ASSESSING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: HIGH SCHOOL EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

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Abstract: On the implementation level of the National Foreign Language Project for the period 2008–2020, now extended to 2025 in Vietnam, Level 3/6 – VNFLPF (B1 – CEFR) has been set as the learning outcomes for high school learners. The pilot English curriculum for Vietnamese high schools was promulgated, and guiding documents were launched officially, supporting EFL teachers in teaching and assessing language learners effectively to achieve the required learning outcomes. This paper reports the findings from an investigation into high school EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of assessing language learners in a city in Central Vietnam by using survey questionnaires, interviews, and assessment samples. From the findings, practical suggestions are made with the hope to provide a valuable basis for both learning improvement and teaching development.

Keywords: assessment, perceptions, practices, high school language learners

1. Introduction

Decision No. 1400/QD-TTg dated 30 September 2008, by the Vietnamese Prime Minister approving the National project named "Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Formal Educational System in the Period of 2008–2020" was promulgated in the hope that most young Vietnamese graduating from vocational schools, colleges, and universities will have a good command of foreign languages that enables them to communicate, study, and work in a multilingual and multicultural environment of integration independently and confidently. The decision is then modified by Decision No. 2080/QD-TTG dated 22 December 2017, approving the modified plan on studying and teaching foreign languages nationwide from 2017 to 2025 (henceforth the National project). The orientation of the modified plan is to make a breakthrough in the quality of teaching and studying foreign languages in all academic levels, encouraging the inclusion of foreign languages in schools from kindergartens upward, as well as in social activities These objectives have made English language learning at all levels promising but challenging not only to learners but also to teachers. English language teaching for high school learners is not an exception.

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Three new curricula, namely, Pilot English Curriculum for Vietnamese Primary Schools being promulgated under Decision No. 3321/QD-BGDDT, December 8, 2010; Pilot English Curriculum for Vietnamese Lower Secondary Schools under Decision No. 1/QD-BGDDT, January 3, 2012; Pilot English Curriculum for Vietnamese High Schools under Decision No. 5209/QD-BGDDT, November 23, 2012, came into being. Learners' communicative competence is considered as the base for these curricula's design and textbook development.

In the implementation of the curriculum for Vietnamese high schools, a variety of issues like selecting entrance learners at the CEFR Level A2 or VNFLPF (Six-level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnam) Level 2, selecting high schools well-equipped with necessary facilities and teachers well-qualified with CEFR Level C1/VNFLPF Level 5 are required. Teachers are also offered several training workshops, including those on language teaching methodology, language testing and assessment, and new curricula accompanied by new textbooks [27]. Among the workshops of significant knowledge and skills, English language testing and assessment is of great concern as effective assessment provides valuable information to students, educators, parents, and administrators for making right decisions or setting upcoming goals maintaining learners' interests and improving learning quality [25, 36]. Teachers' perceptions and practices of assessing language learners, hence, play a significant role in helping learners and teachers achieve the expected learning outcomes.

From the new reality of English teaching and learning in Vietnam, this study is conducted to explore high school EFL teachers' perceptions of assessing school learners, to examine the extent to which their assessment practices have changed to meet the new English teaching and learning requirements, and to help learners meet the English standard set by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in the implementation of the National project, and, more importantly, the relationship between teachers' perceptions and their practices in the specific teaching context is also investigated.

2.   Literature review

2.1. Language assessment

Language assessment is considered as an integral part of the learning and teaching process, which happens continuously aiming at gathering information about learners' knowledge, competencies and skills, and interpreting, recording and using learners' responses for educational purposes [1, 3, 9, 24]. In other words, assessment is considered as "conscious and systematic activities used by teachers for gathering information, analyzing and interpreting

it, drawing inferences, making wise decisions, and taking appropriate actions in the service of improving teaching and learning" [6, p.6].

The literature review shows that assessment has played significant roles in English language teaching and learning. Basically, its primary purposes can be varied from diagnosis, support of learning, selection and placement, and accountability, which aim at improving learning and making judgments of the performance of individuals or effectiveness of the system. Firstly, the assessment helps diagnose learners' English learning process by collecting information about learners' strengths and weaknesses, determining what skills and knowledge learners have learnt in a specific lesson, and comparing learners' learning with specifically set goals and standards [9, 21]. Secondly, the assessment provides learners with timely, effective feedback, and teachers with information for instant decisions to improve the process of learning and teaching [4, 9]. Thirdly, the assessment makes teachers accountable for their teaching and assists teachers and schools in monitoring learning progress [4, 19].

Classroom-based assessment is usually classified into two forms: formative and summative, that would be practiced in EFL teachers' classroom assessment being investigated in this study. Formative assessment is an on-going process of assessment involving all kinds of formal and informal assessment taking place continuously during the teaching and learning process in the classroom to collect evidence of students' knowledge, ability, attitudes, and motivation [22] to inform the results for teaching [17, 38]. In this study, formative assessment is often associated with the use of some assessing tools, such as oral tests, fifteen-minute written tests, peer/self-assessment, and observations, as directed in MOET's [27] guidance of classroom assessment. Summative assessment is the assessment that occurs at the end of the learning periods or courses, summarizing what students have done at the end of the learning process. Unlike the formative assessment, the summative assessment does not usually include timely feedback for improving learning quality. This assessment is used for judging learners' achievement, and its results are for selection, grading, and school accountability purposes [9]. Very often, the summative assessment is associated with a formal test. In the MOET's [27] guidance on classroom assessment, summative assessment is characterized in 45-minute tests and end-of-term tests.

2.2. Major principles of assessing language learners

Selecting assessment tasks

Assessment is believed to play an important role in the process of learning and maintaining learners' motivation. Appropriate language assessment tasks that set learners in a psychologically-safe environment encourage them to make more efforts in taking risks. Thus,

the assessment tasks, either to be designed or adapted, should meet several criteria. Firstly, language assessment should be oriented towards age-related interests of upper secondary students; secondly, language assessment themes/topics should be familiar to upper secondary students; thirdly, language assessment tasks should be engaging and motivating with timely and effective feedback, and finally, language assessment tasks should be well-instructed with a variety of task types [5, 4, 7].

Giving feedback of assessment results

There are three common types of feedback used for classroom assessment, namely, motivational, evaluative, and informative feedback. Motivational feedback, such as good grades or marks, positive comments, and rewards, helps maintain students' motivation in the learning process. Learning feedback corrects students' language use accuracy by not only pointing out errors but also showing why they are incorrect, and gives advice on what to do next to improve the performance. This type of feedback focuses on students' achievements relative to the defined learning targets and explains to students why certain work is good and provides suggestions on how they can improve. Meanwhile, evaluative feedback is used for giving judgment on the students' performance being represented by giving a grade or mark to indicate the different performance of students' work so that they know where they stand in relation to other students [5, 6, 8]. All of these types of feedback can be combined depending on classroom assessment forms.

Feedback can be very powerful if it is done well; therefore, it is significant to bear in mind some principles of giving effective feedback. First, feedback should be timely, indicating that feedback needs to be provided within minutes of task completion to be the most effective [23]. Second, it should be accessible with adequate details emphasizing what students can do. Third, it should be constructive and encouraging, informing what students still cannot do and giving suggestions on how to improve. Fourth, it should match assessment objectives with criteria. Finally, it should require students' act on feedback to check whether the feedback is good [5, 8].

2.3. High school English education in Vietnam: curriculum, testing and assessment policy

The promulgation of the National project proved the importance of improving the quality of teaching and learning foreign languages in the globalization era. Following the objectives set by the National project in which all learners are required to achieve CEFR Level B1 or VNFLPF Level 3 when they graduate from upper secondary schools (specifically B1.1, B1.2 and B1 at the end of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade, respectively), the pilot English curriculum for Vietnamese High schools was promulgated under Decision No. 5209/QD-BGDDT on 23rd

November 2012. This curriculum aims at offering students the opportunities to express their ideas individually, independently, and creatively, to achieve more success in their studies and work, to improve their ability to solve global problems through English, and to apply the knowledge they learn to cultural and social activities [26]. The new textbook and workbook series *English for grades 10, 11, and 12* by Hoang Van Van are being taught within 35 weeks, 3 periods per week, and 105 periods for each grade in total. Each textbook includes 4 themes in 10 topics (10 units); four reviews after Units 3, 5, 8, and 10 are also added.

Being aware of the important role of guidelines in implementing the English language teaching program effectively, the MOET issued a sequence of official documents. Dispatch No. 5333/BGDDT-GDTrH of the implementation of assessing English language learners at secondary schools from the school year 2014–2015 was issued by the MOET on September 29, 2014. This document was written under Article 7, Section 2 – assessment of language learners' competences in Circular No. 58/2011/TT-BGDDT dated December 12, 2011, by the MOET promulgating the regulations on evaluating and grading lower and upper secondary school students officially issued as a replacement for two previous documents (Decision No. 40/2006/QD-BGDDT dated 5 October 2006, and Circular No. 51/2008/QD-BGDDT dated 15 September 2008). Formative and summative assessment is used for assessing language learners in which formative assessment assesses separated language skills; meanwhile, summative assessment is required to integrate language skills (reading, listening, and writing) with language focus and aims at assessing learners' language competences [28].

2.4. Previous studies

The growing trend of linking theories and practices of language learning has recently shed light on the research of teachers' perceptions and practices all over the world. There exist some consistencies, as well as inconsistencies, in the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices. On the one hand, it is believed that teachers are unable to practice effectively without some knowledge in which they are operating. Most studies on teachers' perceptions and practices have shown that teachers' perceptions are considered to have a strong impact on their classroom practices [10, 14]. Particularly, Brown et al. [10] investigated teachers' perceptions by adopting Teacher Conceptions of Assessment (TCoA) inventory and teachers' practices by using a new Practice Assessment inventory (PrAI) with a new cluster (Examination preparation). They reported that in TCoA, teachers agreed with Improvement and Accountability and disagreed with Irrelevance; in PrAI, teachers agreed with Improvement, Accountability, and Examination Preparation. These results reflect part of the school culture and cultural norms in Confucian societies. On the other hand, other studies found a negative correlation between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices. This mismatch might result from certain

influential factors on teachers' classroom assessment practices [11, 12, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34].

From the findings of recent research, this study is, thus, conducted to find if there is a mismatch between teachers' perceptions and practices of assessing high school language learners in a new teaching context with different contextual factors, teacher variables, and learner variables.

3.   Research methodology

3.1. Research participants

The study involves 75 EFL teachers – 9 males and 66 females – aged 21–50 from 16 high schools implementing a Pilot English curriculum for Vietnamese High Schools in Thua Thien Hue province. Seven schools are in Hue city and nine in various suburban districts, and they account for almost 50% of all high schools in the province. The participants account for approximately 45% of all high school English teachers in the studied locality.

Over thee-thirds of the participants graduated from universities and the rest from colleges, and all of them have a degree of English or English language teaching. Most of these participants have been teaching English at high schools for five years (96.1%) and possess CEFR Level C1/VNFLPF Level 5 (89.5%). Besides, 92.1% of these teachers attended at least one workshop or training program relating to English language teaching methodology and language assessment. More than half of these teachers (60%) are in charge of approximately 16–20 periods a week, with an average number of around 40 students in each class (98.7%).

3.2. Research questions

This research aims to answer 2 major questions:

– What are the high school EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom assessment?

– What are the high school EFL teachers' practices of assessing language learners?

The relationship between their perceptions and practices is also explored wherever the findings allow relevant interpretations.

3.3. Data collection

The data collection instruments are questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and assessment samples. The questionnaire was designed and divided into three main categories: teachers' perceptions, teachers' practices, and influential factors on teachers' assessment of language learners. Most of these items follow the five-point Likert scale.

The interviews were in Vietnamese. They were transcribed, sent to the interviewees for checking, and translated into English. A collection of 35 fifteen-minute tests, 30 one-period tests, 20 end-of-term tests, and 10 learning projects was collected. The data collected from formative and summative assessment samples were categorized into groups of assessment types with specific forms. Detailed analysis of assessment skills/tasks, assessment forms, assessment formats, and assessment feedback were also conducted.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. EFL teachers' perceptions of assessing high school language learners

The teachers' perceptions of assessing high school language learners were investigated in terms of the definition of classroom assessment (formative and summative) and the significance of language assessment (learners' learning diagnosis, learning and teaching improvement, and teacher accountability).

As shown in Table 1, the investigated EFL teachers have positive perceptions of classroom-based assessment with an average mean (M) of 4.31. Although their perceptions of two constitutional assessment types, i.e., formative and summative, are positive, they have more positive perceptions of the former (4.55) than of the latter (4.07). That is to say that the participants well define the nature of formative assessment with various kinds of continuous formal and informal assessment in the learning process. The perceptions of the participants of formative assessment are also more consistent than those of summative assessment, with a standard deviation (SD) for formative assessment of 0.5, while it is 1.04 for the other.

Table 2 indicates teachers' positive perceptions across all significant contributions of assessment in language education. However, the level of perceptions for each role varies with the highest given to the diagnostic function and the lowest to teacher accountability. This is

Table 1. EFL teachers' defining of formative and summative assessment

No	Items	*M*	*SD*
1	Formative assessment involves all kinds of formal and informal assessments taking place continuously during the learning process.	4.55	0.50
2	Summative assessment involves all kinds of formal assessment taking place at the end of a period of learning (unit/semester/year).	4.07	1.04
	Average mean	**4.31**	

Note: The number of participants is 75.

Table 2. EFL teachers' perceptions of assessment significance

No.	Learners' learning diagnosis	*M*	*SD*
3	Formative assessment helps to determine what skills/sub-skills and knowledge students have successfully learnt/developed and those that need extra support/consolidation or practice in a specific lesson.	4.61	0.49
4	Formative assessment helps collect information about students' strengths and weaknesses in learning English.	4.57	0.52
5	Formative assessment helps provide teachers with timely input for teachers to identify areas where students still have difficulties in learning and why they have such difficulties.	4.29	0.65
6	The summative assessment helps evaluate students' English language learning outcomes at the end of a specific point of time (e.g., end of the semester, end of the educational level).	4.33	0.66
7	The summative assessment helps describe students' English learning at a specific time in comparison with specific goals, standards or benchmarks (e.g., curriculum, instruction objectives)	4.21	0.64
8	The summative assessment helps grade students' English language performance.	4.24	0.69
	Average mean	**4.38**	
	Learning and teaching improvement	***M***	***SD***
9	Formative assessment results inform students of their progress and so help them keep track of their language learning as well as identify ways to improve their learning achievement.	4.49	0.58
10	My feedback from formative assessment guides students through the process of improving their language learning in a timely manner.	4.53	0.58
11	Through formative assessment, I can make well-informed decisions on what actions regarding teaching methods, techniques, materials, time, etc. are needed immediately to help my students improve learning.	4.52	0.50
12	The formative assessment helps monitor students' English learning process continuously.	4.41	0.52
13	Through summative assessment, I can see where my students are at a specific point of time and so, can make relevant adjustments and plan for my future teaching (e.g., I can look at my students' past semester test score to understand their level before I teach them for the current semester) more properly.	4.21	0.76
14	The summative assessment results are used to help identify students' English learning needs (skills and knowledge)	3.75	0.79

15	The summative assessment helps me make summative decisions after each semester (e.g., how many students pass the course to the next class, how many fail) to improve my teaching for the time/course/class that follows.	3.91	0.89
16	The summative assessment helps me predict future student English language performance and modify my teaching accordingly.	3.59	0.97
	Average mean	**4.18**	

	Teacher accountability	*M*	*SD*
17	The summative assessment results are used to determine if my classroom instructions are suitable to the objectives of the English language curriculum	3.99	0.66
18	The formative assessment results are used to immediately show how well I am doing in my class as an English language teacher.	3.34	1.00
	Average mean	**3.67**	
Average mean of EFL teachers' perceptions		**4.07**	

Note: The number of participants is 75.

very interesting as it is not in line with the general beliefs in the literature on classroom-based assessment, which reinforces that the first and most important role of assessment should be to improve learning and teaching of the target language, as stated by Pham & Nguyen [34]. The findings of teachers' perceptions of assessing language learners in this study are relevant to those of Brown et al. [10] in which Queensland teachers show their stronger agreement with teachers' perceptions of assessment for student accountability than for improvement.

As mentioned, learners' learning diagnosis receives the highest rate of agreement from EFL teachers with an average mean of 4.38 with 6 items describing how assessment can contribute to the function of learning diagnosis. The teachers' perceptions of formative assessment for learning diagnosis receive a higher mean value (4.49) than that of summative assessment (4.26). In the formative assessment, teachers well perceive that formative assessment helps to determine what skills/sub-skills and knowledge students have successfully learnt with the highest mean value (4.61). The other two roles of formative assessment in learning diagnosis also receive a very high mean value: 4.57 for collecting information on students' strengths and weaknesses and 4.29 for providing teachers with timely input to identify students' difficulties in their learning.

With the second mean value in the EFL teachers' perceptions of assessment significance being 4.18, learning and teaching improvement is also highly perceived by EFL teacher participants, indicating the importance of classroom assessment in helping learners improve their learning. Particularly, the teachers sharing the equally high agreement for all of the four items in formative assessment (4.41–4.53) believe that formative assessment results are used to

inform students' progress with timely and effective feedback to advance learning and assist students in taking more responsibilities for their learning. Similar to learners' learning diagnosis, the fact that teachers' perceptions of formative assessment are more highly perceived than those of summative assessment in learning and teaching improvement shows the former's significance in the classroom assessment. The timely assistance given to students helps them monitor their learning process, make progress through effective feedback, motivate learners, adjust instructions, and keep them on the right track towards the set goals.

Among the three significant roles of classroom-based assessment, the participants' perceptions of the role of assessment as teacher accountability, i.e., explaining/justifying how effective his/her teaching, are the lowest. With a mean of 3.67, teachers' perceptions of this role of classroom assessment are not as positive as those of the two others presented above. Teachers have more positive perceptions of summative assessment (3.99) than those of formative assessment (3.34). The former is also more consistent than the latter with a standard deviation of 0.66 vs. 1.00.

4.2. EFL teachers' practices of assessing high school language learners

EFL teachers' practices of language assessment were investigated in this study with an adapted version of the Practice Assessment Inventory by Brown et al. [10] with four constructs: Learners' learning diagnosis, Learning and teaching improvement, Teacher accountability, and Examination preparation.

It can be inferred in Table 3 that teacher participants practise assessing learners frequently and appropriately with a mean of 3.89. The surveyed teachers report through the questionnaire that they do use assessment for diagnosing high school students' learning with an average mean of 3.98. Teachers' practices of formative assessment for diagnosing learners' learning receive a lower mean value (3.88) than that of summative assessment (4.07). This is to say that the results show that in practice, teachers are in favour of summative rather than formative assessment, which implies that learners' learning outcomes collected at the end are emphasized over those collected during the learning process. The divergence between teachers' perceptions and practices of formative and summative assessment shows teachers' inconsistencies between what they believe and what they do in the classroom [18,]. Simultaneously, teachers' practices of assessing language learners for Examination preparation are as frequently implemented as that for learner learning diagnosis (3.97) in which teachers mainly focus on teaching knowledge and skills required in summative tests (4.11). Test-oriented teaching is also paid much attention to in classroom assessment as the findings for Items 36 and 37 suggest.

Table 3. EFL teachers' practices of assessing language learners

No.	Learners' learning diagnosis	*M*	*SD*
19	I use formative assessment results to establish what (sub)skills and knowledge students have successfully learnt and those that need extra support/ consolidation in a specific lesson.	3.99	0.53
20	I use formative assessment to collect information about students' strengths, weaknesses, and progress in learning English	3.88	0.59
21	I use formative assessment to provide teachers with *timely* input for teachers to identify areas where students still have difficulties learning and why they have such difficulties.	3.78	0.63
22	I use summative assessment to evaluate students' English language learning outcomes at the end of a specific point of time (e.g., end of units, end of the semester, end of the educational level).	4.16	0.72
23	I use summative assessment to describe students' English learning at a specific time with specific goals, standards, or benchmarks (e.g., curriculum, instruction objectives).	3.85	0.80
24	I use summative assessment to grade students' English language performance.	4.21	0.68
	Average mean	**3.98**	
	Learning and teaching improvement	*M*	*SD*
25	I use formative assessment results to inform students of their progress and so help them keep track of their language learning as well as identify ways to improve their learning achievement.	4.33	0.68
26	I use formative assessment to guides students through the process of improving their language learning in a timely manner.	4.25	0.50
27	I use formative assessment to collect information in order to make well-informed decisions on what actions regarding teaching methods, techniques, materials, time, etc. are needed immediately to help my students improve learning.	4.16	0.57
28	I use formative assessment to monitor students' English learning process continuously.	4.01	0.63
29	I can use summative assessment to see where my students are at a specific point of time and so, can make relevant adjustments and plan for my future teaching (e.g., I can look at my students' past semester test score to understand their level before I teach them for the current semester) more properly.	3.87	0.68

		M	SD
30	I use summative assessment results to help identify students' English learning needs.	3.51	0.84
31	I use summative assessment to make summative decisions after each semester (e.g., how many students pass the course to the next class, how many fail) to improve my teaching for the time/course/class that follows.	3.85	1.01
32	I use summative assessment results to predict future student English language performance and modify my teaching accordingly.	3.16	1.12
	Average mean	**3.89**	
	Teacher accountability	**M**	**SD**
33	I use summative assessment to determine if my classroom instruction is suitable for the objectives of the English language curriculum.	3.89	0.89
34	I use formative assessment to immediately show how well I am doing in my class as an English language teacher.	3.53	1.20
	Average mean	**3.71**	
	Examination preparation	**M**	**SD**
35	I focus very much on teaching the knowledge and skills required in summative tests.	4.11	0.78
36	I teach primarily according to the summative test format.	4.04	0.66
37	I teach my learners skills for examination and let my students do supplementary exercises to prepare for summative tests.	4.04	0.76
38	I spend the most time preparing my learners for summative tests.	3.68	0.86
39	I try to balance the skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and knowledge (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar) tested to help learners meet standards.	3.97	0.73
	Average mean	**3.97**	
	Average mean of EFL teachers' practices	**3.89**	

Note: The number of participants is 75.

It is noticeable from Table 3 that 8 items, from 25 to 32, describing how often assessment is implemented to improve learning, receive a high mean value (3.89). Regarding the relation between the average mean value of formative and summative assessment for learning diagnosis, the former receive a higher value (4.19) than the latter (3.60). That is to say, teachers understand the primary purpose of assessment for improving learning and teaching quality in the language classroom.

Table 3 also shows that among the four significant roles of classroom-based assessment, the participants' practices of assessment as teacher accountability is the lowest. With a mean of 3.71, teachers' practices of this role of classroom assessment are not as frequent as those of the three others. Interview data suggest that the teachers in the study believe that more factors contribute to their students learning outcomes than just their instructions.

4.2.1. Common features of EFL teachers' classroom assessment practices

The findings from 95 assessment samples show that they share the same common features as teachers' participants practice assessing language learners under the official guidelines by the MOET [26, 28]. Paper tests are the most common tool used for not only summative but also formative assessment of high school language learners. Paper tests of Listening, Reading, and Writing are designed together with pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Each fifteen-minute test has either a section of language or one of the language skills. One-period and end-of-term tests include all of the above sections with around 30–50 items. Each section has two sub-sections with at least 8 questions with official guidelines. Assessment tools and formats are closely related to the summative tests and their tasks are chosen from a list of official documents of assessing learners. Assessment tasks are designed or adapted to meet learners' expectations and assessment criteria. Language assessment tasks are well-instructed with a variety of task types selected from the list suggested by the official guidelines for assessing language learners. Language assessment themes are similar to those in the textbooks accompanying with the curriculum for high school learners. Language assessment tasks focus on both language and skills.

Selected-response items are mainly used in official tests like one-period and end-of-term tests for summative assessment, as well as in fifteen-minute tests for formative assessment. Most teachers believe that it is easy and time-saving when marking tests with selected responses. The large number of learners in each class makes it lengthy to mark tests and give specific comments.

Apart from these common features in teachers' assessment of learners, the findings from the assessment samples show that teachers are more flexible in selecting themes for language assessment tasks, and their delivery of feedback is somehow different from each other.

4.2.2. Teachers' giving feedback in learner assessment

The findings show that written feedback in numbers (marks) or evaluative feedback is the most frequently used in summative assessment; meanwhile, motivational feedback and learning feedback are mainly used in formative assessment. Evaluative feedback is used for the

summative purpose as it gives judgment on the students' performance by giving grades or marks to indicate the different performances of students' work so that they knew where they are in relation to others. Motivational feedback with good grades or marks, positive comments, and rewards help maintain students' motivation in the learning process. Learning feedback corrects students' language use accuracy by not only pointing out errors but also showing why they are incorrect, and giving advice on what to do next to improve the performance. Some teachers often use assessment results to give feedback to the whole group or the whole class if they do not have enough time. Other teachers manage to take little time to give feedback after certain assessing tasks conducted rather than wait until the end of the term or the school year because they believe that their feedback given during the process of learning can promptly help their learners work effectively. Some teachers state that they sometimes give feedback directly to each learner, especially when their learners have difficulties in learning English and need timely support from teachers.

4.3. Relationship between EFL teachers' perceptions and practices

4.3.1. Comparison within quantitative data: perceptions inventory data and practice inventory

It is obvious from Figure 1, EFL teachers' perceptions of assessing language learners are highly perceived with a high mean value of 4.23. All teacher participants graduated from university, where they acquired at least 2 credits of language teaching methodology. High school EFL teachers are also well-selected with criteria for the implementation of the new English curriculum. Additionally, the findings have shown that 92.3% of the teacher participants attended at least one training workshop, in which teachers got accustomed to the description of the pilot curriculum, the learning outcomes, and the principles in assessing learners, assessment, and feedback delivery techniques. Therefore, this background knowledge results in their high perceptions of assessing language learners. Teachers' instructional practices
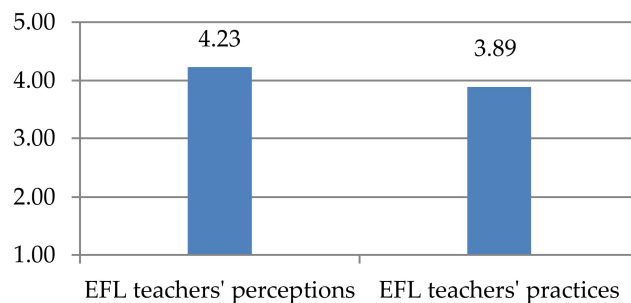

Figure 1. EFL teachers' perceptions and practices

are believed to result from their perceptions; in other words, the higher perceptions EFL teachers have, the more properly they use assessment in their practices [14, 35, 37]. However, this study shows that teachers' perceptions do not support their practices, which is evidenced by the evaluation scores (4.23 vs. 3.89).

The results provide a comparison between teachers' perceptions and practices of assessment in three constructs, namely, learner learning diagnosis, learning and teaching improvement, and teacher accountability. It is undoubted from the findings that teachers have good perceptions of assessment in terms of learners' learning diagnosis and learning and teaching improvement with a high mean value of 4.38 and 4.18, respectively. However, in reality, their practices are not implemented as frequently as what they believed. Learners' learning diagnosis and learning and teaching improvement receive a lower mean value of 3.98 and 3.89, respectively. Learners' learning diagnosis in teachers' perceptions and practices of assessment receives the strongest agreement as some teacher interviewees share that assessment results make them clear about learners' strengths and weaknesses and progress in learning, as well as help grade learners' English language performance. The results of this study are in line with those by Brumen and Cargan's [10], Ndalichako [30], Pham & Nguyen [32], and Pham & Tran [33]. These researchers reported the divergence between teachers' perceptions and instructional practices and obstacles hindering teachers from implementing the classroom instructions shaped by the underlying thoughts and beliefs.

The findings of this study reveal that although teachers' perceptions are high, their practices might not be as properly implemented as they perceive. This mismatch might result from influential factors on teachers' practices of language learner assessment, which are discussed in the following section.

4.3.2. Influential factors on teachers' assessment of language learners

The data of both questionnaires and interviews show that teachers' assessment practices are strongly influenced by contextual factors, learner variables, and teacher variables.

The most remarkable are contextual factors, which include language curriculum, assessment resources, time, and workload. Firstly, 73% of the teacher participants believe that the curriculum is the most influential factor in the implementation of learner assessment. The curriculum with overall objectives, content, methodology, assessment, and facilities plays a significant role, and it is required to implement the curriculum effectively. Regulations on learner assessment relative to pursuing the curriculum are also of great importance for teachers to guide their learners to achieve the learning outcomes. Secondly, 73 % of the teachers face with assessment resources. Most teacher interviewees complain that the resources are not

sufficient for assessing language learners as this new English curriculum has been launched for a short time. Thirdly, time and workload are two other factors to consider in implementing any assessment activities. Time in this context is related to the time teachers spend on preparing and conducting assessment tasks or tools matching the criteria required by the official documents and delivering. Workload also hinders teachers from conducting any assessment activities effectively as it is not easy to practice within a limited time frame. This is also confirmed in Crookes and Arakaki's [16] and Hargreaves' papers [20].

Another highly influential factor in teachers' perceptions and practices of assessing school learners is learner characteristics, learners' language competence, and learners' expected learning outcomes. Major principles of assessing language learners are developed according to the characteristics of high school learners as it is believed that language assessment tasks should respond well to the level of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth of the age group of high school students. Therefore, it is obvious that learner characteristics are influential. The findings also show that learners' language competence is another factor teachers should consider when they select assessment tools, especially for formative assessment. Some teacher interviewees state that learners are required to achieve VNFLPF level 2 or CEFR level A2, but their language competencies are not equal at the beginning. The discrepancy in language learner competencies causes teachers to spend more time on selecting appropriate tools for assessing them. Moreover, learners' expected learning outcomes by the authorities are also paid much attention to the implementation of learner assessment, especially summative assessment.

The third group of influential factors, known as teacher variables, comprises teaching experience and assessment expertise. The findings of this study are supported by Cheng et al.'s work [15], which considers teacher assessment expertise or teachers' experience of assessment as an important factor affecting their perceptions and practices. Additionally, Almarza [2], and Cabaroglu & Roberts [13] agree that teacher education also brings some changes. The findings from participant information show that 93% of the teacher participants have never attended a workshop or training program in English language assessment for high school learners. Teacher participants also suggest that they should have more opportunities for taking part in some specific workshops or training programs suitable for their real demands like how to design test items in a full test for their assessment in the classroom; tools for formative assessment should be focused because summative tests are usually available. Among the four language skills, speaking is the most challenging to carry out due to time limit and to examine due to teachers' expertise and learners' competence.

These factors might give an insight into the process of implementing learner assessment in high schools in this study.

5. Conclusion and implications

The results from qualitative and quantitative data indicate that investigated teachers have positive perceptions of assessment significance. The level of perceptions for each role varies with the highest given to the diagnostic function and the lowest to teacher accountability. This is very interesting as it is not in line with the general beliefs in the literature on classroom-based assessment, which reinforces that the first and most important role of assessment should be to improve learning and teaching of the target language.

The findings also show that teachers practise assessing learners frequently and properly. Among the four constructs investigated in teachers' practices of assessing learners, assessing language learners for learners' learning diagnosis is the most frequently and simultaneously practised. Teachers also implement practices of assessing language learners for examination preparation, and this reflects the reality of teaching to the tests and the impact of standardized and high-stake tests on teachers and learners. Unlike the results of teachers' perceptions of learner assessment for learning diagnosis, the mean value of the summative assessment is higher than that of the formative assessment. This result reflects the reality of classroom assessment in which teachers emphasize summative over formative assessment, although they understand that formative assessment plays an important role in improving learning and teaching quality with timely feedback.

The most remarkable factors are contextual factors, which include language curriculum, assessment resources, time, and workload. Teachers claim that it is not easy to conduct any assessment activities for about 150 to 200 students at the same time frame. Another highly influential factor in teachers' perceptions and practices of assessing school learners is learner variables, which include learner characteristics, learners' language competence, and learners' expected learning outcomes. Other influential factors known as teacher variables are teaching experience and assessment expertise that make some positive changes in teachers' perceptions and practices of assessment.

For effective classroom assessment implementation, it is suggested to raise teachers' awareness in the significance of formative assessment, principles of assessment, and active commitment in the assessment. Formative assessment should be emphasized over summative assessment because the summative assessment is usually referred to as standardized or high-stake paper tests taken at the end of the learning process and these kinds of tests only report the final results for grading learners' language performance, and most of the time, there is the absence of interaction between teachers and learners. Meanwhile, formative assessment in the instructional practices focuses on the continuous learning process of learners, in which information about learners' strengths, weaknesses, and progress is collected and used for

learning and teaching improvement.

Teachers need to apply the major principles of assessing language learners in the classroom. First, a variety of well-instructed task types at different levels should be used to assess different learners' language competence. Second, language assessment tasks should provide teachers more information about their students' language competence development rather than language knowledge; in other words, teachers should spend more time assessing learners' language skills. Third, language assessment themes/topics should be based on the curriculum content, or what learners are assessed should match with what learners are taught. Finally, teacher examiners should be well-trained to ensure the quality of test results.

Teachers' active involvement and continuous commitment to the language testing and assessment process are of great importance. In the implementation of learners' assessment, difficulties hindering teachers' proper practices are inevitable; therefore, teachers should make suitable judgments. For instance, in the formative assessment, portfolios can be used as an alternative tool; peer-assessment and self-assessment can be combined with other tools to engage learners more actively in their learning; large classes can be divided into smaller groups to save time in conducting formative assessment activities and feedback delivery. Additionally, teachers should be willing to take professional development opportunities.

It is also of great importance for educational managers to pay much attention to providing teachers and learners adequate resources for both teaching and assessment; enhancing teachers' professional development; relieving the pressure of learners' learning outcomes on teachers and upgrading facilities for better teaching and learning quality.

First of all, the results suggest that teachers should be provided with more assessment resources that are relevant to the language curriculum. Actually, teachers find challenging in choosing appropriate language tasks to assess their learners because there are not many assessment resources aligned with the textbooks designed in the implementation of a new curriculum.

Second, teachers should also be encouraged to participate frequently in professional development activities, such as professional forums or training workshops, to be equipped with sufficient knowledge of language testing and assessment. They need to be offered more theoretical and practical knowledge to adapt or design assessment activities in the teaching context effectively.

Third, teachers should be relieved from the pressure of learners' learning outcomes so that they can feel relaxed in conducting teaching and assessing activities effectively. The

number of learners in each class should be decreased to about 20–25 to ensure that learners are equally and actively engaged in all classroom activities.

Finally, classroom facilities, such as interactive boards and CD players, should be upgraded for better teaching and learning quality. Listening skills and speaking skills should be given more priority than two other skills and language knowledge.

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