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The Gap between teaching, assessment, and learning: EFL teachers' perceptions and strategies

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ABSTRACT

Keywords
Assessment of Learning, Assessment for Learning, Assessment as Learning, Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment

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Recent discussions of language education have increasingly emphasized the integrated nature of teaching, learning, and assessment. In this regard, Earl's (2013) framework (assessment of learning, assessment for learning, and assessment as learning) provides a comprehensive account of the connection among teaching, learning, and assessment. However, little research has examined how teachers view the connection among these three aspects in light of Earl's framework. The present study explored the perceptions and practices of Iranian EFL school teachers about this connection based of Earl's framework; moreover, it investigated the strategies that the teachers use for reducing or maintaining the gap between these three aspects. To this aim, a qualitative approach was adopted in which in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers. The findings showed that the teachers had both summative and formative relationship between these three aspects, and they used different strategies for these goals such as: 1) stress reduction and creating a space for interaction, 2) assessing before, during, and after teaching, and 3) asking, answering, and giving feedback. The findings promise some practical implications for different groups of stakeholders in general education and L2 education in particular

Introduction

The relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment is mainly discussed based on two perspectives. The first one is known as summative assessment, which has recently been called Assessment of Learning (AoL) (Earl, 2013). AoL compares students, reports progress, and

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calculates final grades (Serafini, 2001). In other words, it provides evidence of student learning, which can be used to inform reporting and differentiation. The second form of assessment is Assessment for Learning (AfL), which is similar to formative assessment and provides diagnostic and formative information for teachers to inform their instruction (Van der Kleij et al., 2015) and also, it offers feedback and advice during the project. Earl (2013) proposed another form of assessment, namely assessment as learning (AaL), which puts students at the center of assessment. AaL, as a subset of AfL, "emphasizes using assessment as a process of developing and supporting meta-cognition for students" (Earl, 2013, p. 3). Specifically, it emphasizes "each student's thinking about his or her learning, what strategies he or she uses to support or challenge that learning, and the mechanisms he or she uses to adjust and advance his or her learning" (Earl & Katz, 2006, p. 54). These sorts of assessment may well increase student engagement in learning and assessment (Jiang & Zhang, 2021; Wu et al., 2021).

Assessment is now viewed as interconnected with learning and teaching (I. Lee, 2007). Schellekens et al. (2021) synthesized the literature on assessment of/for/as learning and claimed that these approaches of assessment should be considered together in order to establish an assessment culture which eases learning. According to Earl's (2013) framework, familiarity with and understanding Aof, AfL, and AaL can give a deep insight to teachers and students to recognize their educational growth. Also, these three components make a meaningful relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment (Earl, 2013).

Despite the substantial developments in assessment theories, an investigation is needed to clarify teachers' perceptions about the relationship between assessment, teaching, and learning, as well as the strategies they use for maintaining or reducing the gap between these three, as also argued by Earl (2013). There are few studies exploring teachers' perceptions and practices about this issue. A study targeting teachers' perceptions and practices to provide us rich information for a better understanding and the evaluation of the current situation is needed. The current study aims to address this gap in the Iranian EFL context. Not only does this study consider the perceptions and practices of Iranian teachers, but it also explores the strategies that the teachers use for reducing the gap between teaching, learning, and assessment. In so doing, this study will be practical for teaching training courses as it helps teachers and teacher educators gain a deeper understanding of the connection between teaching, learning, and assessment, which makes instruction more learning-conducive and beneficial for various stakeholders.

Literature Review

Assessment of Learning

Traditionally, assessment has been viewed as carrying the summative role of certification, measurement, and accountability; this kind of assessment, as mentioned earlier, is also called AoL (Earl, 2013; Serafini, 2001). In AoL, "knowledge is believed to exist separately from the learner, and students work to acquire it, not construct it" (Serafini, 2001, p. 385). Moreover, in AoL, outcome and achievement of the criteria are the most important aspects of learning. Learning is not in the cycle of this assessment until when the grades are reported (Harlen, 2007) and it judges all students by the same criteria.

The rationale behind AoL is reporting the achievement at a particular time. However, the process of interpreting and gathering information may have some impact on learning, or the outcome may be used in planning future teaching; thus, assessment is not carried out primarily with these uses in mind (Harlen, 2006). In other words, AoL is the snapshot in time that permits the teacher, students, and other stakeholders to know how well each student has completed

learning tasks and activities by providing information about student achievement (Chong, 2018).

AoL provides reliable and valid ways to measure, summarize, and evaluate students' acquired skills and knowledge instead of how assessment can be implemented in a way to improve learning and instruction (I. Lee, 2007). The quality of these summative assessments does not measure how accurately they reflect students' learning at a particular time, but how faithfully they adhere to the established examination system, social expectations, and expectations of school administrators (Genesee & Upshur, 1996).

Assessment for Learning

The idea of AfL, which is often used interchangeably with formative assessment (I. Lee, 2007), arose from a 1998 landmark research paper by Black and Wiliam in which they synthesized over 250 studies linking assessment and learning, and found that the intentional use of assessment in the classroom improves student achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In AfL, teachers collect a wide range of data so that they can modify the learning work for their students. AfL happens in the middle of learning, often more than once, not at the end of the process. It is interactive, with teachers providing assistance as part of the assessment, and helps teachers provide feedback to scaffold the next steps (Earl, 2013).

Teachers modify and adjust their instruction based on students' needs (Earl, 2013). Black et al. (2004) defined AfL as "any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting pupils' learning" (p. 2). In this kind of formative assessment, teachers, after assessing students' present understanding, provide feedback to their students. The role of feedback is more crucial here as teachers have to create strategies to help students determine their learning goals and understand the assessment criteria they are judged against. Finally, with the facilitation and guidance provided by teachers, students are empowered to gradually work toward their goals individually (Brown, 2019). Even though in AfL students play an important role in reflecting on their learning, Carless (2007) believed that as teachers are the mediators "in enhancing student learning, improvements in the implementation of formative assessment depend largely on teachers' understandings of principles and practice in formative assessment" (p. 172), and they have more responsibilities for student learning. Additionally, AfL influences teaching as teachers assess students' learning and give them feedback; thus, teachers understand their teaching weaknesses and may use alternative strategies to modify and adjust their teaching based on students' learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010; Schellekens et al., 2021; Wiliam, 2011).

Assessment as Learning

AaL emphasizes "the role of the student as the critical connector between assessment and their own learning" (Earl, 2013, p. 3). The ultimate goal of AaL, which is the supreme goal of education, is enabling the learners to be self-regulated so as to facilitate their life-long learning and personal development (Yan & Boud, 2021). It occurs when students personally monitor what they learn and use feedback from this monitoring to make adjustments, adaptations, and even major changes in what they understand (Earl, 2006, p. 7).

The role of both teachers and students in AaL is different. Instead of only giving students summative information about how they perform in an assessment task (i.e., AoL) or change their instruction based on students' learning needs (i.e., AfL), teachers who adopt AaL are recommended to guide students to develop their metacognition by providing opportunities for them to develop self-regulated and self-assessment skills that can be used by students to reflect

on their own learning (Chong, 2018). For instance, teachers are advised to allocate lesson time to guide students to set appropriate and individual goals (Morisano et al., 2010) and to promote cognitive strategies to monitor their learning (Zimmerman, 2002). According to Voerman et al. (2014), not only do students' metacognitive strategies need to be supported, but also teachers should pay attention to the ways students regulate their emotions when attempting a learning task. For example, feedback that focuses on students' character strengths is important to their learning progress, especially when the learning task is challenging to the student (Voerman et al., 2014). Xiang et al. (2022) found that Chinese students who benefited from the AaL-oriented instruction in terms of their improved writing efficiency and quality enhanced assessment and feedback literacy, and sense of ownership and resilience as a writer.

Development of formative assessment has been conceptualized in the sociocultural theory. Self-assessment has particularly been seen as part of a sociocultural theory in which teachers and learners are engaged in an interactive learning and assessment process. Based on Vygotsky`s sociocultural perspective, formative assessment is an interactive process in which teachers and learners discuss learning intentions, and how best to improve teaching, learning, and assessment. Emphasis is given to social interaction, mediation, and language since the learner will be independent. An important term in the process of learning within sociocultural models is through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). For Vygotsky (Vygotsky & Cole,1978), ZPD is the: Distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers. (p. 85). For Vygotsky, all learning starts on the social level before it can be internalized. First learning appears between people (interpsychologically) and then inside the learner (intrapsychologically).

The Relationship among Assessment, Learning, and Teaching

Without understanding the importance and scope of assessment and its relationship with learning, it becomes very difficult to expect students to have a satisfying performance and meet the expectations of the school and society (Tanner & Jones, 2006). Teachers need to conceptualize their teaching, the process of learning, and how they assess their teaching and students' learning. It is argued that "effective teachers make continual approximate assessment as teaching proceeds to keep the class in the learning zone" (Tanner & Jones, 2006, p. 7).

Empirically speaking and in the context of Pakistan, Khan (2012) showed that teachers have a summative perspective and they considered teaching, learning, and assessment as isolated issues, and they little try to interconnect the three constructs within the class and school. In another study, James (2006) considered the relationship between assessment and learning. Three clusters of theories of learning were identified and their implications for assessment practice were discussed. Finally, the study concluded with a discussion of whether eclectic or synthetic models of assessment matched learning.

Irrespective of the contribution of the new literature to the relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment, the advent of AfL and AaL, which has blurred the gap between teaching, learning, and assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Dann, 2014; Earl, 2013; Serafini, 2001), it seems that teachers in second language (L2) education still struggle to reduce the gap between these three constructs (Chong, 2018). For instance, Yang and Xin (2022) examined the evolution from AoL to AaL from four aspects: participants, test form, multivariate data for process-based measurement, and measurement models for multivariate data. The current literature in institutional and local levels has little investigated teachers' perceptions about and

practices of teaching, assessment, and learning in terms of connecting or linking these three processes. As Volante (2010) argued, the knowledge of teachers, especially their perceptions, about the practices related to connecting these three processes is limited.

The new insights of assessment show that assessment is not separate from teaching and learning (Chong, 2018). Assessment shows not only the weak points of the learners, but also the true way, and also how teachers can improve their teaching and how students can reflect teacher learning (Torrance, 2012). However, as there are few studies exploring teachers' perceptions and practices about this issue, this study aims to address the empirical gap in the literature of examining the gap among teaching, learning, and assessment by addressing the following questions:

1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions about the gap between teaching, learning, and assessment?
2. What strategies do they use to maintain or reduce the gap between these three components?

Methodology

Context and Participants

Data collection for this study was carried out in the spring of 2021. Twelve English language teachers in Iran were recruited for this study through a maximum variation strategy of purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Patton, 2002) in order to have as various and detailed information as possible. The touchstone for choosing the teacher participants was their at least 2-year experience in high schools. All of them had more than 3 years of experience in teaching (see Table 1) and were familiar with school materials, curriculum, and the system of assessment. The teachers were selected from different high schools so as to investigate various perspectives in different regions in Iran.

Table 1

The Teachers' Demographic Information

Fake names	Gender	Age	Degree	Experience (years)
Ayad	*Male*	*42*	*Ph.D. Candidate of AL*	*15*
Nilofar	*Female*	*36*	*MA of AL*	*17*
Rezvan	*Male*	*28*	*BA of AL*	*3*
Parviz	*Male*	*32*	*BA of AL*	*4*
Maryam	*Female*	*42*	*Ph.D. Candidate of AL*	*14*
Hasan	*Male*	*36*	*BA of translation Studies*	*15*
Zineb	*Female*	*52*	*BA of translation Studies*	*23*
Ali	*Male*	*50*	*Ph.D. of AL*	*28*
Mohammad	*Male*	*28*	*BA of AL*	*3*
Leila	*Female*	*38*	*MA of AL*	*10*
Zinat	*Female*	*45*	*BA of AL*	*20*
Atefeh	*Female*	*50*	*MA of*	*12*

BA: Bachelor of Arts; MA: Master of Arts; AL: Applied Linguistics

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to have as various and much information as possible, a qualitative approach was used so as to investigate the teachers' perceptions and practices about the gap between teaching, learning, and assessment. This study provides an in-depth description of the 12 teachers' experience in order to provide a deep understanding of teachers' perceptions and practices in these three areas. To collect the data, 12 semi-structured interviews were used (one per teacher). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were held via phone calls.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with each teacher to explore their perceptions and practices about assessment, how they conduct assessment, and how they relate the three (see Appendix A for the questions). Each interview took at least one hour. The languages were both English and Persian in order for the participants to be as informative as possible and easy with the process. The interviews were audio-recorded for data analysis.

The interviews were fully transcribed and translated into English (Temple & Young, 2005). After reading and analyzing data cyclically, initial/open coding and focused coding (Charmaz, 2006) were used in the first and second cycles of coding, respectively. During coding, the researchers wrote analytic memos to note their thoughts and interpretations (Saldana, 2021). Earl's framework (2013) was used in this study which categorized assessment into three paradigms (AoF, AfL, and Aal). These paradigms clarify how teachers make a relationship between assessment, teaching, and learning; then, the strategies they used to remain or reduce the gaps between these three were sought. To ensure the trustworthiness of data collection and analysis (Saldana, 2021), two measures were taken. First, member checking was utilized by asking the participants to review the transcripts of their interviews. Second, the researchers worked as a team to analyze and interpret the data.

Results

In this study, Earl's framework (2013) was used to analyze the data, which involved three parts; AoL, AfL, and AaL. The findings of the study are organized based on this framework. First, the teachers' perceptions about the relationship between assessment, teaching, and learning are presented, then the strategies they use for maintaining or reducing the gap between these three are presented.

Assessment of Learning

According to the data, some teachers preferred summative assessment. That is, the result of the exams was more important for them. As Ali said: "scores are an important criterion for me to understand how much the students have learned the lessons" (Ali). Additionally, final scores were also important for Zinab as a significant tool for motivating students to have a better performance and encourage them to try more for learning. One of the reasons for motivating the students was encouraging them for getting better scores of their quizzes and final exams: "I evaluate them by scores in their quizzes and final exams" (Zinab). Teachers used quizzes to receive a score from the students to have it for their mid-term exam: "Before every session, I give a quiz, I calculate them for their mid-term score and then I start a new lesson" (Ali).

Based on the findings, because of the school policy, teachers have to evaluate their students by paper and pencil tests to give an exact score to their schools and stakeholders: "maybe it is not always inspiring for students to take an exam especially the final exam, but they ask us to give them score each semester or their parents ask us their learning progress" (Mohammad). Zinat believed that teachers' rhetorical skills have a direct effect on students' learning and the results would be adequate: "as the level of teaching is better it means as the teacher explains better, of course, learning will occur and the result of the assessment will be better" (Zinat).

As the results show, some teachers consider assessment as a separate item from teaching and learning. One of the reasons for this separation might be the large number of students in each class and that they suffer from the lack of time, which does not provide enough change to evaluate their learning simultaneously: "There are many students in classes, and we…don't have enough time to evaluate the students individually so, we have to use a public quiz for all

of them as consider their progress by their scores, and this lack of time doesn't let me to teach their weak points again" (Atefeh). In another reason, Mohammad considered first teaching, then learning, and finally assessment. He believed: "After my teaching, they learn, and I finally take an exam or quiz and I go to the next lesson" (Mohammad).

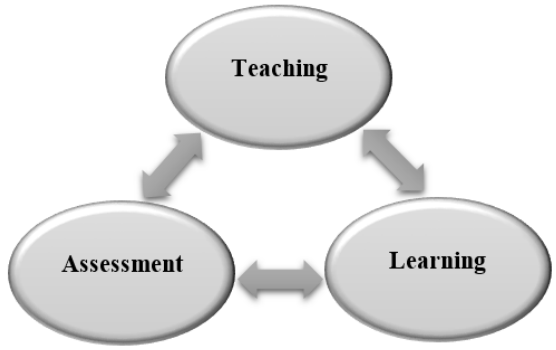
Assessment for Learning

Some of the teachers had a formative perspective toward assessment and did not consider it as separate from teaching and learning. For example, Ayad believed that assessment is a part of education and it is a technique in better education. "Assessment is a process of education and it is not separate from teaching … I mean, I don't teach and finally assess. Assessment is a technique of education" (Ayad).

Even though some teachers considered teaching, learning, and assessment as interconnected, they regarded an order for them. For example, Leila considered the relation of these three aspects as a triangle that has a two-sided direction: "For me, teaching, learning, and assessment are not separate from each other. They are the angles of a triangle. For example, if I want to teach a grammatical point, I will teach it and make an interaction between the students and assessment helps me to understand how they have learned, and how much we have reached our goal, and if it needs reconsideration" (Leila, Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Triangular Relationship Between Teaching, Learning, and Assessment



This relationship is considered in another way based on teachers like Nilofar. She believed that these three components are at the service of each other: "These three items are totally interconnected. I believe the assessment is at service of teaching, and teaching is at the service of learning and assessment, and they are not separate from each other" (Nilofar). This relationship is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Sequential Relationship Between Teaching, Learning, and Assessment



There were also teachers like Rezvan who said that after teaching he assesses the students in order to understand how much they have learned and he believed assessment must be conducted during teaching: "These three have a relationship. Learning is the result of assessment and teaching. We must teach and assess the students to understand if they have

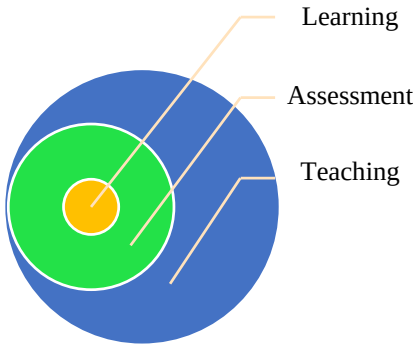
learned or not" (Rezvan). Parviz, also strongly believed in assessment during teaching and said that after teaching we must assess the students to understand how much they have learned: "First teaching, then assessing and finally learning. It means if we don't think about assessing in teaching, learning never totally accrue" (Rezvan). This relationship is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Sequential Relationship Between Teaching, Assessment, and Learning



Moreover, Maryam considered a circular relationship between these three aspects. She saw teaching as the biggest circle, then assessment as the smaller circle, and finally learning as the smallest circle in them: "If we consider teaching as a big circle, then assessment is a smaller circle in it and then learning is the smallest circle after assessment" (Maryam). This relationship is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Circular Relationship Between Teaching, Learning, and Assessment



Although these teachers considered a relationship between the three components, Hasan and Zinat believed that this relationship is not predictable and their positions may change, which is why we cannot persistently claim that this relationship is not fixed: "I think these three are connected like a chain. Somehow their order may change or replace, but they are connected. Somehow they are not separated. They are at the service of each other" (Hasan); "it depends to the situation; sometimes they are not on this order and they may replace each other" (Zinat).

Assessment as Learning

Assessment as learning occurs when students are their own assessors and monitor their own learning, ask questions, and use a range of techniques to decide what they know and can do, and how to use assessment for new learning. Data analyses showed four ways teachers help the students reach this goal: Self-assessment, clarifying the objects of the lessons and self-correction, peer assessment and teaching, and reflection journal.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment was one the most popular techniques among the teachers to ask the students in order to evaluate their progress in a certain time. For example, Hasan would prepare a folder for each student to write and review what they had learned, and at the end of each month, he

checked their progress: “Every student has a folder to write what they have learned and what they have problem with. At the end of each month, they check their learning to see if they have learned whatever they hadn’t learned” (Hasan). Moreover, Mohammad did the same but he gave them a survey which contained some questions about students’ learning performances, the teacher’s performance, etc.: “Sometimes I ask the students how their learning process was in the recent month. How could I help them to learn? How did they help themselves in their progress? Which part was more useful for you? I always use this survey” (Mohammad).

Ayad encouraged the students to assess themselves using their homework. He asked them to do their homework by some criteria and assess their learning based on the criteria and their performance: “I sometimes give them some criteria to do their homework based on them and evaluate how these criteria help them. Sometimes, I ask them to do their homework and do their best based on what they have learned and after that, we will check how their process of learning was. Where does it need to be changed and where does it need to be better?” (Ayad).

One of the technics that Zinat used was thinking about questions. She asked the students to think about their questions. She believed that by thinking and explaining their questions and her encouragement and guidance, they could find out their answer and learn: “one of the technics that I use in my teaching is asking the students to think about their questions. When they think and explain their question and they review what they have learned before. This strategy works well in my classes, because not only do the students reflect their learning but also they find out the answer of the question” (Zinat).

Peer Assessment and Teaching

The teachers also encouraged their students to assess their peers and correct their mistakes several times. Maryam believed that by these techniques, students may learn much from their peers, too: “Peer assessment is an interesting action. I ask them to assess their mates. First, they correct their friends’ mistakes with a red pen and give them to check it them I ask them to revise again with a green pen. In this way they learn new things from their friends too” (Maryam).

One of the technics the teachers used was to encourage the students to teach the subject to their classmates. Nilofar said, “I asked my students to teach the subject to their classmates and I observe their teaching. I see how they are showing their previous learning”. Their teaching may ensure the teacher that they have learned the lesson. Moreover, Parviz had the same idea that students’ teaching is a tool for improving learning and it permits the teacher to assess the students: “I usually ask them to teach what they have learned because it is useful for their learning and my evaluation”.

Clarifying the Object of the Lesson and Self-Correction

Another interesting point for helping students to monitor their learning was clarifying the objects of the lesson. Teachers told the students what they are supposed to learn and what might be the final goals for learning the lesson. By this technique, they monitored students’ performance at any time of the class to see if they have got the final object of the lesson: “I always clarify the object of the study. I tell them what our final goals are at the end of this lesson. It may be a little difficult for them at first, but it helps to minor their learning” (Leila). Another way that was used in their classrooms was self-correction. Teachers encouraged their students to review their speaking and writing specially to correct their mistakes as much as possible. Moreover, making a relationship between their previous learning and their present learning was also emphasized: “I use self-correction to help the students to observe their

learning. By self-correction, they assess their learning too, especially in writing and speaking which are productive skills. I ask them to think about my question and make a relationship between their present learning and their previous learning" (Atefeh).

Reflection Journal

Another method that teachers used to encourage the students to reflect on their learning was using a reflection journal. Teachers asked their students to write a reflection after each session or after their homework. Ayad mentioned that he dedicated time for the students to write a reflection entry about their learning, their difficulties, and the allocated times for spending on each task. "Sometimes I ask them to give me a reflection at the end of the class. For example, at the end of each task I ask them how they did it and what their problems were, how much time did they spend on each task? How was their learning process? I ask them to write them on paper even in Farsi" (Ayad).

On the other side, Maryam asked the students to write a reflection after their homework. It was not only an assignment, but also it gave a wider view of their performance and learning: "Most of the time, I ask them what do to, but they are also free to go away. I mean to know what they are doing and not to see this task as only homework. They must explain to me, what they did, what methods they used, and what their preferences are. It is not for doing some homework and receiving some feedback, it gives the students this chance to think about their learning". (Maryam).

Strategies for Reducing the Gap among Teaching, Assessment, and Learning

In the previous section, we illustrated how teachers make a relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment. In this section, we show the strategies that teachers use to reduce the gap between these three dimensions. Generally, the teachers referred to three strategies: 1) Stress reduction and creating a space for interaction, 2) assessing before, during, and after teaching, and 3) asking, answering, and giving feedback.

Stress Reduction and Creating a Space for Interaction

As effective factors have a crucial impact on learning, Nilofar had a significant consideration for the students' anxiety in the class. She tried to create a peaceful classroom environment in order to encourage the students to ask their questions during teaching. She believed that by this strategy, she would create an opportunity to make a relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment. "I try to make the class a peaceful place and reduce their stress to feel free to ask any questions. When they feel relax I can assess them better" (Nilofar).

By this strategy, students felt relaxed in the class and the space for interaction would increase. Nilofar believed: "When there is no stress in the class, the students who are shy may ask their questions". It seems that one of the factors increasing interaction in the class is reducing stress among the students. When the students feel safety and the lack of judgment, they dare to ask their questions, so it creates opportunities for students to have interaction and reduce the space between teaching, learning, and assessment.

Assessing Before, During, and After Teaching

Another strategy that teachers used commonly in their classes for approximating teaching and learning was assessing during teaching. For teachers to understand whether the students have learned or not, they asked different questions during teaching. As they noted that when the students did not learn a part, they explain it again: "I assess my students during my teaching. This assessment helps me to understand how much they have learned and then I can give them

effective feedback to them" (Ali). For this reason, teachers divided the subject into different parts and after teaching each segment, they assessed their students orally: "I never teach a subject totally to the student. I teach them in different parts and assess their learning between them and if it needs, I teach again" (Zinat).

Another form of assessment, which is also common among teachers, is pre-testing. Before starting their teaching, teachers would ask some questions to clarify the students' schemata about the subject. This technic helps the teacher to understand how to teach better and control the students' learning. Zinab believed that by pre-testing she makes a relationship between learning, teaching, and assessment. "First, I have a pre-test in which I ask some questions to understand how much the students have a background about the object of the lesson. Then I have a wider insight about their level. So, assessment is at the service of teaching and learning (Zinab).

Asking, Answering, and Giving Feedback

Another useful strategy for reducing the gap between teaching, learning, and assessment was asking, answering, and finally giving corrective feedback. Sometimes, the teachers simply asked some questions to understand the students' problem: "I consider where are their problems, if the students have the same problems, so it is because of me, but if it is not my problem, I will encourage them and give them more examples" (Rezvan), or sometimes they used different games in order to assess the students: "I usually use some games which are more asking and answering" (Hasan).

After understanding their problems, the teachers argued that they give effective feedback to students: "According to their answers I will give them feedback and I solve their problem" (Hasan). Giving feedback seems not only to help the students to understand their weak points, but also helps them what to do next: "We can give feedback to the students that they are weak in these parts, so they know what to do" (Ayad). The feedback may include some strategies such as explaining the lesson again, teaching differently, or encouraging the students for learning.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was exploring Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions about the relationship between assessment, teaching, and learning, as well as the strategies they use for maintaining or reducing the gap between these three dimensions. The findings were categorized based on Earl's (2013) framework by three paradigms of assessment, namely AoL, AfL, and AaL. Then, the strategies they used for maintaining or reducing the gaps between assessment, teaching, and learning were shown.

First of all, some teachers were interested in summative assessment. They closely evaluated their students through their scores. Final scores were their prime criterion for measuring the students' learning and their own teaching. This kind of assessment is a fast way for assessing student learning to evaluate their weak and strong points (Ewing et al., 2019). Based on the findings, there are two reasons that make it hard to create an interwoven relationship between assessment, learning, and teaching: the large number of students in each class and traditional perspectives about assessment. As the findings showed, teachers think the students have learned after their teaching and they started giving an exam. They reported the scores to school management and stakeholders. It may still be that some teachers are following the traditional form of assessment. This way of assessment is a sort of AoL, which is still common among some teachers. According to the literature, AoL considers knowledge as separate from the

learner (Serafini, 2001) and achievement is the most important criterion rather than learning (Harlen, 2007).

According to the formative quiddity of AfL, there are no clear boundaries between assessment, teaching, and learning (I. Lee, 2007). AfL happens in the middle of learning more than once, not just in the end. Teachers provide feedback at any step and scaffold the students for the next steps. In the findings of this study, teachers considered different orders for teaching, learning, and assessment; however, Hasan and Zinat believed this relationship is not predictable and their positions may change. Some teachers argued that if their goal is students' learning they make a relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment, they do not consider these three as separate elements of education. Literature shows the same issue that this relationship is not estimable and it depends on teachers' diagnostic skills to make it work (Earl, 2013).

Aal is a sort of assessment that empowers students to monitor their learning, assess themselves, and be a decision maker for their learning (Torrance, 2007). In this study, teachers used four ways to actualize this power. First, before any feedback, the students were encouraged to assess themselves before the teachers' feedback. It seems that teachers try to use self-assessment to allow the students to think. As literature shows, self-assessment is a technique to empower the students to rethink their learning (Boud, 2013). Moreover, teachers, before their teaching, clarify the object of the lesson, its functions, and the expectation from the students after the lesson. Another common strategy which the teachers applied was using the peers in the process of teaching and assessment. In some cases, teachers encouraged the students to teach the lesson to their classmates and also assess their learning. By this way, it seems teachers try to enhance the mindfulness of the students about their learning. Not only does this form of teaching help teachers measure student learning, but also it helps the students to learn the lesson deeply. The final way was self-reflection which the students were asked to write a reflection journal about their learning and the difficulties they faced during teaching and learning. Teachers may enhance the students' awareness by encouraging their self-reflection skills. According to the literature, self-reflection is a powerful way for individuals to monitor the process of their learning (Allal, 2020; Mann & Walsh, 2017).

In order to answer the second research question, teachers commonly used three strategies for reducing the gap between assessment, teaching, and learning. In a series of experiments, Gardner and his colleagues (Gardner, 1985; Gardner et al., 1992) found that anxiety has a significant deleterious effect on L2 development. Anxiety has also significant influence on class interaction (E. L. Lee, 2007) and also because of desire to avoid 'losing face' or being viewed as a 'show-off' (Ning, 2011) students have little interaction in the class. The findings of this study showed that because of this weak interaction, students ask less questions about the gap between learning and teaching. As teachers help and encourage the students for reducing the anxiety, they ask their questions if they have and it improves their learning. By this strategy, it seems the gap between teaching, learning, and assessment reduces.

Another useful strategy which teachers used was assessing before, during, and after teaching. Pre-assessment helps the teachers to understand the level and the background of the students' knowledge (Hockett & Doubet, 2014). Assessing students' learning during teaching is a dimension of formative assessment or AfL, which interwove learning, teaching, and assessment (I. Lee, 2007). Finally, assessing students after teaching, which are oral or written quizzes, is another form of assessment which is relatively similar to summative assessment or AoL. This assessment is also common among the teachers to attain a final score from the

students. Teachers seem to use this strategy in order to understand the background knowledge of the students, the process of their learning, and to be sure if they have learned well.

The final strategy was asking, answering, and giving feedback. During or after teaching, which teachers ask their students different questions, the students almost show how much they have learned and this helps them to notify the students' understanding. After that, the teachers give them different sorts of feedback. By this strategy, teachers seem to examine if the students have learned or not and give them corrective feedback. According to Lyster (2007), teachers use different implicit and explicit feedback to facilitate students' leaning. Some teachers believed that according to the students' responses, they reflect their teaching. When most of the students have the same problem, the teachers understand that the problem roots in their teaching, so they change their teaching in order to help the students learn.

Conclusions

The study explored Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions about the relationship between teaching, learning, and assessment. Moreover, the strategies the teachers used for maintaining and reducing the gap between these three aspects were discussed. The findings were categorized based on Earl's framework (2013) by three paradigms of assessment: AoL, AfL, and AaL. The findings showed some teachers apply summative form of assessment and they consider teaching, learning, and assessment as separate concepts of education. On the other hand, the majority of teachers have a formative perspective toward assessment. They consider assessment as closely connected to teaching and learning. Their assessment, teaching, and learning have an interwoven relationship which we categorized as AfL. Despite this integration, some teachers tried to reduce the gaps by allowing the students to monitor their learning which were classified as AaL. Moreover, the teachers used some strategies for reducing the gap between these threes which were: 1) Stress reduction and creating a space for interaction, 2) assessing before, during, and after teaching, and 3) asking, answering, and giving feedback.

The findings promise some practical and pedagogical implications for teachers and teacher educators in general education and L2 education in particular. Teacher educators, for example, may use this study to professionally contribute to novice teachers' development in teacher training courses in order to different types of assessment. Moreover, English teachers can benefit from the study by understanding how to use different strategies for reducing the gaps between teaching, learning, and assessment, and also, to be more familiar with the three paradigms of assessment.

The study has two limitations. First, the participant teachers were only interviewed. In order to extend the line of thinking, it is better to observe their classes and performance in person; however due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible. Future research may use multiple data collection tools to provide a more complete picture of the issue. Second, this study only focused on school teachers. The findings might be slightly different for the teachers of language teaching institutions or ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teachers. So, further research might be required to consider the perceptions of teachers regarding the connection between teaching, learning, and assessment in these contexts.

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Appendix A.

1. What is your definition for assessment?
2. What is the importance assessment?
3. When do you start assessing?
4. What techniques do you use for assessing?
5. What strategies do you use in assessment?
6. How do you consider the relationship between assessment, teaching, and learning?
7. How do you help the students to monitor their learning?

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