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Assessment polarity or praxis parity? Uncovering the learning-oriented assessment (LOA) landscape of novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers

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Abstract

Although learning-oriented assessment (LOA) has been recognized as an effective method of assessment, the literature on this concept in relation to teacher professionalism is limited. In response to this gap, the present study explored 16 Iranian novice and experienced EFL teachers' beliefs and practices of LOA. Data were collected from self-reported practices and semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the data through MAXQDA revealed that the novice and experienced teachers' LOA beliefs featured similarities and differences. While the novice teachers' LOA beliefs were less sophisticated, experienced teachers highlighted a more central role for LOA in their integration of teaching and assessment. Moreover, while novice teachers preferred using self- and peer assessment, the experienced teachers used more portfolio and dynamic assessment for their LOA-related practices. The study provides implications for teachers and teacher educators to use LOA in professional development courses.

Keywords: Experienced teachers, Learning-oriented assessment, Novice teachers, Teacher beliefs, Teacher practices, Teaching experience

Introduction

For several decades, assessment has been considered as an essential part of language teaching and learning (Phakiti & Leung, 2024) in that it has a significant impact on classroom instruction and students' performance (Tsagari & Vogt, 2017). As pinpointed by Keppell et al. (2006), assessment simply shapes students' learning experience, and it should be about assessing the quality of students' learning and teaching practices as it facilitates the measurement and understanding of student learning (Keppell et al., 2006). Moreover, assessment can inspire intellectual curiosity and drive in students, challenging them to grapple with complex ideas and deepen their commitment to learning (Ramsden, 2003). In the past decades, assessment has been conceptualized as moving beyond a summative perspective toward integrating it with teaching and learning processes (Phakiti & Leung, 2024). In this regard, Hamp-Lyons (2007) argued that

assessment should move toward a learning culture rather than an exam culture. The aim of such shifts has been defining how assessment could be integrated with the dynamics of teaching as this approach could exercise more beneficial effects on students' learning outcomes. Such a perspective of assessment has been reflected in the works of scholars, such as McNamara (2012) and Shohamy (2013), trying to link assessment and learning to broader sociocultural issues.

Carless (2007) held that teachers serve as essential mediators, leveraging their expertise to enhance student learning. However, top-down educational policies significantly limit teachers' assessment identities, emotions, and agency, compelling them to create an adaptive assessment system while receiving minimal professional support (Derakhshan et al., 2024). Meaningful improvements in the implementation of formative assessment hinge largely on teachers' deep comprehension of its guiding principles and effective classroom practices. An offshoot of such a perspective has been learning-oriented assessment (LOA), which refers to the systematic gathering of performance-based evidence as the foundation for making informed judgments about students' continued language development (Purpura, 2004). An LOA perspective enables teachers and learners to develop a better connection between the teaching, learning, and assessment dimensions (Chong & Reinders, 2023). As the most notable feature of LOA is to emphasize the learning process by considering how instruction, assessment, and learning are interconnected (Turner & Purpura, 2016), it is perfectly matched with the principles of assessment for learning, which is a recent trend in assessment in education.

Recent years have witnessed the growth of research on LOA in applied linguistics (Chong & Reinders, 2023). Studies of this line of research have also explored effects of LOA on learners' (e.g., Estaji & Safari, 2023; Gao, 2017; Hamp-Lyons, 2017; Keppell et al., 2006) as well as teachers' LOA beliefs and practices (e.g., Ali, 2013; Banitalebi & Ghiasvand, 2023; Carless, 2015; Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2022; Jalilzadeh & Coombe, 2023). Despite the growth of research on teachers' LOA beliefs and practices, the scope of research on teachers' experience as a factor in LOA is limited. Few studies, if any, have investigated whether novice and experienced teachers concur/differ in their LOA-related beliefs and practices. This gap is prominent as novice and experienced EFL teachers may have dissimilar beliefs and practices of LOA. Tsui (2009a, 2009b) has highlighted a number of differences among novice and experienced teachers (e.g., flexibility, automaticity, adaptability, and effectiveness), which are also likely to influence teachers' assessment beliefs/practices in general and LOA-related beliefs/practices in particular. By bridging this gap, this study attempted to expand the literature on LOA in EFL contexts, where teachers form different conceptualizations and practices of assessment.

Literature review

Learning-oriented assessment

The origins of LOA turn back to the general perspectives about formative assessment. In his paper on LOA, Farhady (2021) tabulates six types of assessment: (1) performance assessment, which is measuring the skills of speaking and writing, (2) authentic assessment, which measures performance in real-world-like tasks, (3) summative assessment, which measures achievement, (4) formative/classroom assessment, which measures learning based on in-class developments, (5) diagnostic assessment, which identifies

strengths and weaknesses, and (6) alternative assessment, which disfavors traditional, discrete point perspectives of testing. These conceptualizations of assessment have evolved over time in that more attention is now paid to moving assessment beyond simply measuring learning toward integrating it with teaching and considering the socio-cultural factors that shape assessment (Inbar-Lourie, 2013; Scarino, 2013; Xu & Brown, 2016).

LOA shares also a lot with the ramifications of integrating assessment with learning, including assessment for, of, and as learning. In this regard, Schellekens et al. (2021) stated that AaL, or assessment as learning, emphasizes the active involvement of students in the assessment process and their own learning. AfL, assessment for learning, focuses on identifying learning progress throughout the assessment. AoL, assessment of learning, revolves around the measurement of learning outcomes through assessments. LOA presents a mixture of these perspectives because as Carless (2007) and Gebriel (2021) stated, LOA could draw on a wide range of assessment-based sources to make a meaningful contribution to students' learning. In this regard, Carless (2007) laid the foundations of LOA by stating that in LOA, the primacy of learning should be at the forefront, both in the literal construction of the term and as a matter of principle. Assessment practices should fundamentally emphasize and prioritize the learning aspects, rather than treating learning as a secondary consideration.

Carless (2007) summarized his framework of LOA around three principles. The first principle states that the design of assessment tasks should promote and cultivate effective learning practices for students, which emphasizes the proactive perspective of assessment in terms of informing instruction. The second principle is that assessment should actively engage students in the process of evaluating criteria, judging levels of quality, and reflecting on their own or classmates' performance, which emphasizes the central role of learners in integrating learning with assessment, what was also emphasized in assessment as learning. The third principle holds that feedback provision should be both timely and future-oriented, aiming to support students' current learning as well as guide their ongoing development, which underlines the importance of feedback as a central process of learning and assessment.

Building on Carless's (2007) study, Gebriel (2021) investigated the perceptions of LOA among novice and experienced EFL teachers in Egypt. The findings indicated that both groups of teachers acknowledged the importance of LOA in expanding student learning and development. However, novice teachers expressed concerns about the practicality and viability of implementing LOA in their classrooms, stressing factors such as large class sizes, time constraints, and pressure to cover the curriculum. In contrast, experienced teachers evinced a more positive attitude toward LOA and underscored the benefits of formative assessment in guiding their instructional decisions.

In addition to the studies mentioned, there are other recent studies that can contribute to the theoretical framework of LOA. For instance, Goldouz and Baleghizadeh (2021) explored the tensions between novice and experienced teachers' beliefs and practices regarding written corrective feedback in EFL contexts. This study could provide insights into how teachers' beliefs about assessment and feedback influence their implementation of LOA. In another study, Khatib and Saeedian (2021) identified the key factors influencing novice teachers' classroom decision-making, emphasizing how pedagogical

reasoning shapes their assessment strategies. Although this study did not directly focus on LOA, it can shed light on the factors that shape novice teachers' classroom practices, including their perceptions of assessment and evaluation. Furthermore, Pham Haiuon (2023) contributes to this discourse by providing a sociocultural perspective on novice teachers' professional development, suggesting that contextual factors significantly impact their understanding and implementation of assessment practices.

Following the growth of LOA, researchers attempted to develop models of the concept. Farhady (2021) argued that LOA tasks not only focus on the learning outcomes, but also prioritize the learning process itself. They leverage the contributions of self-assessment and peer assessment to enhance and deepen the overall learning experience, which opens the space for the emergence of various conceptualizations. With its emphasis on both learning and assessment, LOA has grasped the attention of researchers (Chong & Reinders, 2023; Jones & Saville, 2016; Salamoura & Morgan, 2021; Turner & Purpura, 2016). Despite the growth of research on LOA, this line of inquiry needs more attention from researchers to explore teachers' beliefs and practices of LOA. However, in recent years, few studies have explored teachers' LOA beliefs and practices. For example, Ali (2013) explored whether teachers supported LOA, the reason for such support, how LOA could be applied, and the challenges that teachers faced in implementing LOA. Data were collected from 25 teachers in the context of Oman using a six-question open-ended questionnaire. The analysis of the data showed that the teachers supported using LOA because this approach could help learners improve their learning outcomes and foster more active engagement in the learning process.

In another study, Derakhshan and Ghiasvand (2022) explored Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs and practices of LOA as well as the challenges that they faced in implementing LOA. The study also explored the types of activities that could better promote LOA. Data were collected from 40 teachers' semi-structured interviews and analyzed through MAXQDA. The analysis of the data revealed that the teachers believed that LOA could enhance classroom participation and collaboration, and fostered learners' engagement. Relatedly, Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023) explored how 16 Iranian teachers perceived the role of LOA in education and the challenges that they faced in implementing LOA. Data were collected from in-person and online interviews scheduled on WhatsApp. The analysis of the data showed that before attempting to implement LOA principles in their classes, teachers need to ensure effective coordination and alignment across the different components of the curriculum.

Novice and experienced teachers' assessment beliefs and practices

Teachers' beliefs and practices of assessment have been widely discussed in the form of their language assessment literacy (Estaji, 2024a, 2024b; Wang et al., 2023) and identity (Estaji & Ghiasvand, 2023, 2024). In this regard, Popham (2004) stated that teachers who lack assessment literacy encounter many challenges and that they may commit professional suicide. Moreover, in his discussion of teacher expertise, Tsui (2003) enumerated some of characteristics of expert teachers, including possessing deep subject-matter expertise, demonstrating proficient practical skills, and having the ability to make accurate diagnoses, provide insightful analyses, and reach sound decisions, often under time constraints. From this perspective, expert teachers have been identified as those who

can draw on their spontaneous understanding and experience to make decisions that provide a more quality instruction.

Li (2020) argued that the major difference between novice and experienced teachers is their task performance. That is, novice teachers may have difficulty in integrating conceptual knowledge into their practice, while experienced teachers are better able to incorporate such theories into their teaching. Additionally, novice teachers may have difficulty in establishing effective communication with students, while experienced teachers are able to perform such relationships helpfully (Tsui, 2009a, 2009b). Simply put, compared to experienced teachers, novice teachers often approach problems from a more superficial, immediate perspective, concentrating on the present circumstances. In contrast, experienced teachers can connect the issue at hand to long-term objectives, address it at a deeper level, apply learning theories to their teaching, and effectively manage curriculum requirements (Tsui, 2009a, 2009b).

Moreover, in her 2009 paper on distinctive qualities of expert teachers, Tsui studied four teachers (Marina, Eva, Ching, and Genie), who had 8, 5, 5, and 2 years of experience. Tsui identified three areas in which the teachers differed: integrating knowledge, which had two aspects of establishing class norms and organizing the object of learning; using situated possibilities, which had two aspects of perceiving possibilities for learning and maximizing the learning opportunities; and reflective practice, which focused on actualizing theoretical knowledge and theorizing actual knowledge. Tsui concluded that while many of the features identified in the study have been documented in previous research, the key distinguishing factor between experts and non-experts appears to be the ability to perceive and capitalize on the “situated possibilities” presented by the specific context at hand (p. 437). Furthermore, Tsui (2009a, 2009b) and Li (2020) have argued that while there are similarities between novice and experienced teachers, they also have differences in specific areas of their cognitions and practices.

To further elaborate on the contributions of Tsui (2009a, 2009b) and Li (2020), it is essential to highlight the implications of their findings for teacher training and professional development. Both studies underscore the necessity of fostering reflective practices and situational awareness among novice teachers to bridge the gap between theory and practice. By emphasizing the importance of mentorship and collaborative learning opportunities, educational programs can better support novice teachers in developing the skills to integrate theoretical knowledge into their teaching effectively. Additionally, incorporating strategies that enhance communication and relationship-building with students can empower novice educators to create more dynamic and responsive learning environments, ultimately improving their pedagogical effectiveness. This focus on situational adaptability and reflective practice can lead to a more nuanced understanding of teaching as a complex, context-dependent profession.

In the past decades, research on the beliefs and practices of EFL teachers has increased (e.g., Burkhauser & Lesaux, 2017; Gatbonton, 2008; Karimi & Norouzi, 2019; Koni & Krull, 2018; Wolff et al., 2017). For example, Wolff et al. (2017) explored the differences between novice and experienced teachers’ beliefs about classroom management events. Two videos containing problematic classroom situations were presented to the teachers. Data analyses revealed that while the novice teachers focused more on behavior and discipline, the experienced teachers were more focused on the role of teacher in student

learning. In addition, Karimi and Norouzi (2019) explored the differences in the pedagogical thought units of 20 teachers who were grouped into five different groups of experience ranges. Using recorded classes and stimulated recall interviews, the researchers were able to show that experience could play a direct role in teachers' better representations in comparison to novice teachers.

The above literature shows that teaching experience is a significant factor in shaping teachers' beliefs and practices. Additionally, such experience could influence teachers' assessment beliefs and practices. However, little is known about how novice and experienced teachers differ in their LOA beliefs and practices. Thus, the purpose of this study was exploring such differences between novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers by considering the following research question:

How convergent or divergent are novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers in their learning-oriented assessment (LOA)-related beliefs and practices?

Method

This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the beliefs and practices of novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers regarding LOA. This design was selected because of the nature of the study, by which both similarities and discrepancies in the beliefs and practices of the two groups of teachers about LOA were thoroughly examined using their own perceptions and lived experiences (Lester, 1999; Richardson, 1999). The design was adopted in a way that it could figure out how teaching experience could play a role in shaping EFL teachers' LOA beliefs and practices. In addition, phenomenology not only provided a rich understanding of the hindrances to the practice of LOA encountered by EFL teachers but it also allowed the collection of in-depth data about the coping practices employed by these teachers to navigate the challenges of implementing LOA.

Participants and context

For the present study, private language institutes in the Iranian context were targeted as these institutes recruit both novice and experienced teachers. The rationale for the selection of this context for the study was because it better unpacks the similarities and differences between novice and experienced teachers. The participants were 16 EFL teachers (8 novice and 8 experienced), selected through maximum variation sampling. According to Palinkas et al. (2013), the use of maximum variation sampling enables the researchers to capture the potential diversity among the participants. This approach facilitates the identification of important shared patterns that cut across cases, which, as Patton (2015) notes, achieve their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity. Ultimately, this allows for more effective extrapolation of the data from the sample to the broader population.

Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all participants a week before data collection to observe research ethics. This cohort of teachers (12 out of 16) were predominantly female, representing 75% of the sample, and the remaining 4 teachers (25%) were male. The age range of the teachers spanned from 19 to 42 years old. All the institute courses focused on general English and aimed to develop the learners' four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). The teachers were categorized as novice

(those with up to 3 years of experience) and experienced (those beyond 5 years) relying on the literature (e.g., Farrell, 2012; Gattbonton, 2008). Table 1 indicates the teachers' demographic particularities.

The data in the table indicates that the highest proportion of the teachers in the sample constituting 50% or 8 out of 16 teachers held a Master's degree. Besides, 31.25% or 5 teachers had a Bachelor's degree, while 12.5% or 2 teachers were engaged in a PhD program, and 6.25% or 1 teacher already had a PhD. The instructors' didactic experience spanned from 1 to 12 years, indicating a range of experience levels within the sample. From among the teachers, the largest proportion, 81.25% or 13 teachers, had an English Language Teaching (ELT) background. Moreover, 12.5% or 2 teachers majored in English Literature, and 6.25% or 1 teacher accomplished Translation Studies. Overall, the sample primarily consisted of female teachers in their 20s, with a notable concentration of teachers holding a Master's degree and specializing in ELT.

Data collection

The first stage of data collection involved garnering novice and experienced teachers' LOA-related practices. In this regard, the teachers were asked to report their practices through a self-reported observation questionnaire. The focus of this query was investigating whether or not the novice and experienced teachers differed in their LOA-related practices (Appendix 1). Once these practices were obtained by sending their written reports to the researchers electronically, they were subsequently involved in a semi-structured interview. According to Dornyei (2007), it is appropriate to use a semi-structured interview when the researcher possesses a sufficient understanding of the phenomenon or domain under investigation and is capable of formulating broader questions in advance.

In so doing, the interview questions were primarily developed by the researchers and then three experts (PhD in TEFL) were invited to check their content relevance and

Table 1 Novice and experienced teachers' demographic information

Name	Gender	Age (year)	Academic degree	Experience (year)	Field of study
T1	Female	19	BA	2	Literature
T2	Male	19	BA	1	Literature
T3	Female	19	BA	2	Translation
T4	Female	24	MA	2	ELT
T5	Female	29	MA	2	ELT
T6	Female	22	BA	2	ELT
T7	Female	23	BA	2	ELT
T8	Female	28	MA	2	ELT
T9	Female	40	MA	11	ELT
T10	Male	24	MA	6	ELT
T11	Female	24	MA	4	ELT
T12	Female	36	MA	8	ELT
T13	Female	42	PhD candidate	12	ELT
T14	Female	26	PhD student	6	ELT
T15	Male	29	MA	6	ELT
T16	Male	32	PhD	7	ELT

language appropriateness. The interview aimed to obtain the teachers' beliefs and practices pertaining to LOA (Appendix 2). The interview questions examined how the teachers implemented LOA in their classes, how they perceived LOA and its effectiveness, the challenges that they faced in implementing LOA, and what activities and practices they used to maintain and develop their understanding/practices of LOA in their classes. The relevance, clarity, and language accuracy of each question were examined by the experts in a week. After obtaining the experts' appraisal, the items were revised, and the content validity index (CVI) was measured and approved. Afterward, an online one-on-one audio-recorded semi-structured interview was conducted, via WhatsApp and Skype, and the interviews lasted, on average, 20–30 min per teacher during non-instructional time at their convenience. It is worthy of note that the participants were reassured of their identity and responses, being kept confidential.

Data analysis

The data were qualitatively analyzed in tune with the design of the study. Data collected through the self-reported practices and semi-structured interviews were transcribed. To this end, Braun and Clarke's (2006) model was utilized to run a thematic analysis of the interview data using MAXQDA software. First, the transcribed data from the two data sets were read several times to help better grasp their nature. Second, the initial extracted codes emerging from the data were written down. Third, the initial codes were refined through constant-comparison with the two data sources to develop the major themes. Fourth, all the extracted codes and themes from the interviews were double-checked and fed into the software. Next, coding was done drawing on the "open coding," "axial coding," and "selective coding" model proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990). The data of the interview were iteratively inspected and some open codes were produced. Then, in the axial coding stage, the open codes were linked to produce larger codes. Finally, "selective coding" was carried out and the extracted themes were collated into larger categories (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, a second coder probed the credibility and confirmability of the findings that drew on the codes.

The data from the two data sets (i.e., self-reported practices and semi-structured interviews) were analyzed using MAXQDA software (v. 2020) to develop more inclusive themes. Having the qualitative data analysis completed, to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, two measures of memorandum note-taking (through glossing the findings in a Word file) and member checking were taken. To adhere to the principle of member checking and enhance the credibility and confirmability of the interpretations, a second coder, who was a PhD in applied linguistics, with experience in running qualitative research in L2 assessment was invited to examine the extracted codes and themes to check the inter-coder agreement level. To this end, 20% of the data obtained from the interviews were cross-checked. Cohen's kappa coefficient was calculated, and the results showed an inter-coder reliability of 0.78. In the following, these findings are discussed and presented through figures, percentages, and interview excerpts.

Results and discussion

The findings of the study are divided into three sections. The first section discusses the beliefs about LOA among novice teachers. The second section presents the beliefs about LOA among experienced teachers. Finally, the third section focuses on the LOA-related practices of both novice and experienced teachers.

Novice teachers' beliefs about LOA

The results obtained by MAXQDA revealed that Iranian novice EFL teachers had different beliefs about LOA. Four codes were extracted from the interview data (Fig. 1). These codes were the most frequent ones. The participants perceived that LOA “reflects the integrated nature of assessment and instruction,” “is a movement toward learning,” “highlights learning process rather than product,” and “responds to students' learning needs” which were respectively repeated 6, 5, 4, and 3 times across the data.

For example, for the theme on the integrated nature of assessment and instruction, a teacher argued that LOA is an approach that views assessment and teaching as an integrated whole rather than viewing them as isolated segments: “Well, to me LOA is an approach to testing that unifies assessment and teaching” (T2). Regarding the purpose of LOA toward learning, another teacher mentioned that LOA is an approach that emphasizes learning during assessment: “In my opinion, LOA is an assessment approach that highlights learner-centeredness. So, it prioritizes learning during assessment” (T8). T5 explained about the process-based nature of LOA and proclaimed: “I could say that I believe LOA is an assessment technique that promotes the quality of students' learning. In other word, it focuses on process rather than product” (T5). As to being responsive to learner needs as an influential factor, a teacher mentioned: “To me, LOA is very influential in L2 education as it reduces the pressure on learners by highlighting their learning needs over test performance. Thus, the process of learning is emphasized in LOA” (T4).

The teachers were also asked about their beliefs about the effectiveness of LOA. The analysis of interview responses showed that six teachers (75% of the participants) perceived LOA as an effective assessment approach in their classes. For example, T5 viewed LOA as an approach that contributes to long-lasting learning and stated: “Well, to me LOA can cause life-long learning and classroom engagement as it integrates learning into assessment.” T1 also believed that LOA emphasizes the learning outcomes instead of the exam results and added: “LOA is an effective approach that improves learning. It moves

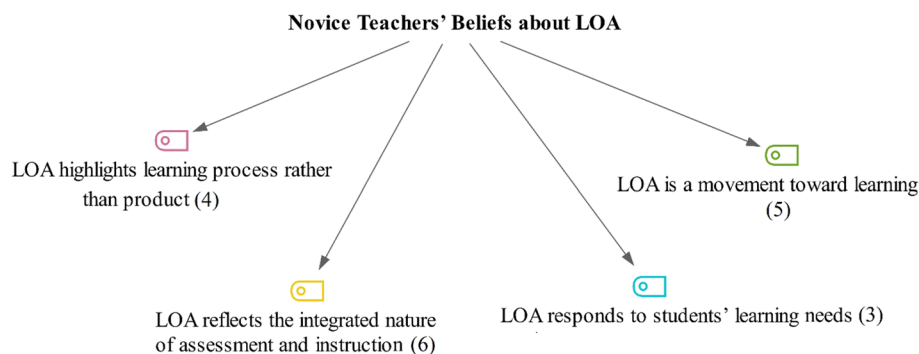


Fig. 1 Novice teachers' perceptions of LOA

the emphasis from exam results to a better comprehension of the material. LOA gives learners the opportunity to take charge of their education, encourages introspection, and advances mentality.” T6 mentioned a similar point regarding the effectiveness of LOA in her classes: “I see LOA as highly effective because it shifts the focus from just grades to the learning process itself. Thus, this method allows students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and work toward improvement.”

Moreover, the teachers were asked about the challenges that they confronted in implementing LOA. The results revealed that “time constraint,” “institutional barriers,” and “lack of experience” were the most frequent challenges in implementing LOA. For example, T8 considered time constraint and institutional barriers as permanent obstacles in implementing LOA in her classes and mentioned that: “Time is always a constraint. Other than that, institutional barriers, like teaching to the test, often exert a limitation on the agency of the teacher to implement creative and beneficial initiatives.” Regarding experience, T7 argued that professional development courses that aim at reducing this challenge can be helpful: “To me, LOA is challenging for novice teachers in that it requires expertise and pre-service training. Therefore, preparing LOA-related professional development courses for teachers if optimal outcome is desired can be helpful.”

Experienced teachers’ beliefs about LOA

Using MAXQDA, six codes were extracted from the interview data (Fig. 2) of the experienced teachers. The codes included LOA as it “reflects the symbiotic nature of assessment, instruction, and learning,” “is a trigger of classroom interaction, collaboration, and engagement,” “is a stimulator of learners’ curiosity and motivation,” “is practicing assessment as a retrospective alternative,” “is a reflection of social change and educational reform,” and “addresses skill-related difficulties via assessment” which were respectively repeated 6, 5, 4, 4, 3, and 3 times across the data.

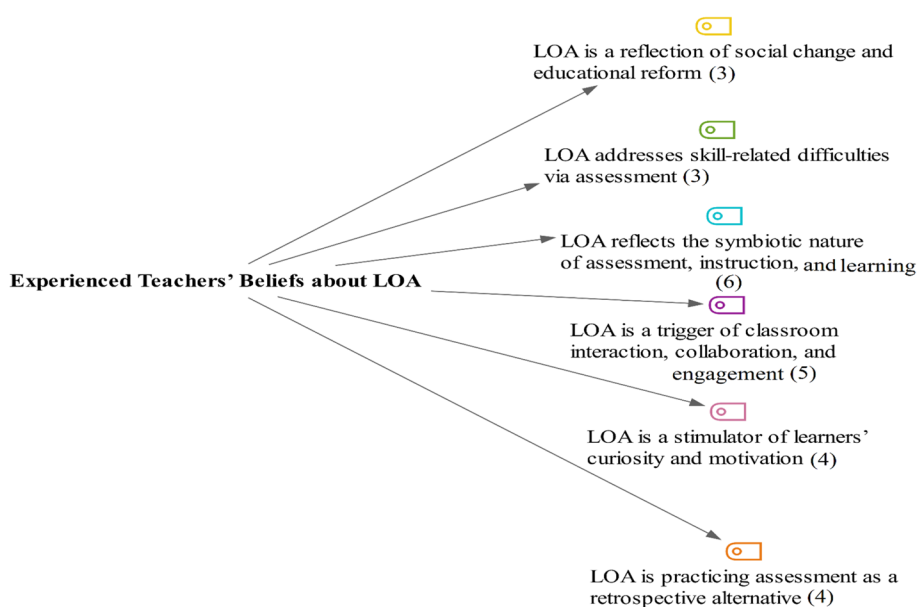


Fig. 2 Experienced teachers’ perceptions of LOA

The following excerpts represent the teachers' beliefs about LOA, representing the themes projected in Fig. 2.

I generally try to unite my teaching and assessment in a way that they are not separate activities. Rather, I aim to design them in a symbiotic arrangement in which instruction helps assessment and assessment encourages further learning. (T15)

To me, LOA is an effective approach because it facilitates classroom interaction, collaboration, and engagement among students. (T10)

I believe in an assessment that achieves its aims, it has to include an element that will push the learners toward further effort and learning. Assessment should be capable of stimulating the learners' curiosity and increasing their motivation. (T13)

Adopting this approach assists me in using my prior experiences of successful student learning and applying them to my current practices. This way I use my best assessment technique, which at the same time increases learning. (T14)

In my opinion, LOA reflects social change and it is a sort of educational reform emphasizing a learning society. (T16)

In my teaching practice, I have often noticed that I can amend possible speaking errors through immediate and direct feedback while the student is talking. And I have come to believe that this technique works for many students. And it has the extra benefit of reflecting these instances in the student's scores. (T12)

Regarding teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of LOA, seven teachers (88% of the participants) based on the analysis of the data argued that LOA is an effective approach in their classroom practices. For example, T14 stated: "LOA alleviates many of the students' problems while decreasing their language-learning resistance at the same time." T11 also declared: "As for areas in which rapport is concerned, LOA creates a feeling for the students that their teacher cares, and it also reduces many negative emotions related to the classroom, such as anxiety, lacking autonomy, and other such feelings." Moreover, like the novice teachers, the experienced teachers shared similar challenges in implementing LOA. They argued that "lack of time" and "institutional barriers" are the main challenges in implementing LOA in their classes. For example, T16 mentioned a point regarding how time constraints can bring about challenges of LOA implementation: "One of the main obstacles I encounter while putting LOA into practice is time management. Because developing and executing meaningful assignments and delivering timely feedback calls for meticulous preparation and coordination." T13 also emphasized the importance of time and how lack of time causes challenges in implementing LOA in her classes: "To me, the main challenge in implementing LOA is time budget. It is time-consuming to strike a balance between grading and providing2 constructive feedback that encourages positive academic growth." T9 shared her opinion about institutional barriers as a challenge in implementing LOA in her classroom practices: "Language assessment approach is not very practical when it comes to school since we don't have the permission to apply such kind of assessment in our classes." T16 also maintained: "The logistics of schools are sometimes challenging because it takes time and effort to search for suitable materials that can effectively convey the language points that I want to teach."

Novice and experienced teachers' LOA-related practices

The analysis of the data showed that the novice and the experienced teachers reported different LOA-related practices (Fig. 3). Novice teachers reported that to implement LOA in their classroom practices, they utilized “self-assessment,” “peer assessment,” and “collaborative group projects” which were respectively repeated 5, 4, and 3 times across the data. For example, T3 stated that she uses self-assessment to promote LOA in her classes: “I incorporate a variety of LOA practices in my classes to enhance the learning experience for students. For example, I use regular self-assessment quizzes, which make them reflect on their understanding of the material.” T6 also posited: “I utilize peer reviews and collaborative group projects to encourage students to engage in self-evaluation and reflection.” Moreover, the teachers held that they used “reading books,” “attending webinars, seminars, and workshops,” and “attending professional development courses” to maintain and develop their understanding/practice of LOA in their classes. For example, T2 shared a point regarding how he develops his understanding of LOA: “I think that I should read books and articles related to language assessment. They can broaden my understanding of the current issues related to this concept.” T8 also mentioned that: “I attend workshops and read-up on the literature available on the subject in-between terms and sometimes, if time allows, during them as well.” Finally, T7 held that: “I pursue ongoing professional learning to preserve and expand my grasp of and application of LOA.”

However, the experienced teachers held that they utilized “formative assessment practices,” “dynamic assessment,” “portfolio assessment,” and “performance-based tests/tasks” to practice LOA in their classes which were respectively repeated 5, 4, 4, and 3 times across the data. For example, T11 stated that: “Well, I use formative assessment practices, dynamic assessment, and process-oriented tasks to measure learners’ language performance.” T16 also mentioned that he prefers to use portfolio assessment and performance-based tasks to practice LOA in his classes: “I use alternative assessment techniques such as portfolio assessment and performance-based tests to measure each student’s learning. Since LOA is an individualized and ongoing approach it integrates assessment and learning.” Furthermore, like the novice teachers, the experienced teachers shared similar activities to maintain and develop their understanding/practice of LOA in their classroom practices. For example, T13 held that: “Personally, I read books and handbooks related to LOA and L2 assessment. Moreover, attending training courses,

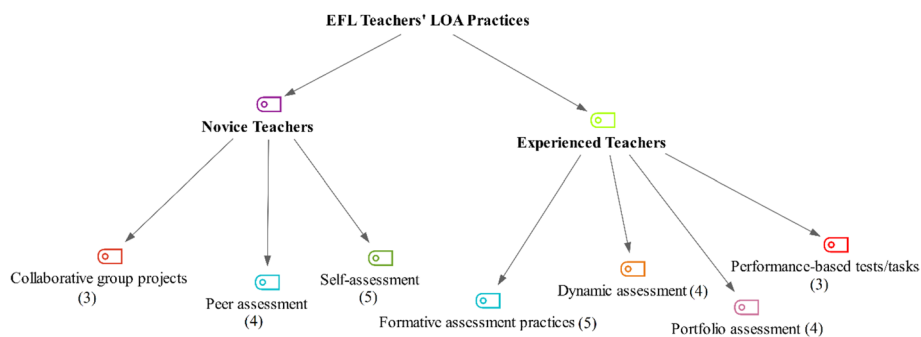


Fig. 3 Novice and experienced teachers' LOA-related practices

workshops, and seminars is beneficial. T12 also added that an effective way to exchange ideas related to LOA is attending webinars, conferences, and seminars: *“I always participate in webinars, conferences, and seminars related to pedagogy and assessment. In order to exchange ideas and experiences, I also work in collaboration with other colleagues.”*

In sum, the results of this research question indicated that the novice and experienced teachers had different beliefs about LOA. The novice teachers claimed that LOA “reflects the integrated nature of assessment and instruction,” “is a movement toward learning,” “highlights learning process rather than product,” and “responds to students’ learning needs.” While experienced teachers considered that LOA “reflects the symbiotic nature of assessment, instruction, and learning,” “is a trigger of classroom interaction, collaboration, and engagement,” “is a stimulator of learners’ curiosity and motivation,” “is practicing assessment as a retrospective alternative,” “is a reflection of social change and educational reform,” and “addresses skill-related difficulties via assessment.” Moreover, the analysis of the data demonstrated that the novice and experienced teachers reported different LOA-related practices. Novice teachers reported that they utilized “self-assessment,” “peer assessment,” and “collaborative group projects” to implement LOA in their classroom practices while the experienced teachers held that they utilized “formative assessment practices,” “dynamic assessment,” “portfolio assessment,” and “performance-based tests/tasks” to practice LOA in their classes.

Discussion

This study explored the beliefs and practices of novice and experienced EFL teachers with regard to LOA. The findings of the study revealed both similarities and discrepancies in the belief and practices of the two groups of teachers. Concerning the novice teachers, their LOA beliefs revolved around four overarching themes, while the experienced teachers pointed to six main themes that characterized their LOA beliefs. The differential impact of teacher experience can be markedly identified in the dataset of the two groups. Corroborating the observations made by Li (2020), while the novice teachers’ cognitive processes were predominated with less sophisticated instructional concerns, the experienced teachers demonstrated a more comprehensive perspective of what shapes genuine and ongoing student learning. These findings also resonate with Tsui (2009a, 2009b) who contended that experienced teachers normally possess a broader knowledge base in relation to collecting data on student learning and making accurate assessments. In addition, the experienced teachers’ data vividly reflect their critical evaluation of product-oriented and psychometric approaches to classroom assessment and, instead, indicates how these teachers favor linking the teaching–learning–assessment cycle to broader sociocultural issues and socio-educational exigencies of the context of their instruction (Jones & Saville, 2016; Shohamy, 2013). By stating that LOA both reflects and contributes to the broader social and educational transformations taking place, they have demonstrated their deep understanding of the theoretical ramifications of adopting an LOA approach, which replaces an exam culture in educational milieu with a learning culture (Carless, 2007; Gebril, 2021; Hamp-Lyons, 2007; Turner & Purpura, 2016).

These differences are significant in that they highlight a novel dimension of language teachers’ LOA-related beliefs, which has not received due analysis in the previous

literature. In light of the point that the LOA movement was originally a product of the growing dissatisfaction with the dominant psychometric paradigms of measuring students' achievement (and, by extension, themselves and their future prospects) to determine their academic fate (Farhady, 2021; Turner & Purpura, 2016), the experienced teachers in our study aptly drew attention to the rather destructive outcomes of that paradigm on the broader scale of the society, which is shaped by the individual students. By favoring formation and construction against labeling and deconstruction, the teachers have attempted to align their conceptualization of LOA with larger sociocultural and contextual considerations in the formation of a learning society (Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Zeng et al., 2018). That is, they have verbalized their belief that the implementation of LOA is a promising approach, which not only integrates learning and assessment aiming to capitalize on the former, but also eventually engenders an environment to educate individuals, who will be able to contribute to social change and improvement. It is probable that this conceptualization might have emanated from following the longitudinal journey of the development of many students that the experienced teachers have taught during their career.

In terms of similarities, both groups of teachers were cognizant of the principal foundations of LOA. Both groups acknowledged that LOA represents a movement toward prioritizing learning and that it seeks to establish a synergy between assessment, instruction, and learning (Carless, 2015; Chong & Reinders, 2023). This finding might be due to the distinctive characteristics of LOA that the teachers have acquired through their graduate and undergraduate training in formative assessment approaches, such as dynamic assessment and assessment for learning (Popham, 2011; Sun & Zhang, 2022; Xu & Brown, 2016). Despite the slight differences between these formative assessment techniques, the teachers' assessment literacy seems to have enabled them to identify the fundamental principles of a learning-oriented approach to assessment and this ability is common among the teachers regardless of their experience level. Similar findings have also been reported by Banitalebi and Ghiasvand (2022) and Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023).

Pertaining to one of the three main principles of LOA (i.e., feedback as feedforward; Carless, 2007), both groups of the teachers have demonstrated their well-established beliefs about the effective feedback loop inside an LOA approach to classroom practice. By stating that "LOA highlights learning process rather than product" (novice teachers) and "LOA is practicing assessment as a retrospective alternative" (experienced teachers), they have pointed out the primacy of feedback in guiding the learning process according to an LOA orientation (Estaji & Safari, 2023; Jones & Saville, 2016). Within this mindset, assessment does not mark the end of the instructional cycle, but rather starts another loop of scaffolding student learning through the data gathered from the current performance. Reflected in their "feedforward" term, Carless (2007), Hamp-Lyons (2017), and other scholars have illustrated how the feedback from the teacher (as well as from other sources) can serve as a flashlight with which to diagnose potential learning pitfalls, as well as a crutch with which to walk the student through his/her attempts to amend those instances of failure. As such, the teachers have highlighted the fact that feedback acts as a cornerstone of pedagogy in the implementation of LOA (Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2022; Jalilzadeh & Coombe, 2023; Zhao & Qi, 2023).

With regard to the teachers' practices of LOA, the findings point to the distributed and collective approach to assessment by the teachers. The data of novice teachers indicates that they used multiple sources of information in their evaluation of student learning (e.g., self-assessment, peer-assessment). These alternative assessment techniques are among the most frequently adopted tasks teachers employ in line with an LOA framework (Derakhshan & Ghisvand, 2022; Gebril, 2021; Zeng et al., 2018). Concerning the findings gleaned from the analysis of the experienced teachers' data, it was observed that this latter group embedded their practice of LOA within a more comprehensive and fully fledged understanding of its implementation. That is, by referencing "formative assessment" and "dynamic assessment" among their designated tasks to embody LOA in the classroom, they have demonstrated that LOA is not just another method of assessing student learning to be employed once in a while, but rather a holistic and integrated approach on which to base classroom instruction (Jones & Saville, 2016; Turner & Purpura, 2016). Considering the focus of formative and dynamic assessment, which is to mobilize all the resources (especially assessment) to serve student development, the teachers have documented their important role as mediators in this process.

Collectively, the research findings document the positive appraisal and effective implementation of LOA by both groups of teachers, despite the variance which could be attributed to their experience level. Significantly, both groups of the teachers had noted the stumbling blocks in the way of their practice of LOA (Derakhshan & Ghiasvand, 2022; Jalilzadeh & Coombe, 2023; Zhao & Qi, 2023). At the same time, the teachers have also enumerated some of their coping strategies (e.g., attending seminars, reading books, among others). As Farhady (2021) states, teachers are the foundation upon which all educational systems are built. The agency among our participants, which seemed to possess a higher status with experienced teachers, can be observed to contribute to LOA, especially in the face of potential challenges (e.g., institutional barriers).

Conclusion and implications

This study looked into novice and experienced Iranian EFL teachers' LOA-related beliefs and practices. The findings revealed both similarities and differences between the two groups. Regardless of the discrepancy that could be ascribed to their experience level, both groups (1) indicated positive appraisal and effective enactment of LOA, (2) remarked the hindrances to their practice of LOA, and (3) enumerated some of their coping practices. In view of the findings, it can be concluded that teaching experience plays a significant role in shaping EFL teachers' LOA beliefs and practices. Another conclusion is that while LOA has recently begun gaining attention in EFL contexts, teachers can still enact it effectively when they are trained to do so. Theoretically, these findings add new insights to the literature on teachers' beliefs and practices of LOA as an alternative assessment technique. To date, the studies have mainly focused on assessment literacy and practices in general rather than having a specialized analysis of alternative assessment approaches. Therefore, the findings can unveil the mechanism of LOA and how it relates to teachers' professional practice and knowledge base. Additionally, this study contributes to the literature by pointing up the prominent role of teaching experience in shaping teachers' assessment beliefs and practices.

The study offers implications to EFL teachers and teacher educators. Regarding teachers, they can benefit from the findings by enhancing their understanding of LOA practices that contribute to their professionalism in assessment. Moreover, they can figure out the benefits and challenges of implementing LOA in their classes and the strategies to cope with those challenges. Teacher educators can also benefit from the findings of this study by developing LOA-specific training courses and workshops to raise early-career teachers' awareness of how to structure their assessment practices and contribute to a better implementation of LOA. Such teacher development courses would have several beneficial outcomes for teachers by making them cognizant of how to consider the different aspects and components of LOA in their professional career.

This study had limitations that could be compensated for in future studies. To investigate whether novice and experienced teachers concurred/differed in their LOA practices, the teachers were only asked to report their practices. Classroom observations could have helped to grasp a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers practice LOA. This can be a plausible line of inquiry for future scholars. Moreover, this study was conducted with only 16 novice and experienced teachers, which limited the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, it is more likely that better results can be pursued through conducting future research with a greater number of teachers. Additionally, further research is called for to examine the other stakeholders' LOA-related beliefs and practices and expand the conceptualizations of LOA in L2 education.

A triangulated approach to collect and analyze the data over a longer period of investigation is also suggested to future avid researchers of the field. Likewise, further research can delve deeper into the factors that influence the implementation of LOA practices in EFL classrooms. Investigating the specific professional development requirements and support systems that can help novice and experienced EFL teachers better understand and implement LOA practices in their classrooms would also be a potential area for future research. Finally, the other avenue for further research is examining how teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their perceived agency in the assessment process influence their willingness and ability to incorporate LOA approaches in their teaching. Future research can also explore the impact of cultural contexts on the implementation of LOA practices. Specifically, teachers' and students' perceptions of assessment may be influenced by their cultural values, beliefs, and educational norms. Such a study can involve comparative studies across different cultural settings, investigating how these contextual factors shape the understanding and application of LOA. The outcomes can reveal unique challenges and opportunities that arise from cultural differences, ultimately informing more culturally responsive assessment practices in EFL classrooms.

Appendix 1

Self-reported LOA practices

Dear teacher, please write a report on your leaning-oriented assessment (LOA)-related practices considering the following questions.

1. Have you implemented LOA in your classes?

2. How do you describe the LOA-related practices that you have implemented in your EFL classes?
3. Can you provide more specific examples or descriptions to illustrate your LOA-related practices?
4. What activities and practices do you use to maintain and develop your understanding and practices of LOA in your classes?

Appendix 2

Semi-structured interview

As an EFL teacher, please respond to the following questions on your beliefs and perceptions about the role of learning-oriented assessment (LOA) in your EFL classes.

1. How familiar are you with the concept of learning-oriented assessment (LOA)?
2. How do you perceive the key principles or characteristics of LOA?
3. In your opinion, how effective is the implementation of LOA?
4. What are the challenges that you have confronted in implementing LOA?

Abbreviations

AaL	Assessment as learning
AfL	Assessment for learning
AoL	Assessment of learning
CVI	Content validity index
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELT	English Language Teaching
L2	Second language
LOA	Learning-oriented assessment
MAXQDA	MAX Qualitative Data Analysis
TEFL	Teaching English as a foreign language

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the author on reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

All procedures performed in the study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all the individual participants included in this study.

Consent for publication

The authors consent to the publication of the manuscript upon its acceptance.

Competing interests

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