

Language Teacher Assessment: Iranian Stakeholders' Views

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Abstract

Language teacher assessment, like many aspects of second language teacher education, is changing. To understand factors that are driving the change, such as work of teaching generally, language teaching in particular, and the role of teachers' knowledge in teaching, this study examined language teacher assessment schemes across the globe. The aim was to arrive at a set of shared beliefs, attitudes, and values that specify the minimum knowledge, skills, and values that are necessary for foreign language teachers. In this study after reviewing the literature the opinions of a number of stakeholders were sought through Delphi method. The results indicated that Iranian stakeholders mainly thought of language teacher competency as knowledge of language– knowing about language, its grammar, form, and uses, so in their view assessing language teachers was simply a matter of testing teachers' knowledge of language.

Key words: Teacher assessment, stakeholders' views.

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I. Introduction

The main concern of this study is language teacher quality in Iranian context. World wide three ways are used to ensure teacher quality: accreditation, credentialing, and probationary period. Accreditation is a way to ensure that teacher preparation institutions are of sufficient quality. Therefore, it sets standards for institutions rather than individual teachers and examines them. Credentialing is a way to ensure that individual teacher candidates are of sufficient quality. There can be different types of credentials. For example, the state of California in the USA uses three types of credentials: preliminary credentials, professional credentials, and renewal credentials. Probationary period is a way to ensure that beginning teachers are of sufficient quality. The focus of this study is on credentialing.

In order to provide an appropriate framework of reference for credentialing foreign language teachers, we need to identify competencies necessary for successful language teaching in Iranian context. According to Lumley (1996) such frameworks could be used to develop tests for certifying language teachers, to select applicants for language teacher education, and to identify professional development needs. Alternatively, they could be used as the basis for the development of self assessment instruments. However, Cohen (1995) cautions readers to view standards as a long-term process and commitment which if handled correctly could lead to a productive national dialogue. Also, Jennings (1995) warns that national content standards do not constitute a mandate for a national curriculum but rather a starting point for individual states to grapple with difficult questions and work toward consensus. There are other dilemmas or controversies as well.

One such dilemma is whether to go for broad-based internationally recognized or locally developed frameworks/standards. Internationally recognized schemes have the advantage of making possible comparison between the learning outcomes across countries and provide the profession with well-field-tested assessment instruments. Locally developed schemes, however, satisfy the need for local autonomy, responsiveness to local contexts, and sense of agency and ownership of standards on the part of local experts and teachers. In addition, they make possible a deeper appreciation of how/why the instrument was developed. In this research project the researcher adheres to the second view. Therefore, he views a conceptual framework as a shared set of beliefs, attitudes, and values that sets out quite specifically the minimum knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are necessary (Ingram, 2007).

A second dilemma is what use such frameworks should be made of. There have been arguments against the use of such frameworks as the basis for selecting or certifying foreign language teachers. For example, the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) explicitly rejects any notion of teacher evaluation based on standards (AFMLTA, 2005). Responding to this controversy, Ingram (2007) posits:

The notion of standards serves valuable purposes if it provides clear and unambiguous guidelines, is set with some rational justification for some valid purpose [.....] or in relation to knowledge, skills, and attitude required for effective practice of a vocation [....] Such a 'standard' may be objectively justifiable if, for instance, the proficiency specified is related to

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the sort of language behavior routinely undertaken in carrying out the practical duties of a vocation whose performance ‘standards’ a Vocational Registration Board has been established to regulate [.....] However, it is difficult to justify the notion of a ‘standard’ if it is arbitrary, not obviously related to or explicable in terms of real language use or other vocational requirements, or if it is set as, for example, an arbitrary score on some arbitrarily chosen test to serve some administrative or political expediency (p. 11).

Having touched upon some of the limitations and dilemmas related to such frameworks, the researcher intends to state that the driving force behind this study is the belief that the type, number and degree of importance of the competencies necessary for language teaching is sensitive to socio-cultural context of language teaching and the characteristics of stakeholders. In the absence of this type of information any attempt to impose such frameworks without paying attention to stakeholders’ attitudes and beliefs is doomed to failure. Therefore, the identification of such competencies needs to be done in the local context. As such, this study intends to be a preliminary feasibility assessment of the issue in question. The researcher’s hope is that the information to be obtained in this study would be helpful to expert or officials who might feel the need to move toward such frameworks in the future.

2. Literature Review

According to a report prepared by Simpson Ltd. (1999) there is a considerable confusion as to the relationship of teacher proficiency

and linguistic proficiency. Simpson (1999) uses the terms teacher language proficiency versus language teacher proficiency to highlight this confusion. Briguglio and Kirkpatrick (1996) report that most stakeholders in the field have a broad view 'language teacher proficiency' including attributes of a competent language teacher; however, the main area of concern of those interviewed for the report was actually linguistic proficiency. However, the term language teacher proficiency implies that there is more to language teaching than simply linguistic knowledge. According to Briguglio and Kirkpatrick (1996) teacher proficiency refers to the totality of language teaching and learning and encompasses many other factors such as school or classroom conditions, teacher support, teacher morale, and career structures that contribute to successful language programs. Most models examined in this study include at least some of the following competencies as part of the definition of language teacher competence: linguistic proficiency, cultural understanding, pedagogical skills, and teacher knowledge and understanding. Ingram (2007) proposes a model consisting of two main modules: language proficiency standards and professional standards. Thus, in this section the researcher follows his lead and reviews language proficiency frameworks, language proficiency tools, and professional frameworks separately.

2.1 Language proficiency frameworks

Like many other abstract phenomena proficiency is not easy to define. A dictionary definition equates proficiency with such vague terms as ability, competence, qualifications, etc. In the same token, linguistic proficiency is the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language. However, as Chastain (1989) pointed out such a

definition is too imprecise and often leads to fuzzy thinking. At a more technical level especially in assessment circles there is little consistency as to how different organizations define proficiency. The following models have all tried to define this notion in specific ways.

These models include Lado's (1961) skill and component model, Oller's (1976) integrative model, and various models of communicative competence. Lado's (1961) model of language competence is a multi-componential one in which language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are distinguished from components of knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, and phonology/graphology). Oller's model (1976), on the other hand, is a unitary one, which claims that language proficiency consists of a single global ability. From 1980 on this view of language proficiency has been challenged by several empirical studies. Oller (1983) as its chief proponent abandoned the theory at least in its strongest interpretation. The unitary trait view has been replaced, through both empirical research and theorizing, by the view that language proficiency is multi-componential, consisting of a number of interrelated specific abilities as well as a general ability or a set of general strategies or procedures. Currently the most influential model of language proficiency is that proposed by Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996).

Bachman's conception of language proficiency is influenced by the notion of communicative competence introduced by Hymes (1972). This framework combines knowledge of the language system with knowledge of cultural conventions, norms of politeness, discourse conventions, and the like (Savignon, 1983). Several models have since been proposed for communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) provided a useful

starting point. These authors took communicative competence to include grammatical competence (knowledge of rules of grammar), sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of the rules of use and discourse), and strategic competence (knowledge of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies). The model was subsequently updated by Canale (1983), who proposed a four dimensional model comprising linguistic, sociolinguistic, discoursal and strategic competencies; the additional distinction being made between sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of sociocultural rules) and textual competence (knowledge of cohesion and coherence). Later, Bachman (1990) and Bachman and Palmer (1996) proposed a framework consistent with earlier definitions of communicative language ability. This model includes language competence, strategic competence, and psycho-physiological mechanisms. Language competence includes organizational competence, which consists of grammatical and textual competence, and pragmatic competence comprising illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence.

A comparison between Lado's model (1961) and Bachman's model (1990) reveals two important differences. First, Bachman's model is not only concerned with linguistic knowledge but it is also concerned with the ability to use language properly in real situations. This is dealt with under pragmatic competence. Second, unlike previous models, in which sentence was the ultimate unit of analysis, it takes both sentence and text into account under the names of grammatical and textual competences. That being said, this model has not been without its criticism.

2.2 Language proficiency tools

Language proficiency tools are devices that reveal the level of language

proficiency in individuals. In other words, they provide us with a measure of language proficiency. The most common of these are ACTFL, CEFR, and CLB. In this section we introduce each of these tools in turn.

2.2.1 The American Council on the teaching of foreign languages (ACTFL)

The most prominent foreign language assessment organization is The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). In part, ACTFL's definition of proficiency is derived from mandates issued by the U.S. government, declaring that a limited English proficient student is one who comes from a non-English background and who has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language and whose difficulties may deny such an individual the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in our society. ACTFL distinguishes between proficiency and performance, which it views as the combined effect of all three modes of communication: interpretative, interpersonal, and presentational (See ACTFL, 1996).

In terms of actual assessment, one significant result has been the adaptation of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) oral interview test to academic situations, providing a common, widely known index of spoken language ability. ACTFL published its first Proficiency Guidelines in 1986. This document represented a shift of emphasis in language instructional goals from what learners know *about* language to what they can *do with* the language they have learned, and at the same time they established a common metric for measuring student performance. The Proficiency Guidelines describe student performance in listening,

speaking, reading, and writing at the novice, intermediate, advanced, and superior levels. ACTFL recognizes ten different levels of proficiency as follows: novice, intermediate, advanced, and superior, of which the first three are each subdivided into low, mid, and high. For example, the following is a description of Advanced-Low level in speaking:

Speakers at the Advanced-Low level are able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times. They participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations on activities related to school, home, and leisure activities and, to a lesser degree, those related to events of work, current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance.

2.2.2 The Common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR)

Like ACTEFL, CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment) is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe. It was published in 2001 by the Council of Europe. It was developed out of a Council of Europe project entitled, Language Learning for European Citizenship. According to Hudson (2005) SEFR aims at (1) promoting and facilitating cooperation among educational institutions in different countries, (2) providing a method of assessing and teaching which applies to all languages in Europe and (3) assisting learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies, and educational administrators to situate and coordinate their efforts. In 2001 a European Union Council Resolution recommended using the CEFR to set up systems of validation of language ability. The six reference levels used by SEFR are: A (basic user), A1(breakthrough), A2 (waystage), B (independent user), B1

(threshold), B2 (vantage), C (proficient user), C1 (effective operational proficiency), and C2 (Mastery). The CEFR describes what a learner is supposed to be able to do in reading, listening, speaking and writing at each level, in details. For example, the following is a description of level B2:

Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. (Council of Europe, 2011, p. 42).

2.2.3 Canadian language benchmarks

Canada uses a system of benchmarks, which is designed to help clarify educational goals and illuminate the nature of good performance for teachers, students, and parents. Since 1987, the Toronto Board of Education has developed over 100 language and mathematics benchmarks at different grades. The latest benchmarks published in 2000 are a 12-point scale of task-based language proficiency descriptors used to guide the teaching and assessment of ESL learners in Canada. According to the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, each benchmark contains 1) a global performance, or a short benchmark performance profile, 2) four competencies in social interaction, instructions, suasion (getting

things done), and information, and 3) examples of communication tasks that may be used to demonstrate the required standard of proficiency (CCLB). The 12 benchmarks are divided into three parts as follows: Stage I: Basic Proficiency, Stage II: Intermediate Proficiency and Stage III: Advanced Proficiency. Each benchmark is then described in terms of can do statements or performance descriptors. For example, the following is a description of level 5 in writing:

1) Learner demonstrates initial ability in performing moderately complex writing tasks. 2) Can effectively convey an idea, opinion, feeling or experience in a single paragraph. 3) Can write short letters and notes on a familiar topic. 4) Can fill out extended application forms. 5) Can take simple dictation with occasional repetitions at a slow to normal rate of speech. 6) Can reproduce in writing simple information received orally or visually. 7) Can write down everyday phone messages. 8) Can complete a short routine report (usually on a form) on a familiar topic *etc.* (Johansson, Leader, Angst, Beer, Martin, Rebeck, and Sibilleau, 2010, p. 50)

2.2.4 Language teacher credentialing frameworks

In this part the researcher will give an overview of the current practices in the area of language teacher proficiency assessment i.e., professional assessment in Asian, American, Australian, European contexts. The review will focus on both ELT (English Language Teaching) and LOTE (Languages Other Than English). Most frameworks introduced here can

be categorized as forms of standards-based assessment.

2.2.5 United States

Starting in years before the turn of the century, four important standards documents were published in the United States in 1999, 2001, and 2002: (1) the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the Twenty-First Century* in 1999, (2) *World Languages Other than English Standards*, in 2001 by NBPTS. (3) *Standards for Licensing beginning FL Teachers* by INTASC, (4) and *Program Standards for the Preparation of FL Teachers*, 2002 by ACTFL – NCATE. Table one summarizes all of these.

Table 1: Standards documents published in the U.S.

K-16 student standards	
Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21 st Century, 1999	
<i>Standards Collaborative</i>	
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FL Teacher Candidates	
Program Standards for the Preparation of FL Teachers, 2002	
<i>ACTFL — NCATE</i>	
<hr/>	
Beginning FL Teachers	
Standards for Licensing Beginning FL Teachers, 2002	
<i>INTASC</i>	
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Accomplished FL Teachers	
World Languages Other than English Standards, 2001	
<i>NBPTS</i>	

In 1999 a document entitled Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century was published. In this document eleven content standards are clustered within five major goals (five C's) as follows: 1) communication (the ability to communicate in a language other than one's mother tongue). This goal emphasizes that communication is the

most important aim of language teaching. 2) Culture (the ability to gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures). This goal emphasizes that the study of another language is intimately connected to the study of culture. 3) Connections (the ability to connect with other disciplines and acquire information). This goal encourages approaches which integrate discipline content with advanced foreign language teaching. 4) Comparisons (the ability to develop insight into the nature of language and culture). This goal is intended to provide an opportunity for students to analyze and reflect on the nature of languages and cultures. 5) Communities (the overall aim is to enable the student to participate to function in multilingual communities). This goal is designed to develop students' communication skills beyond the walls of the classroom. Technology can be a key component for this goal. Such goals represent a shift from a traditional approach in which individual skills—reading, writing, speaking and listening were emphasized to a blending of skills that integrates language and culture in five areas. At the heart of this framework is communication:

Communication, or communicating in languages other than English, is at the heart of second language study, whether the communication takes place face-to-face, in writing, or across centuries through the reading of literature. Through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language. In fact, students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs. Learning languages provides connections to additional bodies of knowledge that are unavailable to monolingual English speakers. Through comparisons and contrasts with the language studied, students develop greater insight into their own language and culture and realize that multiple ways of

viewing the world exist. Together, these elements enable the student of languages to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world in a variety of contexts and in culturally appropriate ways. (Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, 1999, p. 31).

In this framework eleven standards, which are framed within the five goals mentioned above, describe the language and cultural competencies that students will acquire as a result of their studies. These standards include:

2.2.5.1 Communication

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions. (Sample from Beginning Stage)- The student makes and responds to simple requests (Interpersonal standard).

Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics. (Sample from Developing Stage)- The student uses aural, visual and contextual clues to derive meaning (Interpretive standard).

Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics. (Sample from Expanding Stage)-The student elaborates on present, past and future events (Presentational standard).

2.2.5.2 Culture

Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied. (Sample from Expanding Stage)- The student analyzes relationships of diverse

groups within the target language culture.

Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied. (Sample from the Beginning Stage)-The student identifies objects, images and symbols of the target language culture.

2.2.5.3 Connections

Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language. (Sample from the Developing Stage)-The student relates and uses familiar and new information and skills from mathematics.

Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures. (Sample from the Beginning State)- The student identifies and applies familiar information and skills from social studies.

2.2.5.4 Comparisons

The true intent of this goal is not for teachers to make simple comparisons of languages and cultures. Rather, this goal is intended to provide an opportunity for students to analyze and reflect on the nature of languages and cultures. Teachers should find ways to encourage students to think about the complexity of cultures in order to make their own comparisons.

Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own. (Sample from Expanding Stage)- The student identifies the sound patterns of a variety of dialects

Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of

culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own. (Sample from Beginning Stage)- The student identifies cultural differences and similarities.

2.2.5.5 Communities

This goal is designed to develop students' communication skills beyond the walls of the classroom. Technology can be a key component for this goal.

Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting. (Sample from Developing Stage)- The student connects with the target culture through the use of technology, media and authentic resources.

Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment (sample from Beginning Stage). They also locate resources in the community to research the target culture.

There is also a teacher version of those standards known as Standards for Licensing Beginning FL Teachers, 2002. By developing these standards, the INTASC hopes to promote standards-based reform of the licensing process by working with state education agencies responsible for teacher licensing, professional development, and program approval.

This document has two components:

(a) Core Standards, which define the knowledge, dispositions, and performances deemed essential for all teachers regardless of subject or grade level.

(b) Foreign Language Standards, which define what foreign language teachers should know and be able to do to effectively teach a student a foreign language.

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In the second component, namely, Foreign Language Standards this document provides a conceptual framework for a model of language teacher proficiency with ten areas as follows: teacher knowledge, learner development, diversity of learners, instructional strategies, learning environment, communication, planning for instruction, assessment, professional development, and community:

INTASC Standards for Beginning Foreign Language Teachers

Principle #1: **Content knowledge.** Language teachers are proficient in the language they teach. They understand language as a system, how students learn a language, and how language and culture are linked. They are knowledgeable about the cultures of the people who speak the language. Using this knowledge, they create learning experiences that help students develop language proficiency and build cultural understanding.

Principle #2: **Learner development.** Language teachers understand how students learn and develop and can relate this to their development of language proficiency and cultural understanding. They provide learning experiences that are appropriate to and support learners' development.

Principle #3: **Diversity of learners.** Language teachers understand how learners differ in their knowledge, experiences, abilities, needs, and approaches to language learning, and create instructional opportunities and environments that are appropriate for the learner and that reflect learner diversity.

Principle #4: **Instructional strategies.** Language teachers understand

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and use a variety of instructional strategies to help learners develop language proficiency, build cultural understanding, and foster critical thinking skills.

Principle #5: **Learning environment.** Language teachers create an interactive, engaging, and supportive learning environment that encourages student self-motivation and promotes their language learning and cultural understanding.

Principle #6: **Communication.** Language teachers use effective verbal and non-verbal communication, and multi-media resources, to foster language development and cultural understanding.

Principle #7: **Planning for instruction.** Language teachers plan instruction based on their knowledge of the target language and cultures, learners, standards-based curriculum, and the learning context.

Principle #8: **Assessment.** Language teachers understand and use a variety of assessment strategies to monitor student learning, to inform language and culture instruction, and to report student progress.

Principle #9: **Reflective practice and professional development.** Language teachers are reflective practitioners who continually evaluate the effects of their choices and actions on others and who actively seek out opportunities to grow professionally.

Principle #10: **Community.** Language teachers foster relationships with school colleagues, families, and agencies in the larger community to

support students' learning and well-being.

2.2.6 Hong Kong

According to Angel and Lin (2007) in December 1995, The Hong Kong Education Commission published Report No. 6 (ECR6). The Report made two recommendations on the issue of standards of language ability of teachers:

ECR6 C1: The concept of benchmark qualifications for all teachers should be explored by the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (ACTEQ) with a view to making proposals to the Government as early as possible in 1996.

ECR6 C2: Minimum language proficiency standards should be specified, which all teachers (not just teachers of language subjects) should meet before they obtain their initial professional qualification. The standards should be designed to ensure that new teachers are competent to teach through the chosen medium of instruction.

Subsequent research led to the proposal for a benchmark test of English language ability of language teachers with two components:

1. Formal tests
 - assessed by criterion referenced scales-Writing, Speaking
 - assessed by an analytic marking scheme-Reading, Listening
2. Direct Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) — assessed by lesson observation, using criterion-referenced scales.

This processes resulted in the development of Language Proficiency

Assessment for Teachers (LPAT). LAPT consists of the following parts:

1 Reading

1.1 Part 1 Multiple-choice Cloze

1.2 Part 2 Reading Comprehension

2 Writing

2.1 Part 1 Expository Writing

2.2 Part 2 (A) Detection and correction of errors

2.3 Part 2 (B) Explanation of errors / problems

3 Listening: one or more segments of spoken discourse of 30 minutes in total length. Possible text types include discussions, debates, interviews, and documentaries which discuss matters broadly related to education and language teaching. Task: completing 20 questions of various types, including open-ended short questions, table or diagram completion tasks, multiple-choice items, post-listening written responses at or above sentence level.

4 Speaking

4.1 Part 1 (A) Reading Aloud a Prose Passage

4.2 Part 1 (B) Reading Aloud a Poem

4.3 Part 1 NECESSARY Telling a story / Recounting an experience / Presenting argument

4.4 Part 2 Group Interaction (Discussing errors in a student text)

5 Classroom Language Assessment (CLA)

5.1 Language of Instruction: Eliciting, Responding, Providing Feedback

5.2 Language of Interaction: Presenting, Giving Instructions, Signaling

2.2.7 Australia

In 2005, the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) published a set of Professional Standards for Accomplished Teaching of Languages and Cultures [AFMLTA 2005]. These standards consist of statements about aspects of the knowledge and skills that are considered necessary for an accomplished language teacher. They are clustered around eight dimensions: educational theory and practice, language and culture, language pedagogy, ethics and responsibility, professional relationships, active engagement with wider context, advocacy, and personal characteristics.

Ingram (2007) developed a framework for Languages Other Than English (LOTE), which consists of five areas of competencies each with several elements. The first area of competency in this framework is using and developing professional knowledge and values: Competent teachers are supposed to 1) communicate effectively in LOTE (use of the LOTE), 2) have explicit knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discursal features (knowledge about the LOTE), 3) model and encourage favourable cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors (cross-cultural values), 4) display sensitivity to and some knowledge of a culture(s) associated with the LOTE and understand how the values and world view are expressed through the language (cultural understanding), 5) have some appreciation of the wider educational goals of LOTE

learning (goals of LOTE learning), 6) have some understanding of how students learn at different stages (understanding about learning), 7) have some understanding of how second/foreign languages are learned (understandings about second/foreign language learning), 8) have some understanding of the principles of language teaching methodological approaches and uses language teaching processes appropriate to the learning goals (understandings about language teaching methodologies), 9) operate from an appropriate ethical position and within the framework of law and regulation affecting teachers' work (ethical and legal requirements).

The second area of competency in this model is communicating, interacting and working with students and others: Competent teachers are supposed to 1) communicates effectively with students (communication with Students), 2) recognize and makes some responses to individual needs and differences (responding to individuals), 3) consistently model and encourages positive behavior (managing behaviour), 4) work effectively with teachers, ancillary staff and others in groups and teams (working in teams), and 5) value communication with school or institution support staff, the profession and with the wider community, including the LOTE speaking community (developing professional and community contacts).

The third area of competency in this framework is planning and managing the teaching and learning process. Competent teachers are supposed to 1) plan purposeful learning programs that aim for the outcome of fluent and accurate student communication in the LOTE, cultural awareness and sensitivity, and other learning outcomes in accordance

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with specific curriculum requirements (planning courses and units), 2) choose language content and language teaching approaches appropriate to student development and learning and to the interactive nature of language during planning (planning for specific groups of learners), 3) implement effective language programs which motivate and engage learners (implementing language programs), iv- demonstrate some awareness of the need for flexibility and responsiveness (responding flexibly), and 4) demonstrate some awareness of the need to foster independent and cooperative learning (fostering learning skills).

The fourth area of competency in this model is monitoring and assessing student progress and learning outcomes. Competent teachers are supposed to 1) have some understanding of the educational basis and nature and role of assessment in teaching of LOTE (understandings about assessment), and 2) use effective assessment strategies that take account of the relationships between the objectives of LOTE teaching, learning and assessment (assessing LOTE learning).

Finally, the fifth area of competency in this model is reflecting, evaluating, and planning for continuous improvement. Competent teachers are supposed to 1) critically reflect on their own practice on a regular basis to improve the quality of LOTE teaching and learning programs (reflecting on practice), and 2) value and take some opportunities to develop their own LOTE proficiency, cultural awareness and pedagogic knowledge and to critically consider LOTE initiatives (developing as a professional).

2.2.8 Europe

In 2004 a document entitled *The European Profile for Language Teacher Education — A Frame of Reference* was developed by a team at the University of Southampton supported by the European Commission. The Profile builds on the conclusions of an earlier report, namely, *The Training of Teachers of a Foreign Language: Developments in Europe*, which examined the current provision of language teacher education over 32 countries. The Profile presents a toolkit of 40 items in four areas, namely, structure, skills and strategies, knowledge and understanding, and values. This framework could be included in a teacher education program to equip language teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge, as well as other professional competencies, to enhance their professional development. The following is a list of 27 items in the areas of skills and strategies, knowledge and understanding, and values:

2.2.8.1 Knowledge and understanding of

- • teaching methodologies, and in state-of-the-art classroom techniques and activities;
- • a critical and enquiring approach to teaching and learning;
- • language proficiency;
- • information and communication technology for pedagogical use in the classroom;
- • information and communication technology for personal planning, organization and resource discovery;
- • the application of various assessment procedures and ways of recording learners' progress;
- • the critical evaluation of nationally or regionally adopted

curricula in terms of aims, objectives and outcomes;

- • the theory and practice of internal and external program evaluation;

2.2.8.2 Skills and strategies in

- • ways of adapting teaching approaches to the educational context and individual needs of learners;
- • the critical evaluation, development and practical application of teaching materials and resources;
- • methods of learning to learn;
- • the development of reflective practice and self-evaluation;
- • the development of independent language learning strategies;
- • ways of maintaining and enhancing ongoing personal language competence;
- • the practical application of curricula and syllabuses;
- • peer observation and peer review;
- • developing relationships with educational institutions in appropriate countries;
- • action research;
- • incorporating research into teaching;
- • Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL);
- • the use of the European Language Portfolio for self-evaluation;

2.2.8.3 Values

- • social and cultural values;

- · the diversity of languages and cultures;
- · the importance of teaching and learning about foreign languages and cultures;
- · teaching European citizenship;
- · team-working, collaboration and networking, inside and outside the immediate school context;
- · the importance of life-long learning;

2.2.9 Summary

The competing frameworks studied so far reflect different conceptualizations of language learning. The American, Australian and European frameworks are characterized by the conviction that language and culture are inseparable. As an example the INTASC Foreign Language Standards reflect this conceptualization with respect to culture in this way:

Purposeful communication requires meaningful content. One important content area of language learning is the cultures of the people who speak the language being studied. Because language expresses culture and culture is expressed through language, language and culture are inseparable. As a result of this connection, language teachers use the products, practices and perspectives of culture as one content area for the learning of language elements and the communicative modes. Exploration of the target language culture provides learners with an abundance of topics on which to communicate (INSTAC, 2006, p. 3).

Elsewhere the same document emphasizes culture paradigms (products, practices, and perspectives):

In the teaching of culture, the terms products, practices and perspectives are used. Products consist of concrete cultural elements of a culture

such as literature, foods, tools, dwellings, and clothing, or, such abstract cultural elements as a system of laws, an education system, and religions. Practices refer to the patterns of behavior accepted within a society, such as forms of address, use of personal space, rituals, storytelling, sports, and entertainment. The perspectives of a culture are the worldview, namely the attitudes, values, and ideas that characterize a particular society. From perspectives, a culture's practices and products are understood methods of inquiry as tools for self-assessment, problem-solving, and derived (INSTAC, 2006, p. 6).

INTASC Foreign Language Standards places equally emphatic importance on communication. What's more, Communication in foreign languages is conceptualized in a new way: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational communication. In this framework the traditional four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—are viewed as not separate skills but as integrated skills (Adair-Hauck and Bonnie, 1996).

By contrast, The Hong Kong model focuses linguistic knowledge as envisaged in manner close to “skills and components model of language proficiency. A natural consequence of such models is the tendency for simplicity. That is, there are very few components beyond the linguistic component. In case of the Hong Kong model, the only component other than the linguistic one is classroom language assessment with two subcomponents: language of instruction (Eliciting, Responding, Providing Feedback) and language of interaction (Presenting, Giving Instructions, Signaling). This sort of conceptualization is no stranger to Iranian teacher candidates. Language teacher applicants in Iranian

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private language institutes are usually screened in a two phase process. First, they take a TOEFL test or a similar one. Those getting a good enough score on this test are then invited to demo session, in which they are required to act as a teacher in front of an audience.

3. Research Question

The following research question was formulated for this study.
How do multiple key stakeholders set quality standards for certifying foreign language teachers in Iran?

4. Methodology

The aim of this study is to gauge opinions of Iranian stakeholders with respect to the identification and description of quality standards for language teacher proficiency assessment in Iran key stakeholders in any attempt to formulate teacher assessment standards in Iran could include a diverse spectrum of individuals and organizations like the Ministry of Education, field experts, textbook writers, school principals, school inspectors, community partners, the teachers themselves. The diversity of key stakeholders requires a consensus building approach to developing standards. Literature abounds in examples of failure of imposed standards (Papademetre, 2002). Such top-down and often bureaucratic models often face resistance from the practitioners in the field. He argues that standards carry a pejorative connotation of governmental interference. Heretofore, in most fields, standards have usually been top-down mandated requirements that are assessed by examinations. Therefore, it is imperative to work from the bottom up. A grassroots approach would democratize the process by taking into account teachers' perspectives

in the formulation of such models and try to build consensus among all those who play a role in this respect. Otherwise, there is no guarantee for the continuity in the application of those standards.

4.1 Participants (sample of key stakeholders)

To address the question of achieving consensus in drawing up teacher standards, there is a need to identify and involve key stakeholders such as teachers, teacher educators, students, parents, government officials and all individuals involved/concerned with education in the process. According to Papademetre (2002) in developing professional standards for learning and teaching the most important question to ask initially is the question of ownership. In other words, who prescribes and who ascribes? Thus, the process should involve 1) full negotiation with and ownership of standards by the profession as a collective, 2) reflect self-realization of the teaching profession itself. 53 participants took part in this study including 33 language teachers, 3 educational supervisors, 5 educated parents, 10 college instructors.

4.2 Materials

As was argued in the previous section, it was decided that the use of successive questionnaires, which were modified after each round would help to elicit responses from key stakeholders rather than impose categories on them. The researcher started with an open questionnaire containing the most generic questions allowing the respondents to express rather freely their opinions and experiences. The responses were collected, analyzed, and coded to reveal recurring themes and patterns. Based on the emerging patterns and themes some follow up questions were developed. This process went on for three rounds.

4.3 Procedure

The researcher used Delphi technique in order to come to a sort of consensus among a sample of key stakeholders. Delphi method involves obtaining data and analysis in a cyclic fashion. Thus, a set of pre-determined questions were sent to a panel of stakeholders. Thanks to new forms of information technology such as e-mail, list serves, etc through which members of the profession are increasingly getting in touch with one another. This is the point the researcher started with. He reached out to his friends in the profession and asked them to form a pyramid scheme distribution network via e-mail, through which we distributed our research tools i.e., an open questionnaire. The respondents were asked to respond to these questions and return them to the researchers. Their answers were then coded, refined, analyzed. Follow up questions were sent to the participants for the sake of clarification and refinement. This Delphi study was conducted entirely by e-mail. This process continued until it reached the point of saturation.

5. Results and Discussion

As outlined above the data gathered from the first round open questionnaire was qualitative in nature. The first question asked the respondents "How do you set the goals of language teaching in Iran?" In the first round the responses were general terms such as the ability to read or speak in L2. Therefore, in the second round the respondents were asked to elaborate on their responses by providing details. The following is a list of the emerging themes in order of magnitude of responses (n=53).

The goals of language education at high school level in Iran should be to enable students to:

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- • read materials such as specialist literature, academic journals, reading instructions; (n=45)
- • listen to the extent that they are able to enjoy films, songs or VCD in English (n=43)
- • write materials such as writing instructions, drawing labels, and technical memos; (n=41)
- • can engage in survival conversations; (asking for directions, shopping, etc) (Sample= (n=38)
- • use L2 to assume certain educational and vocational roles and experiences such as attending conferences, lectures, technical or business negotiation in English; (n=35)
- • master a sufficient size of vocabulary to enact vocational and educational roles; (n=35)
- • show an understanding of the text structure such as narrative, description, comparison, etc; (n=20)
- • use “study skills” such as academic writing, listening to lectures, note-taking, making oral presentations, and how information can be found in texts; (n=21)

The results obtained for question one, namely, goals of language teaching show that Iranian stakeholders in ELT are at variance with their colleagues in America, Australia, and Canada when it comes to goals of language teaching and in harmony with those in Hong Kong. That is, Iranian stakeholders still view the aims of language teaching in terms of the mastery of four individual skills i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing while their counterparts abroad set the goals of language teaching as communicative competence, multiculturalism, and even global citizenship. This is evident when one compares the very low expectations

set for conversational skills as opposed to relatively high expectation set for reading and writing. That is, for oral proficiency the expectation does not exceed survival conversations to the extent that the learner is able to carry out such basic functions as asking for directions, shopping, etc while for written proficiency the expectation is for learners to be able to read materials such as specialist literature, academic journals, reading instructions. In general, the participants in this study seem to hold a pre-communicative view that language is acquired by learning the elements of the language system first. This is hardly surprising given the fact that the current textbooks and teaching methodology in Iranian high schools rarely employ activities with communicative values.

The second question asked the respondents to name as many competencies, skills, values, dispositions, etc that you think are essential for a foreign language teacher in Iran. The respondents were asked to feel free to answer in form of words, phrases, sentences, questions, examples or in any other format they thought appropriate. At this stage only 38 responses were received. After the second and at times the third round of clarifications the following themes emerged in four categories: knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values.

1 Knowledge areas

1.1. Knowledge of language

1.1.1 Language teachers have comprehensive knowledge of grammar.
(n=40)

1.1.2 Language teachers have comprehensive knowledge of phonology.
(n=32)

1.1.3 Language teachers have comprehensive knowledge of discourse

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features (coherence, cohesion). (n=28)

1.2. Knowledge of teaching

1.2.1 Language teachers know effective teaching strategies and tactics. (n=28)

1.2.2 Language teachers understand best practices in language education.

1.2.3 Language teachers develop instructional materials; (n=32)

1.2.4 Language teachers have knowledge of recourses; (n=21)

1.3. Knowledge of Learning

1.3.1 Language teachers understand different learning styles.(n=21)

2 Skills

2.1. Language teachers can control and manage the class; (n=32)

2.2. Language teachers have good pronunciation; (n=38);

2.3. Language teachers have good oral proficiency;(n=32)

2.4. Language teachers use a variety of assessment procedures to monitor students' progress. (n=22)

2.5. Language teachers are able to prepare appropriate instructional materials.(n=18)

2.6. Language teachers are skillful in teaching grammar (n=28)

2.7. Language teachers can deal with exceptional learners.(n=14)

2.8. Language teachers provide feedback to students; (n=19)

2.9. Language teachers are able to create procedures, organization, and structure; (n=15)

2. dispositions

a. Language teachers reflect on their own teaching practices; (n=28)

b. Language teachers have a positive attitude toward their career; (n=14)

- c. Language teachers have a positive working relationship with colleges, parents, and others; (n=12)
 - d. Language teachers conduct the class in second language most of the time; (n=37)
3. Values
- a. Language teachers treat all their students fairly; (n=21)
 - b. Language teachers provide help to their students if required; (n=31)
 - c. Language teachers accept constructive criticism; (n=18)

The results obtained for the second question too show that a pre-communicative view prevails among the participants in this study. For example, in the case of knowledge of language no one deemed the knowledge of pragmatics, socio-cultural conventions, L2 culture, and the like as necessary knowledge competencies essential for language teachers. Likewise, In the area of skills, teachers; ability to handle and control the class was of paramount importance to the stakeholders in this study, yet no body was concerned with teachers' ability to conduct language games, or create a lively and fun atmosphere which are very important in communicative classes. In the area of knowledge of learning, no one mentioned such areas of knowledge as knowledge of acquisition and learning theories, or the theoretical knowledge of assessment and evaluation. This perhaps shows that practical rather than theoretical concerns were prevalent among participants in this study.

The third question asked the respondents what proficiency level they deemed necessary for language teachers in Iranian High schools in terms of IELTS band scores. The following table summarizes the results.

Table 2: Proficiency level needed for language teachers

Band Scores	5	6	7	8	9
N	10	20	18	2	3

The fourth question asked the respondents what proficiency exam they thought was most appropriate for this purpose. The following table summarizes the results.

Table 3: The most appropriate proficiency exam for language teachers

Exam	TOFEL	IELTS	TOLIMO	MCHE	Other
N	23	16	7	3	4

The fifth question asked the respondents what college degree was necessary for high school language teachers. The following table summarizes the results.

Table 4: The degree requirement for language teachers

Degree	AS	BA	MA	other
N	1	38	11	3

The last questions in the questionnaire asked the respondents whether they thought formulating a framework for certifying high school language teachers is necessary. The results showed that 21 respondents thought such a framework was necessary for improving the quality of

language teaching in Iranian high schools without any preconditions. Ten participants agreed that such a framework was necessary but they expressed some reservations. 22 respondents thought such a framework was not at all necessary. The relatively high proportion of respondents disagreeing with the necessity of such frameworks is hardly surprising given the fact that most respondents were actually language teachers themselves and thus perhaps felt threatened by the introduction of such requirements.

6. Conclusion

This study attempted to identify the key stakeholders' perceptions of competencies necessary for successful language teaching in Iranian high schools. This was deemed important because it was feared that in absence of any such information any attempt to formulate a framework specifying those competencies would ignore the realities on the ground. The information obtained would be helpful to expert or officials who might feel the need to move toward such frameworks in the future.

In short, the study showed that the stakeholders in this study mainly perceived the goals of language teaching in Iran to be the development of the four skills with more emphasis on reading and the least emphasis on speaking. They also believed that mastering a large enough size of vocabulary and study skills is of importance. This sort of conception is more in line with a CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) rather than BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) (Cummins, 1979). Nonetheless, it is not compatible with general global trend setting such goals and multiculturalism and communicative competence.

A similar trend was observed when the respondents were asked to enumerate competencies they thought necessary for effective language

teaching. Here, too, they enumerated competencies compatible with those goals enumerated earlier. Therefore, while competencies such as comprehensive knowledge of grammar, comprehensive knowledge of phonology, and management skills ranked high, competencies such as pragmatic knowledge, knowledge of culture, the ability to create a pleasing atmosphere in the class and the likes were absent in their lists of required competencies.

In general, a large proportion of the participants in the study were reluctant to embrace the requirement that language teachers need to obtain special certificates based on framework of competencies needed for effective language teaching.

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