



A Review of Assessment System in EFL Education in Iran

Negin Naderi^{ID}

Department of English Language Teaching, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran

*Corresponding author: Ngin.ndr76@gmail.com

Review Article

Received:
10 November 2025

Revised:
01 December 2025

Accepted:
01 December 2025

Published in Issue:
31 December 2025

©2025 the Author(s). Published by the OICC Press under the terms of the © CC BY 4.0, Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract

The problems of Iranian assessment system at pre-university level can be traced in both theoretical bases and the practical levels. This study aimed at offering a critical review of Iranian assessment/testing system at the pre-university level based on post-structural theories of Jean François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. To this end, first, an introduction to the paper was presented followed by explanation of education in modernism and post-modernism. Then, a section was provided called postmodernism and Iranian pre-university assessment/testing system. Next, a section was devoted to beyond post-testism: towards post-post-test era. Finally, probable scenarios for Iranian pre-university assessment/testing system were presented.

Keywords: Assessment system of Iran; Postmodernism; Post-structuralism

Cite this article: Naderi, N. (2025). A Review of Assessment System in EFL Education in Iran, *Journal of New Trends in English Language Learning*, 4(4), Article 27. <http://doi.org/10.57647/JNTELL.2025.0404.27>

1. Introduction

Seeking more effective ways of teaching a second/foreign language is not a new phenomenon and emergence of post-method era or so-called death of method can be attributed partly to this issue. Parallel with teaching, assessment, and testing issues have always been of great importance in any educational system. Besides, interrelationship between teaching and assessment/testing is not deniable and consequently fluctuations in the former somehow have led to changes in the latter at both theoretical and practical levels. However, changes in these two realms have not been at the same pace. Existence of different teaching methods through language teaching history supports this saying. However, with all come and go of different methods, what is almost common regarding the notions of assessment/testing in Iranian education system is some sort of prescription in the field. The problems of Iranian assessment system at pre-university level can be traced

in both theoretical bases and the practical levels. In other words, the theoretical deficiencies and lack of educational facilities have subjected the Iranian educational and assessment/testing system to widespread criticisms. The post-modernistic theories can both challenge and rehabilitate the Iranian educational and assessment/testing system. This paper is aimed at offering a critical review of Iranian assessment/testing system at the pre-university level based on post-structural theories of Jean François Lyotard (1984), Jacques Derrida (1987) and Michel Foucault (1972).

1.1. Education in Modernism and Post-modernism

Modern system of education is characterized by its universality of knowledge, values and human nature. By universality the authority of some fixed rational principles is meant that all people have in common. Modern education is against any sort of irrationality or

illogicality. These logical, rational and systematized principles and plans are needed to enable the students to be civilized, educated and good citizens who respect humanitarian values and try to develop their abilities in order to live in a liberal society. Therefore, love of knowledge, solving the problems of the society and the environment, having a critical thinking as well as respecting human values like freedom and others' rights are the cornerstones of modernism. Here learning is entangled with the discipline. In other words, disciplines are required to achieve ultimate goal of any modern system. Although these disciplines and modern principles and values in education can help the third world countries to compensate for their underdevelopments, the modern characteristics of the educational systems are severely criticized by the post-modernist.

Post-modern thinking has its roots in theories and ideas of such French philosophers as [Jean François Lyotard \(1984\)](#), [Jacques Derrida \(1987\)](#), [Michel Foucault \(1972\)](#), [Gilles Deleuze](#), [Julia Kristeva](#), etc. According to the post-modern theories truth and knowledge is constructed in reality and there is no ultimate truth or objective knowledge ([Webster & Metrova, 2007](#)). The post-modern view of knowledge rejects that there are universal principles and values that all human being all over the world should follow them. In post-modernism knowledge is personal, not impersonal. According to post-structuralist philosophers' theories, education and assessment systems must be fundamentally transformed, although almost all developed and developing countries resist against any change. In contrary, radical ideas have influenced western education and assessment system some clear manifestations of which are as follows:

Students' wants have been into account and alternative forms of assessment such as dynamic assessment increasingly used.

Disciplinary systems have been weakened and obligation in education minimized.

Relativism and lack of quick judgments have become more important than before and rational and humanistic principles less emphasized.

Rights, wants and conditions of subcultures and minorities have been respected more than ever.

[Lyotard \(1984\)](#) believes that the grand narrative has come to an end and now we live in micro narrative era. The end of the grand narrative means discrediting western great discourses which are the heirs of enlightenment. Great thinking systems which were formed based on universal humanistic and rationalistic teachings generated some sort of totality wherein the others' voices and views are suppressed. Given that liberty is one of the main mottos of enlightenment, in

effect it can be seen that the enlightenment and rational discourse suppresses other voices. To [Lyotard \(1984\)](#), each community is intertwined with various discourses and structures having their own dominating mechanisms. We can't define a set of general and universal values and oblige all communities and individuals to comply with it because it is against various generations of human rights specifically fifth generation. Tightly relevant with this discussion is [Lyotard's \(1984\)](#) view about knowledge. He distinguishes between modern and post-modern status of the knowledge. In the modern discourse, the knowledge is based on the grand narratives and general and necessary laws, while in the post-modern state we deal with countless micro narratives which consider differences, varieties, different cultures and perspectives as important. Referring to Wittgenstein's language games, [Lyotard \(1984\)](#) shows that each knowledge and cognition are language games which are not superior over the other language games (other types of cognition), rather they are of their own significance and value. This view is also influenced by [Nietzsche's](#) perspectivism wherein much emphasis is put on a look towards the world from various perspectives and lack of superiority of one perspective over the other one. Thus, in [Lyotard's \(1984\)](#) view, a given form of knowledge can't be selected as benchmark knowledge and imposed on all the individuals and societies.

We may think of [Lyotard's \(1984\)](#) theories as individualistic because differences and diversity of thoughts and views are of much importance in them. But this point has also been taken into account in modern education. A democratic look on the education and taking various talents into account has always been one of the main educational concerns. [Lyotard's \(1984\)](#) views even go beyond this level in the sense that he doesn't just address individual differences. Rather, [Lyotard's \(1984\)](#) concern is a fundamental change in the cognition and knowledge systems which leads to revising whole education systems and developing various local, cultural, gender, ethnic methods dominating the modern education, so that students will be exposed to various educational methods.

Such views as [Lyotard's \(1984\)](#) may be very important for the third world countries in that these countries can benefit from both global and local methods and approaches in educational planning. Accordingly, assessment system must also be subject to fundamental changes. Students' learning should not be evaluated just based on a predetermined benchmark, rather mechanisms should be developed to evaluate the students' behaviors and learning based on a post-modernistic attitude towards the cognition and knowledge.

Jacques Derrida (1978) is one of the other philosophers who, similar to Lyotard (1984), has criticized modern theoretical fundamentals seriously. Derrida (1978) believes that each structure, theory or thought, including modern systems of education, is built on a binary opposition which is accepted easily and without contemplation. Some of these oppositions are major/minor, rational/irrational, true/false, unity/multiplicity, truth/lie, male/female, high/low, order/disorder, etc. According to Derrida (1978), basically human can't think out of these binary oppositions. Every saying, theory, plan, method or approach is formed based on these oppositions. Here the important point is that always it is the case that one side is superior over the other one: order over disorder, rational and logical over illogical and irrational, male over female, original over copy or simulacrum, etc. However, a fundamental look on the problem reveals that preferring one of the opposite sides is usually due to specific cultural situations, and one of the opposites has become superior over the other merely by force. According to Derrida (1978), reflecting philosophically on these opposites we see that the original superiority of one of the opposites over the other one is not based on a definite reason or logic. Rather, when a rationalistic structure or principle, including educational structures, appears for the first time out of a given structural situation some binary oppositions and principles are coined by force to preserve the order, however, these principles which are formed in specific conditions, cannot be valid and true. The new order and discipline can be replaced by some other new orders and values in some other times with some other individuals. Derrida (1987) has always insisted that the "other" must have a voice. Thus, in education we should always pay attention to the "others" or all other points of views which may be suppressed silently in our system of education.

This view is also reminiscent of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (2013). In this book, Nietzsche questions good/evil binary opposites and aims to arrive at a stage in which a new logic is dominant which goes beyond binary opposites of good/evil. In this way, Derrida (1987) questions all educational systems formed based on binary opposites and believes that our duty is to reveal the existing conflicts and gaps inherent in educational structures so that the other's voice isn't suppressed. He particularly comments on the universities' educational system and believes that we must think of future university or to-come university. The future university isn't a utopia or a given university, rather it is a university and educational system which is never formed in practice but we can criticize the current educational system referring to it. Adopting such an outlook towards teaching and testing requires much care

and obsession with the point that ultimate judgment or decisions must not be made and no point of view must be preferred over the other views. Students and teachers should learn that always there are some other different things which we don't know or don't think about it, but can be as important as those views we know and are aware of. Also, judgment about true/false should be delayed as much as possible.

Derrida's (1987) views can be applied to the realm of teaching, testing and assessment in two ways: firstly, they can be taught to the students practically without using his argument and terminology. Secondly, benefitting from his views about the binary opposites, the students' performance must not be judged just based on common criteria, rather we must analyze their behaviors and responses more than before. Besides, before judging them based on our presupposition we should try to trace new voices and unknown meaning inherent in their behaviors and sayings.

Michel Foucault (1972) is also among famous post-structuralist thinkers whose views and concerns are similar to Derrida (1987) and Lyotard's. Foucault (1966) also discusses about totality of social institutions and structures but in a different way. He has benefited from innovative and new research methods through his intellectual life and terms such as archeology, genealogy and discourse analysis have been interconnected with his name. Besides, he has theorized about power and believed that contrary to our primary conceptions, power relation does not simply occur in a mutual relation. Instead, there is a network of power relations that determines the true and false in modern societies. In addition, he reveals a complex relationship between knowledge, power and truth. Similar to Derrida (1987), his theories are radical and fundamental and require a basic transformation in human individual and collective life. In his works *The Order of Things* (1966) and *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault presents innovative and expensive analyses on knowledge production in intellectual history. Investigating such problems which have been less taken into account as the status of the ill and insane or categorization and classification method in various sciences, he questions taken-for-granted beliefs in various natural sciences and humanities.

According to him, all over the intellectual history various discourses have been formed based on various methods of classification and existing power relations which determine true and false in the domain of morality and knowledge. By discourse he means a set of elements and interrelated relations which form our conception and beliefs in a given historical period or social state. He believes that knowledge and cognition are tools to strive, maintain life and show to what extent we have been

successful in recognition of and dominance over our surrounding. Applying Foucault's (1972) views in education in general and in testing and assessment in particular means the need for a fundamental change in the basics of education system.

1.2. Postmodernism and Iranian Pre-university Assessment/testing System

Now taking these views into account in education and consequently in assessment and testing what changes will be made in our Iranian approach towards these issues? Realistically speaking, perhaps discussing about post-modernist theories in Iranian educational system, where the main constructive aspects of post-modernistic and even modernistic education haven't been established yet, doesn't make sense, however the point is not that much straightforward and investigating post-modernistic theories at least can be promising in avoiding repetition of many past mistakes. Overview of Iranian educational/ assessment system based on post-structuralist theories shows that this testing and assessment system is subject to serious criticisms. Generally, assessment system deficits go back to theoretical fundamentals dominating Iranian Education which is built on the grand narrative, binary opposition and inattention to the network of power relations.

In general, the pre-university assessment system in Iran is traditional. The main part of the assessment is relied upon the final exams. The final exams are usually consisted of some blank pages by which all of materials are tested, invoking students to write whatever answer they know. There are also some other oral and written exams during the semester, however, the final exams constitute the main part in this assessment/testing system. Moreover, the teachers' presuppositions and misunderstandings of the ends of the education do not let the current testing system go well.

Apparently, Iranian educational system has borrowed from western countries and some theoretical bases of the Iranian education seem to be modern, it hasn't been successful in achieving its objectives (Risdiyanto et al., 2025). Most of the classrooms are still held in a traditional teacher-based way. Students should sit quiet on the benches and listen to the teacher. Students are hardly involved in an active context of learning. Although lack of basic necessary facilities for teaching/assessment and crowded classrooms has a hand in this play, in a wider spectrum the problems have a root in the educational system that prescribes such assessment/testing system. Education system is not concerned with the development of the students' critical thinking. The main goal in such systems is accumulation of knowledge not generation of knowledge (Sabzevari et

al., 2022). Students are not required to deploy their knowledge in actual situations or take some critical positions regarding what they have learned. In such educational systems, automatically assessment system sticks to traditional value-free principles devoid of any sign of humanistic individualistic values and agendas.

In particular, pre-university courses are covered during a six-month term consisted of two three-month periods. At the end of the first period a separate exam is taken from each course the grades of which are considered as the summative grade. Average grade of oral and written exams taken during this period is taken as formative grade, taking class activity into account. The final grade is calculated by multiplying the summative grade by two and formative grade by one. The same procedure is followed at the end of the second three-month period except that here to calculate the final grades, summative grades are multiplied by six and for four courses (two general and two specific) the exams are administered in a centralized form at the country level.

In this system there is no true right for the students to protest the results of exams. The term 'true' is used here intentionally to say that even if there exists the protest right, it is no more than a formal opportunity in the form of providing the students with the opportunity to see their exam paper (in the first semester) and a formal procedure namely protest registration right in a fixed period (in the second semester); mostly there occurs no change in the results in both cases.

Applying post-modern views can help Iranian educational system support such approaches as critical thinking and being sensitive to other points of view, put the teacher-based method of teaching aside and involve students, as the suppressed part of the previous system, in class activities. In assessment domain this means putting such elements as single test sessions, blank answer sheets waiting for students' answers, omnipotent teachers and ignorant students, silent test sessions, watchful observers of test session, single scores as absolute determinants of the students' future, powerful teachers and authorities and powerless students, lack of rights to protest test results, unquestioning acceptance of the results and traditional testing aside. However, it is worth mentioning that in reality applying post-modernist ideas to such a system like Iranian education/assessment system is very difficult, if not impossible. Because at least it requires teaching to the students the point that every institution including where they are studying is suppressive and they must question it.

However, in a more moderate sense it can be said that this requires breaking teacher's authority in the class because power relations dominating the class emerges in the form of a network than in a two-way form between

the teacher and student. Thus, students should be provided with more opportunity for self-expression. In the realm of testing, this means that a single score in a single testing situation shouldn't be of a value load and cause belittling or suppress those getting a low score. A set of educational facilities and assessment systems should be designed so that weak students also become empowered and can practice and self-express in their own discourse. Moreover, a particular importance should be put on the students with a critical spirit. This group should experience alternative forms of knowledge and education system hasn't the right to exert a specific kind of educational method on them and thereby oblige them to think of the truth in the same as education system does.

1.3. Beyond Post-testism: Towards Post-post-test Era

Philosophically speaking, it seems that parallel with the emergence of post-post-methodism, there is a would-be now-in-the-seed post-post-test era under way, as offspring of test and post-test era, where coexistence between test and posttest era will be more peaceful in the form of ties of convenience in response to new needs of a new generation of learners, in line with the fifth generation of human rights.

However, this new era brings forth new colorful test-non tests with a strange kind of unity which is simultaneously unity and discord, old and new, flexible and fixed, bounded and free. This still in-the-seed age is the result of so many factors the least of which is growing enlightenment of such involved beings in the field as teachers, learners and contexts! The would-be enlightened teachers, in response to the more enlightened learners who are lovers of knowing, need to break with the present era and stick with it at the same time.

Obviously the now-in-the-seed learners do not welcome the prescriptive presentation of the rules and structures, forms and functions, or various models of such and such which the books are replete with.

They seek a deep understanding in their foggy bright minds full of new post-post-modernistic whats, whys, hows, etc. However, more obvious than this is the point, if not fact, that these would-be critical beings do not favor a regular legitimate vagueness in the name of post-method/post-test pedagogy. They want to be tied with somewhere and nowhere simultaneously. They seek irregular regularity and regular irregularity and that's why I called it a peaceful coexistence between method/test and post-method/post-test era through simultaneous breaking and sticking with the two.

If by analogy we take learning in general and language learning in particular as a game, the would-be

learner knows rules and tactics of the game well, he/she is well familiar with loss and gain, knows the judge well, and is a clever mind-reader.

What the post-post-method/post-post-test era calls for from teachers is a new, old, fixed, flexible, demanding and simple scene. Parallel with economics, there are numbers of game theories in language pedagogy which are here to stay and what this scenario necessitates is a comprehensive field theory to cope with the challenges confronted by post-post-modernistic beings. Of course, by field we mean nothing but "field of game".

In the still-in-seed era, there is a strong need for mutation, that is, transformation of the old methods/tests and creation of new ones. Certainly, the new methods/tests cannot be created out of nothing. They should be built upon something and that something is nothing but the old methods/tests. And that's why I would like to call this under way era "offspring" of ties of convenience of test and post-test era.

Regarding Iranian pre-university assessment/testing system, unfortunately even post-test era has not reached our country, let alone post-post-test era. Here, there is little or no room for teachers and learners' creativity, exchange of ideas, insight formation and identity formation in Iranian educational/assessment system. Everything is "out there" and the mere responsibility of teachers is to transmit this to the learners and the very duty of learners is receiving the knowledge, memorizing it and reproducing it on the harsh papers in single sessions or so-called exam/test sessions. Both teachers and learners are deprived of liberty of being, and enjoyment of becoming.

As mentioned, in the mainstream educational setting of Iran, teacher comes to class with the books prepared by curriculum designers and all his/her own and the learners' creativity remains behind the doors. A series of pre-determined materials is covered during a pre-determined period. Then at the end of semester a formal exam is administered in the name of final exam.

In the best of all possible worlds, class activities and grades of formative exams are taken into account when calculating final grade. Technology and innovation are the missing links of Iranian classrooms. The classrooms are still teacher-fronted. Obviously, in such a closed system, creation of new creatures is far from mind, if not impossible.

I wish [Derrida \(1987\)](#) came here and introduced his concept of dissemination to this realm of lost productivity. All in all, the main aim of education namely changes, not seeking knowledge, is not assumed in Iran, and the system is characterized by submission to the present condition, and still our favorite paper and pencil exam is here to sta.

1.4. Probable scenarios for Iranian pre-university assessment/testing system

In conclusion, given the status quo of Iranian pre-university assessment/testing system, the following probable scenarios are predicted:

The current assessment is here to stay without any change and flexibility in its principles and premises, its resistance against any change continues and old principles and premises are followed as before.

The current assessment system remains but its resistance against postmodernist views is reduced and its reductionist attitude is subjected to a major twist towards relativity, openness and subjectivity.

The current assessment system emerges in a different form, although its fundamentals remain untouched, for such purposes as keeping face.

The most improbable scenario is one in which the current assessment system transcends both test and post-test era by integrating their efficient practical premises.

This new emergent system is bound neither to testism nor post-testism and emerges in the form of a kaleidoscope accommodating a new generation of learners or lovers of knowledge who don't lend themselves to any restrictive educational and assessment procedure. All in all, the bottom line is that according to the post-modernistic principles, assessment and testing system in Iranian education system should be fundamentally transformed so that it reflects truth, knowledge, true and false differently and more opportunity is provided for the ignored and suppressed views to self-express (Fatehi Rad & Atashdast, 2023; Rayani & Fatehi Rad, 2023).

Authors Contributions

All the authors have participated sufficiently in the intellectual content, conception, and design of this work or the analysis and interpretation of the data (when applicable), as well as the writing of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

References

- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Baas, A. University of Chicago Press.
- Fatehi Rad, N., & Atashdast, M. (2023). Investigating the effect of input-based and output-based instruction through divergent and convergent tasks on Iranian EFL learners' learning English idioms. *Journal of English Language and literature Teaching*, 2(1), 15-26.
- Foucault, M. (1966). *Order of Things*. http://mysite.pratt.edu/~morourke/common/CriticalParadigms/Foucault_OrderThings_Ch1.2.pdf
- Foucault, M. (1972). *Archeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. Translated by Smith, Sh. A.M. Pentagon Books.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *Postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Translated by Bennington, G., & Massumi, B. University of Minnesota Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (2013). *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Zimmern, H. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4363/4363-h/4363-h.html>
- Rayani, E., & Fatehi Rad, N. (2023). A qualitative assessment of supervisors' views towards examiners' perceptions: Fair justice or not? *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 11(4), 161-168.
- Risdianto, E., Shirzadi, S., Fatehi Rad, N., Barjesteh, H., & Isaee, H. (2025). Advancing English language education through artificial intelligence: A review of benefits and challenges. *Journal of New Trends in English Language Learning (JNTELL)*, 4(Special Issue). <https://doi.org/10.57647/JNTELL.2025.si-01>
- Sabzevari, M., Fatehi Rad, N., & Tajaddini, M. (2022). Implementation of reciprocal scaffolding treatment in virtual learning context: Iranian EFL learners' listening and speaking skills: Implementation of reciprocal scaffolding treatment in virtual learning context. *Journal of New Trends in English Language Learning (JNTELL)*, 1(2), 87-97. <https://doi.org/10.30495/jntell.2022.698800>
- Webster, L., & Metrova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching*. Routledge.