

English Language Instructors' Perceptions and Practices in Teaching to the Test at PYU, PSAU in the KSA

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Abstract—The study aimed at exploring the perspectives of English instructors on teaching English syllabuses and testing procedures, particularly focusing on design, validity, washback, and their contribution to test creation. Data were collected via a questionnaire from 40 instructors at Sattam bin Abdulaziz Preparatory Year Program during the academic year 2023-2024. The findings underscored instructors' profound understanding of teaching methodology and active engagement in syllabus development, evident in their involvement in language testing processes. Instructors also exhibited decision-making independence regarding their tests. These insights demonstrated the collaborative nature of language test-taking, which empowered educators to contribute meaningfully to assessment practices, thereby creating an environment that fostered learning for language learners.

Index Terms—perceptions, practices language teaching, testing, syllabus, participation

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language instruction, learning, and the assessment process has been previously discussed by Cholis and Rizqi (2018, p. 47) who argue that testing is an essential means of assessing language teaching and acquisition. The pivotal role of testing in measuring learners' progress cannot be overstated in the context of language teaching and learning.

According to Bachman (1990, p. 2), assessment of language skills is rarely viewed in isolation, but rather as part of a broader pedagogical field.

Hakim (2015, p. 42) emphasizes the critical importance of comprehensive understanding, clear perception, and precise utilization of assessment methodologies in ensuring the success of language programs.

However, a notable observation is the deficiency observed among many English language instructors in effectively employing pedagogical techniques, understanding syllabus construction, comprehending testing procedures, and actively engaging in the test design process. Addressing the perceptions and practices of English language instructors regarding teaching to the test at the Preparatory Year Unit (PYU), Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University (PSAU) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) assumes paramount significance. The assessment constitutes a fundamental pillar of education, serving as a conduit for vital information regarding learners' progression, enabling instructors to appraise the efficacy of their teaching methodologies, and fostering the active involvement of English language instructors in the assessment continuum within the fields of teaching, learning, and testing.

Against this background, the present study explores instructors' cognizance of teaching English, comprehension of English syllabuses, familiarity with testing protocols, and their participatory role in test development processes. By shedding light on these dimensions, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics underlying language instruction and assessment practices, thereby informing pedagogical approaches to enhance the efficacy and inclusivity of language education initiatives.

Veloo et al. (2016, p. 1220) assert the importance of the assessment component in education.

In this process, language teaching and learning, testing exemplify crucial roles in measuring learners' progress.

Ali et al. (2019, p. 254) state that in language teaching and learning settings, and testing play fundamental roles in measuring language learners' development in a classroom language.

According to Bachman (1990, p. 2), Language testing almost never takes place in isolation. The development of language testing incorporates language teaching areas.

Hakim (2015, p. 42) has argued that profound comprehension, clear perception and precise usage of assessment methods play an integral role in the language program's success.

Unfortunately, it is noticed that many English language instructors lack applying suitable techniques in teaching, awareness of syllabus building, testing procedures, and even participating in the test design process.

It is important to address English language instructors' perceptions and practices on teaching to the test at PYU, PSAU in the K.S.A.

Undoubtedly, assessment in education is a vital component. Therefore, providing information about learners' learning progress, helping instructors to evaluate their teaching methods, and the participation of English language instructors in assessment are essential in teaching, learning and testing contexts.

The present paper explores instructors' awareness of teaching English, English syllabuses, testing procedures, and their participation in making tests.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Literature Review

Stern (1983, p. 21) offers a comprehensive definition of language teaching that frames it as a set of deliberate actions intended to facilitate language learning.

Stern (1983, p. 501) further elaborates on the teacher's multifaceted role as a curriculum developer, emphasizing the importance of meticulous planning, thoughtful material selection, and strategic organization of classroom activities to achieve predefined educational objectives.

Eisner and Vallance (1974, p. 5) identify five distinct orientations in curriculum theory, each of which captures a different perspective on the nature and purpose of curriculum design. A diverse array of conceptual frameworks, including cognitive process enhancements, curriculum development as a technology, self-actualizations, social reconstruction relevance, and academic rationalisms, are used by these orientations to provide faculty with a wide range of perspectives to inform their curriculum development efforts.

Bloom (1957, p. 25) identifies four fundamental questions that constitute curriculum development and instructional design. The purpose of these questions is to assist educators in defining educational objectives, selecting appropriate learning experiences, arranging instructional materials effectively, and evaluating the effectiveness of learning experiences. This ensures that curriculum planning and implementation are aligned and coherent.

According to Nunan (1988, p. 5), syllabus design considerations are distinguished, pointing out the crucial distinction between content selection and grading, both of which are part of syllabus development, and the selection of learning tasks and activities, which are part of the methodology. This differentiation underscores the importance of carefully aligning instructional content with pedagogical approaches to optimize learning outcomes.

Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 25) caution against overreliance on formal tests, advocating for a comprehensive understanding of learners' abilities to inform assessment practices and promote effective pedagogy.

Madsen (1983, p. 9) emphasizes the role of achievement tests in measuring progress gains, underscoring their utility in assessing student learning outcomes and informing instructional decision-making.

Hughes (1989, p. 1) asserts, many language tests are poorly designed, and many have a negative impact on teaching and learning. Additionally, he argues that too often they fail to precisely measure, in terms of content or techniques, whatever it is they are intended to measure. This phenomenon, known as washback, can have either harmful or beneficial effects. Such tests, according to Madsen (1983, p. 4), can help students develop a positive attitude towards their classes and help them learn the language more effectively.

Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 28) stress the importance of test design expertise in ensuring the validity and reliability of language assessments, emphasizing the need for tests to be designed by qualified instructors or test design specialists. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of performance-based assessments in providing a holistic evaluation of language proficiency, particularly in the speaking and writing domains (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 29).

Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 3) mention that validity is a fundamental concept in testing and assessment.

Hughes (1989, p. 22) states that testing and assessment validity, in a traditional form, has traditionally been understood to mean finding out if a test exactly measures what it is proposed to measure. Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 24) regard validity as the major aspect of assessing the process inside the classroom and link this to validity theory. They add that taking the principles from large-scale assessments and applying these directly to what is going on inside the classroom is not always easy. This is often why instructors are 'wary' of language testing and wonder why it is related to their day-to-day work.

Bachman (1990, p. 25) regards validity as a quality of test use and interpretation while reliability as a quality of the test scores.

According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 4), validity is classified as criterion-oriented; the tester is concerned with the relationship between a specific test and a criterion to which it wishes to make forecasts. Content validity is defined by Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 4) as any attempt to show that the content of the test is a representative sample from the domain that is to be tested. Hughes (1989, p. 26) defined content validity as a representative sample of language skills, structures, etc., which is meant to be concerned. Fulcher and Davidson (2007, p. 4) mention that construct validity is

defined in such a way that it can have relationships with other constructs that are different, as stated by Hughes (1989, p. 26); i.e., construct validity can demonstrate that it measures just the ability that it is supposed to measure.

Bachman and Palmer (1996, p. 7) believe that being competent in language testing would help readers avoid misconceptions such as thinking that for any situation there is only one test, misunderstanding the nature and progress of language testing, having paradoxical expectations about what language tests can do and what they should do, and placing blind faith in measurement technology.

B. Previous Studies

Eight previous studies were reviewed in relevancy to field of study.

Hakim (2015) revealed that all participants knew how to use assessment tools. Additionally, the study found that instructors' perceptions of assessment tools were influenced by their teaching experience. Notably, the research uncovered deficiencies in the teaching methods of instructors who demonstrated clear knowledge of assessment techniques.

Veloo et al. (2016) found that teachers' school-based assessment (SBA) practices were at an average level. The most significant difference between the assessment practices of instructors who had participated in SBA courses and those who had not showed that SBA courses did indeed affect the effectiveness of SBA implementation.

Dammak (2017) demonstrated that teachers' participation in assessment, curriculum and professional development activities was both inclusive and sporadic.

Cholis and Rizqi (2028) revealed that Seleksi Bersama Masuk Perguruan Tinggi Negeri (SBMPTN), as a high-stakes test, had a positive impact on Senior High School English instructors' attitudes and teaching approaches.

Ragchaa (2019) demonstrated that typical research into more efficient teaching methods tended to restrict freedom in lesson design, reduce pedagogical content, and focus more on educational criteria. A correlation analysis revealed a significant association between English language teachers' assessment perspectives and the content of assessments designed by teachers in their classes. Based on the results, it can be concluded that teachers prioritized the assessment content they designed for progress monitoring and final testing purposes. They preferred to prepare students for these assessments by having them practice test items identical to those on school achievement tests throughout classes.

Tajeddin et al. (2022) disclosed that the majority reported being well-educated in classroom-based language assessment and supported the allocation of more space to classroom-based language assessment in teacher education courses. The results suggested that the recently improved scale could serve as a valid and reliable tool to assess language teachers' classroom-based assessment literacy.

Jayathissa (2023) revealed that the main method of testing in ESL classrooms had been test papers, assessing only reading and writing skills. Consequently, speaking and listening skills were not evaluated in the ESL classroom. As a result of this testing method, teachers adopted a passive stance towards existing ESL testing methods. Thus, teachers emphasized reviewing current testing methods. Most teachers lacked prior knowledge and practice in testing to create valid and reliable test items. Therefore, their testing methods should be modified to create a more conducive learning environment for students while emphasizing the importance of language learning.

Ali et al. (2019) found that in the Saudi EFL setting, EFL instructors lacked a voice in the language assessment process, and there was a serious shortage of professional development training to raise EFL instructors' awareness of language tests and develop their assessment literacy.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study aimed at exploring the role of English language instructors' perceptions and practices in teaching towards the preparation of learners' tests at PYU, PSAU in the K.S.A. It examined instructors' perceptions of English teaching, English syllabuses, and testing procedures, as well as their involvement in test development. Accordingly, the findings of this study will be valuable to those who develop curriculums and syllabi, as well as those who conduct language tests, for English language courses in Saudi Arabia as well as in other countries. The study will also be of use to all language instructors.

Furthermore, the study is limited to instructors of English at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University in the Preparatory Year Unit program during the 2023/2024 academic year. A quantitative and descriptive research method was used with data collected through a questionnaire where 40 instructors responded to the questionnaire statements. Additionally, the research method was descriptive and analytical, where 27 items were selected for the questionnaire, which was modified by experts in the field of applied linguistics.

A. Tools & Procedures

The questionnaire, which was composed of 27 statements, was distributed to 40 English language instructors in the second semester of the Preparatory Year Unit program. It is structured to be answered by ticking "Agree", "Strongly agree", "Undecided", "Disagree" or "Strongly disagree". The questionnaires were then analyzed by SPSS. Table 1, and table 2 represent the validity and reliability of the data from the questionnaire.

B. Validity

TABLE 1

No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
27	0.89

C. Reliability

TABLE 2

No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
27	0.80

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

A. Axis 1

TABLE 3
ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS' AWARENESS OF TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unidentified	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (x)	Standard deviation
1. Well-planned teaching is essential to students' learning.	26 (65.0%)	14 (35.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.65	0.48
2. Teaching focuses on the objectives of the lessons.	20 (50.0%)	16 (40.0%)	1 (2.5%)	3 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)	4.33	0.86
3. The objectives of the lessons should be separated into smaller behavioral objectives to be taught.	11 (27.5%)	24 (60.0%)	4 (10.0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	4.12	0.69
4. The objectives of teaching lessons are to be attainable.	15 (37.5%)	23 (57.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	4.30	0.65
5. The current teaching strategies used are effective.	10 (25.0%)	25 (62.5)	5 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.12	0.61
6. The students can understand the lessons because the English instructors use different suitable teaching strategies.	14 (35.0%)	21 (52.5%)	5 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.22	0.66
Total	96 (40.0%)	123 (51.2%)	16 (6.7%)	5 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)		

As indicated in axis 1, 40 (100.0%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that well-planned teaching is essential to students' learning and is crucial to learning the English language, with an overall mean of 4.65, indicating mostly positive responses. Furthermore, as stated in statement 2, teaching is focused on achieving the objectives of the lessons and has a very positive response with 90.0% indicating agreement or strong agreement, with an average score of 4.33. The results from statement 3 indicate that 87.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with a mean score of 4.12. As shown by statement 4, 87.5% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the objectives of teaching lessons are achievable with a reasonable mean score of 4.33. In relation to statement 5, the current teaching strategies used are effective, with 87.5% and a positive mean of 4.12, indicating a strong influence on the strategies used. In statement 6, the mean is 4.22 with a percentage of 87.5%, which indicates that the students are able to comprehend the lessons because the English instructors use a variety of instructional methods. Overall, 91.2% of participants reported high levels of awareness of teaching methodology among English Language instructors. This can be seen in Figure 1 below. It coincided with Ragchaa's (2019) findings that what is actually done inside the classroom in terms of teaching methodology is related to the assessment of students.

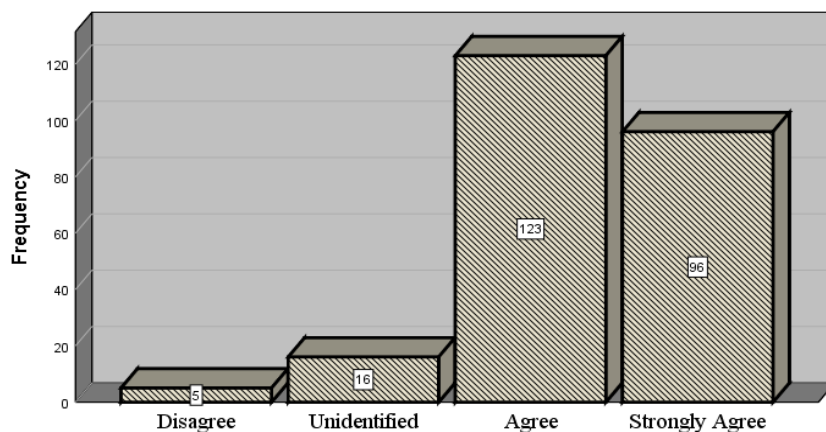


Figure 1. English Language Instructors' Awareness of Teaching Methodology

B. Axis 2

TABLE 4
ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS' AWARENESS OF SYLLABUSES BUILDING

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unidentified	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (x)	Standard deviation
7. The objective of teaching English is to match the prescribed content of the syllabus.	7 (17.5%)	31 (77.5%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.13	0.46
8. The English syllabus's contents are sequenced from easy to difficult.	6 (15.0%)	29 (72.5%)	3 (7.5%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.98	0.66
9. Learners are able to obtain a lot of knowledge from the lesson contents.	7 (17.5%)	30 (75.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	4.10	0.57
10. Learners are able to interact with the lesson contents.	3 (7.5%)	31 (77.5%)	5 (12.5%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3.90	0.55
Total	23 (14.4%)	121 (75.6%)	12 (7.5%)	4 (2.5%)	0		

According to statement 7, in axis 2, 38 (95.0%) responses out of 40 responses agree or strongly agree that the objectives of teaching English match the prescribed content of the syllabus and are important in learning the English language, with an overall mean of 4.13 indicating mostly positive responses. Additionally, as stated in statement 8, the English syllabus contents are organized from easy to difficult and are highly rated, with 87.5% indicating agreement or strong agreement with a mean of 3.98 (higher than 3). It is evident that 92.5% of respondents agreed with or strongly agreed with statement 9, with a positive mean of 4.10. With a reasonable mean of 3.95, 85.0% of respondents agree or strongly agree with statement 10 that learners are able to interact with lesson contents. In general, we can say that English Language instructors' awareness of syllabus building is highly positive and responded to by 89.5% of the participants. It can be seen in Figure 2 below. The present study aligns with Veloo et al. (2016) which showed that training teachers in syllabus content had a positive impact on the effectiveness of implementation.

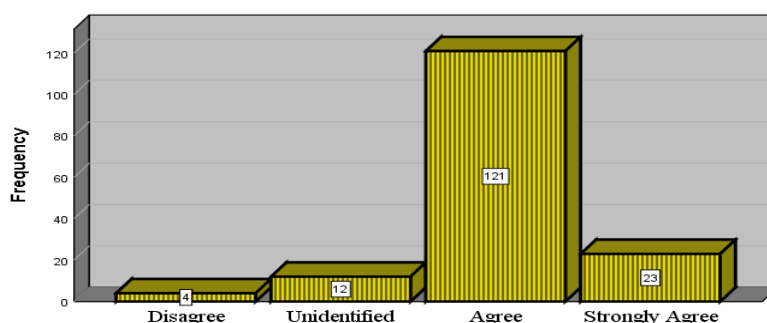


Figure 2. English Language Instructors' Awareness of Syllabuses Building

C. Axis 3

TABLE 5
ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS' AWARENESS OF TESTING PROCEDURES

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unidentified	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (x)	Standard Deviation
11. Teaching and language testing are related to each other.	13 (32.5%)	26 (65.0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.30	0.52
12. Testing evaluates language teaching outcome	13 (32.5%)	22 (55.0%)	2 (5.0%)	3 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)	4.13	0.82
13. The testing practices currently evaluate the students' language learning.	8 (20.0%)	23 (57.5%)	7 (17.5%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.92	0.76
14. Testing represents a very important role in measuring learners' achievement.	12 (30.0%)	21 (52.5%)	7 (17.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.13	0.69
15. Test questions cover skills and knowledge.	10 (25.0%)	24 (60.0%)	2 (5.0%)	4 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.00	0.85
16. Test questions cover acquired learning abilities.	7 (17.5%)	24 (60.0%)	5 (12.5%)	4 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.85	0.83
17. The English language tests are appropriate to the student's level.	6 (15.0%)	24 (60.0%)	3 (7.5%)	7 (17.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3.72	0.93
18. The tests are checking the core content of the lessons	6 (15.0%)	28 (70.0%)	3 (7.5%)	3 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3.92	0.73
19. Some tests enhance students' learning.	8 (20.0%)	27 (67.5%)	3 (7.5%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.03	0.70
20. Some tests do not enhance students' learning.	10 (25.0%)	13 (32.5%)	9 (22.5%)	8 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.63	1.10
21. Content validity is central to testing and assessment.	8 (20.0%)	27 (67.5%)	2 (5.0%)	3 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)	4.00	0.75
22. English instructors consider allowing students to practice mock exams before the final test.	7 (17.5%)	22 (55.0%)	7 (17.5%)	4 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.80	0.85
Total	108 (22.5%)	281 (58.5%)	51 (10.7%)	40 (8.3%)	0 (0.0%)		

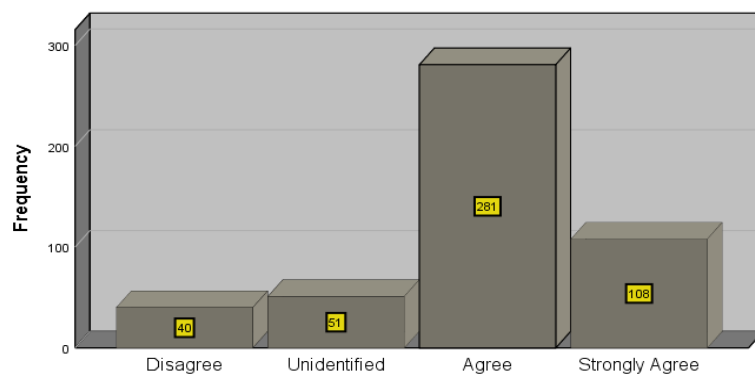


Figure 3. English Language Instructors' Awareness of Testing Procedures

In statement 11 in axis 3, 39 (97.5%) responses out of 40 responses agree or strongly agree that teaching and language testing are related to each other, with an overall mean of 4.30 indicating mostly positive responses. Moreover, as stated in statement 12 testing evaluates language teaching outcomes is highly responded positively with 87.5% indicating agreement or strong agreement with a mean of 4.13. Statement 13, indicates that 77.5% responded agree or strongly agree with a positive mean of 3.92. In statement 14 it is clear that 82.5% agree or strongly agree that testing represents a very important role in measuring learners' achievement with a reasonable mean of 4.13. About statement 15, test questions cover skills knowledge has a percentage of 85.0% with a positive mean of 4.00 which indicates a strong influence of used strategies. Statement 16 has a mean of 3.85 with a percentage of 77.5% and a slightly high standard deviation of 0.83 which means that test questions cover acquired learning abilities are a little widespread in responses. In statement 17 in axis 3, about 75.0% of responses agree or strongly agree that the English language tests are appropriate to the student's level with an overall mean of 3.72 and a deviation of 0.93 indicating slightly positive responses. Moreover, as stated in statement 18 that the tests are checking the core content of the lessons is highly responded positively with 85.0% indicating agreement or strong agreement with a mean of 3.92. With a mention of statement 19, indicates that 87.5% responded agree or strongly agree with a positive mean of 4.03 that some tests enhance students' learning. In statement 20 it is clear that 57.5% agree or strongly agree some tests do not enhance students' learning with a reasonable mean of 3.63 and a slightly high standard deviation which means a wide spread of responses. About statement 21, content validity is central to testing and assessment, has a percentage of 87.5% with a positive mean of 4.00 which indicates a strong influence of used strategies. Statement 22 has a mean of 3.80 with a percentage of 72.5% and a slightly high standard deviation of 0.85 which means that English instructors consider allowing students to practice exams before the final has a little

widespread in responses. Generally, we can say that English language instructors' awareness of testing procedures is highly positive responded by 81.0% of the participants. This can be seen in Figure 3 above. It was assured by Hakim (2015) that instructors were aware of the use of assessment tools and this was in match with what the present study revealed. It was also discovered by Cholis and Rizqi (2008) that the test had an affirmative backwash on English instructors' attitudes and their teaching methodology and that was related to the results revealed above. On the contrary, the results of Jayathissa's (2023) study revealed that the majority of teachers lacked the preliminary knowledge and practice on testing to develop valid and reliable test items. Concerning instructors' statements about allowing students to have mock exams before the final; there was a positive vision toward better learning outcomes and Tajddin et al. (2022) agreed to more allocation of more space to classroom-based assessment in teacher education courses.

D. Axis 4

TABLE 6
PARTICIPATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS IN MAKING TESTS

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unidentified	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean (x)	Standard Deviation
23. Currently, English language instructors are involved in the process of making tests.	6 (15.0%)	18 (45.0%)	7 (17.5%)	9 (22.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3.53	1.01
24. English language instructors participate in decision-making about test revision.	7 (17.5%)	15 (37.5%)	10 (25.0%)	7 (17.5%)	1 (2.5%)	3.50	1.10
25. Teamwork of English language instructors is a vital method in developing testing procedures.	16 (40.0%)	20 (50.0%)	2 (5.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4.30	0.78
26. English language instructors have the final authority on decisions related to their tests.	9 (22.5%)	14 (35.0%)	6 (15.0%)	10 (25.0%)	1 (2.5%)	3.50	1.17
27. English language instructors have adequate knowledge about test design.	10 (25.0%)	17 (42.5)	9 (22.5%)	4 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.83	0.93
Total	48 (24.0%)	84 (42.0%)	34 (17.0)	32 (16.0%)	2 (1.0%)	57.7	23.4

According to statement 23 in axis 4, 60.0% of responses agree or strongly agree that currently, English language instructors are involved in the process of making tests which is important in learning the English language, with an overall mean of 3.53 with a high standard deviation of 1.01 indicating slightly positive responses. Additionally, as stated in statement 24, English language instructors who participate in decision-making about test revision slightly responded positively with 55.0% indicating agreement or strong agreement with a mean of 3.50 (higher than 3) and a slightly high deviation of 1.10, indicating a relatively wide spread of responses. Statement 25, indicates that 90.0% responded agree or strongly agree with a positive mean of 4.30. In statement 26 it is clear that 57.5% slightly agree or strongly agree that English language instructors have the final authority on decisions related to their tests with a mean of 3.95 and a slightly high standard deviation of 1.17 which means there is a reasonably wide spread of responses. About statement 27, English language instructors have adequate knowledge of test design, and have a reasonable percentage of 67.5% with a positive mean of 3.83 and a slightly high standard deviation of 0.93 which indicates the moderate influence of used strategies. Generally, we can say that the participation of English language instructors in making tests is moderately positive and responded by 66.0% of the participants. This can be seen in Figure 4 below. The present study results refute what was revealed by Ali et al. (2019) that teachers lacked a voice in the progress process; the present study respondents revealed they were involved in the process of testing and revision of tests and had the final decision and authority in relation to test making. In this study, the results contradicted Dammak's (2017) findings regarding teachers' participation in assessment and curriculum activities, which were described as limited and unsystematic.

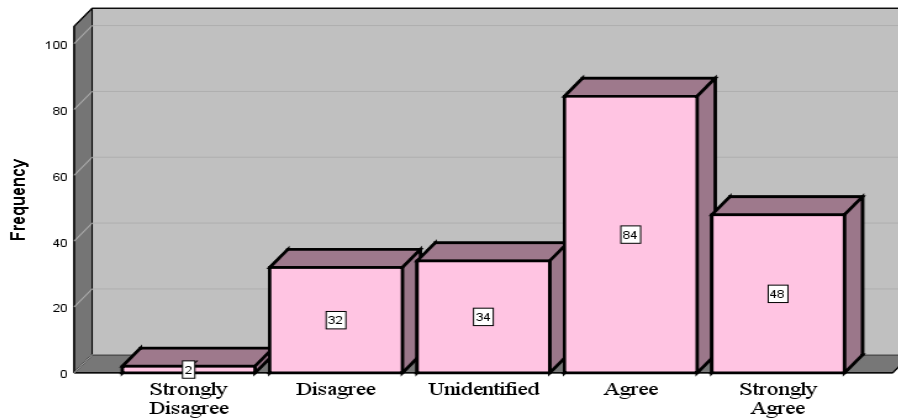


Figure 4. Participation of English Language Instructors in Making Tests

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that English language instructors demonstrated a strong awareness of various teaching methodologies, which influenced their approach to instruction. Furthermore, they were equipped with substantial knowledge about syllabus development, which was evident in their active participation in the process of language testing. Their understanding extended to the design of tests, including crucial concepts such as test validity and washback effects. In addition, the instructors held a degree of autonomy in decision-making, particularly in the creation and modification of their own tests, allowing them to adapt assessments to better suit their teaching objectives.

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