

**Original Research**

## Writing Assessment Literacy: Strategy Development Among Iranian EFL Teachers

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**Abstract**

Assessment literacy is a critical competency for English teachers, enabling them to identify classroom challenges and implement targeted modifications for pedagogical improvement. Given the significance of strategic development for the Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL), this study sought to identify the specific strategies developed by Iranian EFL instructors. It further aimed to explore their familiarity with the complexities of WAL and to investigate the concomitant challenges and needs they face in assessing L2 writing, thereby addressing a clear gap in the existing literature. In so doing, this study employed a grounded theory methodology to conceptualize WAL of EFL instructors in Iran. The research design consisted of two sequential phases. Initially, insights from a comprehensive literature review and semi-structured interviews with ten assessment experts were synthesized to develop a robust interview protocol. This instrument was subsequently employed to conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 40 EFL teachers from Iranian language institutes. The data were explored through a systematic thematic analysis, employing both open and axial coding procedures, conducted manually and supported by NVivo software (version 10). The analysis led to the discovery of the core constructs of WAL strategies deployed by Iranian EFL teachers and the principal challenges they encounter in writing assessment practices. The findings hold significant implications for teacher professional development, suggesting pathways to enhance writing assessment literacy and refine pedagogical training in second language writing instruction within EFL contexts. Moreover, the findings strongly advocate for comprehensive in-service training focused on writing assessment literacy.

**Keywords:** Assessing L2 Writing, EFL Teachers, Strategy Development, Writing Assessment Literacy

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## **1. Introduction**

Assessment literacy is a critical competency for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, enabling them to identify classroom challenges and implement targeted modifications for pedagogical improvement (Scarino, 2013). This proficiency is particularly crucial for the effective assessment of language skills. Taylor (2013) further emphasizes that instructors must be equipped with diverse assessment methods to enhance the precision of their teaching and to moderate the teaching-learning process effectively. The necessity of assessment literacy is especially pronounced in the contemporary educational landscape, characterized by a shift from quantitative, testing-oriented approaches to a more qualitative, assessment-focused perspective. However, despite its recognized importance, a gap often exists between theoretical awareness and classroom practice; as Wang et al. (2008) note, many teachers lack sufficient assessment literacy and are unfamiliar with sound assessment practices. In response to this discrepancy, a significant body of research (Fulcher, 2012; Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020; Pastore & Andrade, 2019) has sought to investigate the multifaceted nature of teacher assessment literacy, examining its mechanisms, implications, and integration into effective teacher training programs.

Teachers play a central role in the processes of language learning, teaching, and assessment. However, those with assessment literacy assume a more critical role, as they possess the expertise not only to design, score, and interpret practical assessments but also to evaluate the assessment practices of others critically. Within the domain of English Language Teaching (ELT), Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) is of particular significance. Since second language (L2) writing represents learners' formal academic language proficiency, accurately assessing it is crucial (Sahebalam et al., 2026), which requires EFL instructors to possess an advanced understanding of assessment principles, enabling them to effectively communicate the theory and practice of L2 writing assessment to relevant stakeholders, particularly in large-scale testing contexts (Carrero, 2018). Elaborating on the essential features of assessment literacy for writing instructors, Gao and Zhang (2020) contend that its core lies in achieving a necessary alignment between test developers and test users. They argue that teachers with advanced assessment literacy are better equipped to mediate and bridge the potential discrepancies between the intentions of assessment designers and the realities of the classroom.

L2 writing is characterized as a performance assessment, a designation that has galvanized significant scholarly interest in its evaluation as both a dynamic process and a final product (Atak, 2019; Bahmani et al., 2021; BoyerHassani et al., 2023; Dorri et al., 2025; Heidari Tabrizi & Chalak, 2023; Hosseini et al., 2019; and Masaeli et al., 2016). This scholarly focus reflects a paradigmatic shift within the field, from holistic and subjective scoring practices toward an atomistic approach that privileges empirical objectivity (Bachman, 2014). Underpinning this methodological evolution is the axiomatic principle that pedagogical efficacy is contingent upon robust assessment mechanisms; as Earl (2013) asserts, instruction is inherently limited in the absence of systematic evaluation. Consequently, preparing EFL/ESL learners for sustained L2 development necessitates the seamless integration of assessment into pedagogy. Such integration fosters a dynamic instructional environment conducive to cultivating learner autonomy, with self-assessment representing a paramount objective (Ergun & Dewaele, 2021). The attainment of this pedagogical ideal, however, is predicated on a foundational requirement: the teacher's comprehensive mastery of diverse testing and assessment methodologies (Bachman & Damböck, 2018).

Following earlier discussions, Lam (2019) argues that, while defining proficiency, constructing tests, and measuring curricular attainment remain necessary, the social context of testing must also be critically examined. A review of recent assessment research (Gao & Zhang, 2020; Giraldo, 2018; Mohamed et al., 2017; Pastore & Andrade, 2019) underscores a fundamental practical constraint: educators operate within significant time and resource limitations. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage testing instructors to develop and apply flexible methodologies within their assessment practices (Levi & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). This need for adaptability is complemented by a broader conceptual expertise, which Fulcher (2012, p. 115) defines as the ability to situate “knowledge, skills, principles, concepts and ideas within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks” to critically evaluate the evolution and impact of testing on individuals and institutions.

When the focus of assessment literacy narrows to specific language skills, the competence of many EFL/ESL teachers often proves to be less comprehensive (Karaca & Uysal, 2021). This deficiency may stem from the requirement for a more atomistic and analytical perspective when assessing discrete skills such as reading, writing, or speaking (Kim & Kim, 2021). A teacher possessing robust assessment literacy understands not only

what is being measured and why, but also the appropriate methods for measurement, strategies for mitigating error, and the potential consequences of flawed assessment practices (Stiggins, 1995). According to Popham (2009), such teachers can effectively employ a range of assessment methods, design and select relevant activities, and analyze the resulting data to improve instruction and enhance student motivation and achievement.

The domain of WAL has garnered specific scholarly attention. For example, Carrero (2018) argues for the necessity of deconstructing linguistic bias in the assessment of multilingual and L2 writers. Similarly, Lam (2019) investigated the WAL of ESL teachers in Hong Kong, focusing on their knowledge and classroom practices, while Nemati et al. (2017) explored the writing proficiency and assessment ability of EFL teachers in Iran. Further contributing to this area, Valizadeh (2019) concentrated on the beliefs and training needs of EFL teachers regarding WAL, and Atak (2019) analyzed the developmental stages and complexities of writing for Turkish EFL learners.

Despite this growing body of research, the concept of L2 WAL remains relatively nascent, particularly in the Iranian context. EFL teachers require a greater familiarity with core assessment literacy concepts, including a consensus-based definition of assessment literacy and its application across diverse groups with varying needs and levels of involvement in assessment (Malone, 2013). It is crucial to distinguish between the language assessment literacy required for professional testing scholars and that which is essential for classroom teachers, as the demands differ significantly.

However, a critical gap persists, as teachers often still lack sufficient knowledge of language assessment, indicating a pressing need to enhance their understanding of assessment concepts, strategies, and skills (Xu & Liu, 2024). To date, few studies have specifically investigated the strategic development of writing assessment literacy for Iranian EFL teachers. This gap in the literature establishes a clear rationale for further investigation. Therefore, the present study intended to address this need by systematically investigating the strategy development of writing assessment literacy for Iranian EFL teachers. By focusing on this underexplored area, the research aimed to contribute valuable insights that can inform professional development and enhance assessment practices within Iran's distinctive EFL teaching environment.

## **2. Literature Review**

The assessment of learner output remains one of the most persistent challenges in education. Within this domain, the use of WAL for Iranian EFL teachers has historically received scant attention in the literature. This gap is particularly evident concerning the specific strategies these teachers develop to assess their students' L2 writing—an emerging research topic that demands meticulous investigation. Compounding this issue is a recurring finding that, despite the proliferation of modern educational tools, teachers often remain ill-equipped to conduct practical classroom-based assessments (Al-Malki & Weir, 2014). This deficiency is critical, as teachers are expected to fulfill a multifaceted role in assessment. They must be able to communicate assessment results to learners and parents and implement subsequent adjustments to enhance instructional efficacy (Bastian et al., 2016; Beziat & Coleman, 2015). To meet these demands, teachers need a robust knowledge base in assessment, a competency widely recognized as assessment literacy (Coombe et al., 2020).

### **2.1. Assessing L2 Writing**

Assessment encompasses various methods of collecting information regarding student performance and capabilities. In the realm of language education, it serves to motivate learners and to enhance instructional methodologies and materials (Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Fulcher, 2012). Writing assessment is a remarkably complex subfield due to its inherently subjective nature, which refers to an area of scholarly inquiry that synthesizes theory and practice to evaluate a writer's performance or potential through designated writing tasks (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011). Since its adoption as a standard pedagogical practice in the twentieth century, a fundamental principle has been the simultaneous evaluation of multiple writing constructs, including fluency, content, conventions, syntax, and vocabulary (Isaacson, 1984).

Within this domain, formative assessment is of paramount importance, as it furnishes students with actionable feedback aimed at enhancing their writing competencies (Hamp-Lyons, 2003; Lockwood et al., 2015). Formative assessment constitutes a vital element of classroom practice that has the potential to elevate achievement standards. This process confers a dual advantage: it guides students on their learning journey while simultaneously providing educators with valuable insights into the efficacy of their instructional methods.

Such feedback can be obtained from both educators and through peer assessment mechanisms (Chandler, 2003; Truscott & Hsu, 2008).

For a writing assessment to be effective, it must demonstrate both reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement and encompasses two primary components. The first is performance reliability, which can be improved by collecting enough writing samples, limiting topic options, and providing clear instructions and formats (Hughes, 2003). The second is scorer reliability, divided into inter-rater reliability (consistency among different raters) and intra-rater reliability (consistency of the same rater over time).

Validity, conversely, refers to the evidence supporting the interpretation of test scores. A valid writing assessment requires that scoring rubrics accurately reflect the constructs being measured and that raters adhere strictly to these rubrics. Multiple forms of validity evidence are essential in test design, with face, content, criterion-related, construct, and consequential validity being paramount for ensuring that a writing task assesses what it intends to assess (Ergun & Dewaele, 2021).

## **2.2. Second Language Teachers' Writing Assessment Literacy**

WAL constitutes a specialized domain of language assessment literacy, focusing specifically on the knowledge, practices, and skills that teachers require to evaluate student writing effectively. Weigle (2007) delineates this competency for second language teachers across three interconnected areas: first, the capacity to construct, administer, and score writing tests, and to communicate the results; second, the proficiency to prepare students for high-stakes, timed writing exams (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS); and third, the skill to conduct formative assessments that track writing development throughout a curriculum.

Building upon this foundation, Crusan et al. (2016) further developed the concept of L2 WAL by exploring how teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices interact. Their work argues that a comprehensive understanding of a teacher's assessment literacy must extend beyond the technical aspects of test content and implementation. It must also consider how these technical skills are influenced by and shaped through the teacher's individual cognitive framework, as these factors collectively influence pedagogical decision-making in the writing classroom.

The formation of this cognitive framework is, in turn, influenced by contextual factors. Drawing on Borg's (2013) concept of teacher cognition, Crusan et al. (2016) posit that a teacher's prior experiences and specific working environment significantly affect their assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Additionally, recent research in the Turkish context (Jalilzadeh et al., in review) suggests that developing robust WAL among EFL instructors requires targeted professional development that addresses both the practical implementation of strategies and the systemic challenges within preparatory school environments. A critical finding from their study was a prevalent lack of formal training in writing assessment, a shortfall often attributed to its neglect within teacher education programs. This finding aligns with studies by Volante and Fazio (2007) and Nurdiana (2021), who also reported teacher insecurity in administering classroom-based assessments.

However, the research landscape shows conflicting evidence. Contrary to the findings of insecurity, Crusan et al. (2016) showed that the L2 writing teachers in their study were both familiar with and confident in using specific classroom-based tools, such as student self-assessments and integrated writing tasks. This divergence in research outcomes highlights the complex and context-dependent nature of teachers' writing assessment literacy, emphasizing a clear need for further investigation in this area.

### **2.3. Strategy Development of Writing Assessment Literacy**

The development of specific assessment strategies constitutes a core component of WAL. The significance of such strategic development is underscored by Tseng et al. (2006), who demonstrated that the teaching and assessment strategies employed by instructors directly influence the learning strategies adopted by L2 students. This relationship is further supported by the established concept of washback, which details the profound impact testing practices exert on teaching and learning processes (Polat, 2020; Tsagari, 2009; Xu, 2020).

Teachers' strategic approaches are often shaped by their underlying pedagogical orientation. Hyland (2019) distinguishes between two primary philosophies: instructors who view L2 writing as a product-oriented activity tend to prioritize writing mechanics and assessment rubrics to help students meet the expectations of raters. On the other hand, those who view writing as a process-focused task are more likely to use dynamic



assessment methods, including peer and self-assessment, to support gradual skill development. The process-oriented method emphasizes the importance of frequent error checking and highlights the value of corrective feedback in formative, assessment-focused tasks, rather than in summative tests (Rashtchi et al., 2019).

Empirical research has documented a range of strategies used by writing instructors. For example, Hamed Al-Azani's (2015) study in Oman found a strong preference for rubric-based assessment, including providing students with criteria, creating custom rubrics, and offering instruction on Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF). However, his findings also revealed a conflation between teaching and assessment strategies, with teachers reporting pre-writing activities such as idea generation and planning, which are primarily instructional rather than evaluative in nature.

Beyond traditional methods, alternative assessment strategies have gained support. Research consistently endorses the use of portfolios in ESL/EFL writing assessment (Al-Qadi & Smadi, 2014; Nezakatgoo, 2011; Sabooni & Salehi, 2015). These studies position portfolios as a central tool for both teaching and assessing L2 writing, a practice Wu (2018) identifies as a key expertise for L2 writing teachers, alongside other reflective procedures.

The efficacy of strategic assessment is demonstrated in classroom interventions. Santos and Semana (2015), for example, studied the development of written communication through expository writing tasks. By employing a methodology centered on rubrics, assessment documents, and models, and ensuring students were familiar with the criteria, they observed significant improvement in the learners' writing. This finding supports Lee's (2017) study, indicating that assessment strategies—such as raising awareness of writing mechanics and providing written corrective feedback—directly improve teaching effectiveness and student performance.

However, a critical gap often exists between claimed and actual practice. A study by Jalilzadeh (2021) in Turkey found that while instructors reported using strategies such as multiple-draft approaches and rubric-based assessment, classroom observations revealed that their behaviors were not always consistent with these claims. This discrepancy highlights the complexity of implementing a strategy. Furthermore, Zhang and Zhang (2021) argue that many strategy-supported courses remain product-oriented. Their research with 280 Chinese EFL learners demonstrated that process-oriented tactics, enriched with



WCF and dynamic assessment, led to superior mastery of L2 writing, confirming that assessment provides vital feedback for instruction.

Given the demonstrated significance of strategic development for WAL, this study sought to identify the specific strategies developed by Iranian EFL instructors. It further aimed to explore their familiarity with the complexities of WAL and to investigate the concomitant challenges and needs they face in assessing L2 writing, thereby addressing a clear gap in the existing literature (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Taylor, 2013). Accordingly, the following research questions were proposed:

**RQ1:** What are the strategy development processes in writing assessment literacy of EFL teachers in the Iranian context?

**RQ2:** What are Iranian EFL writing instructors' strategies in writing assessment?

**RQ3:** What are the main challenges of EFL teachers in developing strategies for assessing writing?

### **3. Methodology**

This study used a qualitative research design to explore the strategies Iranian EFL instructors develop and use in assessing L2 writing. The approach was guided by principles of interpretive inquiry, aligning with the exploratory nature of the research questions (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

#### **3.1. Participants**

A total of 40 EFL instructors from private language institutes in Tehran, Iran, participated in this study. The participants were randomly selected from a larger pool of approximately 900 teachers. The sample consisted of 20 male and 20 female teachers, all of whom had direct experience teaching and evaluating L2 writing. All participants signed an informed consent form and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. During interviews, participants described their previous formal training in general assessment and L2 writing assessment, including in-service courses, webinars, and conference attendance, to provide context for their responses.

### **3.2. Instruments**

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview. Its development involved a multi-stage process. First, a comprehensive review of the literature on writing assessment literacy was conducted to identify key strategic domains (Crusan et al., 2016; Jalilzadeh, 2021). Next, five experts in L2 writing assessment, each holding a Ph.D. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) with substantial experience, were consulted during the development of the interview protocol. Finally, another expert reviewed the questions and verified the content validity of the instrument. The final version of the interview included nine open-ended questions focusing on teachers' strategy development processes, commonly employed assessment methods, perceived challenges in L2 writing assessment, sense of autonomy, and preferred assessment styles (see Appendix).

To ensure credibility of the study and to reduce interviewer bias, the researcher followed established protocols in qualitative research (Creswell, 2018), which involved maintaining a neutral stance, welcoming all perspectives without guiding participants toward predetermined conclusions, and creating an environment that fostered open and honest responses.

### **3.3. Data Collection Procedure**

The data were collected through individual interviews with the 40 participating teachers from various language institutes in Tehran. Participants were provided with the interview questions in advance to allow comprehensive responses. Interviews were conducted either in person or online, based on logistical convenience, and were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The transcribed data were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach, guided by the systematic procedures of open and axial coding (Creswell, 2018). Data analysis involved an iterative process of identifying emerging themes and categories related to assessment strategies and challenges, and then organizing them into a coherent theoretical pattern that reflects the underlying constructs of writing assessment literacy among Iranian EFL teachers.

### **3.4. Data Analysis Procedure**

To address the study's research questions, a qualitative content analysis was performed on data collected from semi-structured interviews with 40 EFL instructors. The analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage process aligned with established qualitative methods. First, all audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to create a textual corpus for detailed examination.

The transcribed data were then analyzed through a two-stage coding process, using both open and axial coding techniques (Anderson, 2018). During the first stage of open coding, the data were broken into separate parts and carefully examined to identify initial concepts and emerging themes related to writing assessment strategies, challenges, and developmental processes. This process generated a comprehensive set of initial codes.

Subsequently, axial coding was used to refine and organize the initial codes, which involved identifying relationships between open codes, grouping them into higher-level categories, and defining their properties and dimensions. This systematic categorization helped reveal dominant patterns in the instructors' strategic approaches to L2 writing assessment, as well as the specific challenges and contextual factors affecting their assessment practices. The entire coding process was conducted meticulously to ensure that the resulting thematic structure accurately reflected the participants' reported experiences and perceptions, thereby providing a robust basis for understanding the development of WAL among Iranian EFL teachers.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Strategy Development Processes**

The interviews were analyzed to answer the first research question. The analysis revealed a multi-stage process through which the participants develop their strategies for assessing L2 writing, which can be conceptualized as a sequence of ten distinct yet interconnected steps, as follows:

1. Acceptance: Acknowledging assessment as an indispensable component of their professional role as writing teachers.
2. Engagement: Developing a perception of writing assessment as both an intellectually engaging and professionally challenging endeavor.

3. Recognition of Efficacy: Understanding that the strategic implementation of assessment directly contributes to improving learners' writing abilities.
4. Performance Monitoring: Observing learners' writing performance and their subsequent use of provided feedback.
5. Feedback Personalization: Identifying learner preferences regarding feedback modalities (e.g., oral vs. written, direct vs. indirect).
6. Knowledge Acquisition: Actively reading literature on writing assessment techniques to inform their practice.
7. Strategy Implementation: Developing and practicing specific assessment strategies within their own classroom contexts.
8. Adopting a Dynamic Approach: Relying on dynamic assessment principles to view evaluation as an interactive, developmental process.
9. Collaborative Refinement: Discussing strategies with colleagues to refine their approaches based on shared experiences.
10. Learner Transparency: Informing students about the assessment strategies being used to enhance their metacognitive awareness.

The findings further highlighted this developmental journey. As one instructor said, *"I tried a lot to learn how to assess my students' L2 writing progress."* Expressions of a pressing need for professional development often accompanied this sentiment. Another teacher pointed out, *"We are in urgent need of training with respect to L2 writing assessment,"* highlighting a perceived gap in institutional support for improving their assessment literacy.

The ten steps outlined by the teachers form a logical developmental system. The process begins with establishing a positive attitude and sense of purpose (steps 1-3), then progresses through identifying needs and expanding knowledge (steps 4-6), and concludes with actively applying and refining strategies (steps 7-9). It ends with sharing results with the learner (step 10). The findings suggest that when this process is followed carefully and systematically, it effectively contributes to achieving successful assessment outcomes.

## 4.2. Assessing Strategies Employed by EFL Writing Teachers

The second research question focused on the strategies writing instructors use while assessing students' writings. Data analysis identified eight strategies, as outlined in Tables 1 through 8, pertinent to interview questions 1-8.

**4.2.1. Describe How You Feel about Assessing Writing.** As shown in Table 1, the majority of teachers (37.5%) considered writing assessment an essential part of being an EFL teacher. This finding was followed by 25% who found the writing assessment interesting and challenging. Meanwhile, 22.5% felt frustrated or resentful at least sometimes, and finally, 15% would rather do almost anything else than assess students' writing.

**Table 1.**

*Frequency and Percentages for Feeling About Assessing Writing*

Feelings of EFL teachers about assessing L2 writing	Frequency	Percentage
I accept it as a necessary part of being an English teacher.	15	37.5%
I find it interesting and challenging.	10	25%
I feel frustrated and/or resentful at least sometimes.	9	22.5%
I could rather do almost anything else.	6	15%

**4.2.2. In your course, do you utilize a multiple-draft approach in which students receive feedback and revise one or more times before a paper is graded?** As shown in Table 2, the majority of EFL teachers reported having employed a multiple-draft approach, while 22.5% claimed that they sometimes used this approach, and 15% reported that they had never used it.

**Table 2.**

*Frequency and Percentages for Employing a Multiple-draft Approach*

	Frequency	Percentage
Never	6	15%
Sometimes	9	22.5%
Yes	25	62.5%

**4.2.3. When you give a writing assignment, do you provide students with a rubric or a list of criteria for which they will be held accountable on the assignment?** As shown in Table 3, most EFL teachers (55%) provided students with rubrics or criteria; however, they did not do so for every assignment. Similarly, 32.5% provided such rubrics, while 12.5% did not offer these rubrics to the students.

**Table 3.**

*Frequency and Percentages for Providing Rubrics or Criteria*

	Frequency	Percentage
I seldom provide rubrics/criteria.	5	12.5%
Yes, but not for every assignment	22	55%
Yes, I provide criteria/rubrics for every assignment.	13	32.5%

**4.2.4. Do you create your own rubrics for your writing assignments?** As Table 4 illustrates, most EFL teachers (60%) reported that they did not create any of the rubrics they used, while 5% stated that they created all of their own rubrics. Conversely, 7.5% created some of the rubrics they used, and 17.6% never used such rubrics.

**Table 4.**

*Frequency and Percentages for Creating Own Rubrics or Criteria*

	Frequency	Percentage
I create all the rubrics I use.	2	5%
I create none of the rubrics I use	24	60%
I create some of the rubrics I use	3	7.5%
I do not use rubrics.	11	27.5%

**4.2.5. Do you employ any strategies to ensure students understand your assignment criteria/rubrics?** Table 5 presents the strategies employed by Iranian EFL teachers to help students understand their assessment criteria and rubrics. Most EFL teachers (55%) regularly used these strategies; additionally, 27.5% used them occasionally, and 17.5% reported they did not provide students with such rubrics.

**Table 5.***Frequency and Percentages for Strategies to Ensure Students' Understanding of Criteria*

	Frequency	Percentage
Not applicable as I do not provide any rubrics/criteria for my students.	7	17.5%
Yes, occasionally.	11	27.5%
Yes, regularly.	22	55%

**4.2.6. If you use rubrics as a tool for writing assessment, do you provide any training to students regarding the information on the rubric?** As shown in Table 6, most EFL teachers (47.5%) provided students with formal instructions on how to use rubrics. Meanwhile, 15% reported having their own specific approach, and over 7.5% of EFL teachers either did not provide these rubrics or did not use them at all.

**Table 6.***Frequency and Percentages for Training Students on Rubrics*

	Frequency	Percentage
I do not provide any training or instruction.	8	20%
I do not use rubrics in my classes.	7	17.5%
I provide an informal instruction on the rubric in use, but I would not call it training.	19	47.5%
Yes, I have a specific approach.	6	15%

**4.2.7. What is your main approach to assessing language in student writing?** Table 7 presents the frequencies and percentages for the primary approaches to evaluating writing. The results showed that the most frequent strategies were; *marking errors with some coding scheme to help identify errors* (32.5%), *writing correct forms of learners' language errors in their portfolios* (27.5 %), and *using portfolios and circling language errors and asking students to correct them* (20%), while *ignoring errors unless they cause significant confusion* (5%) and *putting a check in the margin by a sentence containing errors* (5%) were the least employed strategies.



**Table 7.***Frequency and Percentages for Approaches to Assessing Writing*

Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Circle language errors and ask students to correct them in portfolios.	8	20%
Do not correct errors unless they cause major confusion.	2	5%
Mark errors with a coding scheme to help identify errors.	13	32.5%
Put a check in the margin next to a sentence containing errors.	2	5%
Write end comments focusing on patterns.	4	10%
Write in correct forms for student language errors in portfolios.	11	27.5%

**4.2.8. Regardless of your overall approach to assessment, which statement best describes the effects of using rubrics for grading writing assignments?** Table 8 presents the frequencies and percentages of Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes toward the effects of using rubrics for grading writing assignments. The most frequent ones were as follows; *I feel that rubrics are important tools for accountability and help students understand why they receive the grade they received* (42.5 %), *I think rubrics have potential to help students*, *I am not sure they pay adequate attention to them* (25 %), and *even if they do pay attention to rubric, students are not always able to utilize the information to improve their writing* (15 %). The least frequent response was 'I don't use rubrics' (3.9%).

**Table 8.***Frequency and Percentages for Effects of Rubrics for Grading Writing*

Effects of Rubrics for Grading Writing	Frequency	Percentage
I believe that rubrics are important tools for accountability, as they help students understand why they receive the grades they do.	17	42.5%
While I think rubrics have potential to help students, I am not sure they pay adequate attention to them.	10	25%
Even if they do pay attention to the rubric, students are not	6	15%

always able to utilize the information to improve their writing.		
I do not think rubrics help that much.	5	12.5%
I do not use rubrics.	2	5%

### 4.3. Challenges Faced by EFL Teachers in Developing Effective Strategies

The third research question inquired about the primary challenges faced by EFL teachers in developing effective strategies for assessing writing. The researcher analyzed the data derived from answers to the ninth item of the interview, specifically addressing the challenges Iranian EFL teachers face in assessing writing. Table 9 presents the prominent statements made by the teachers, as reported in Table 9.

**Table 9.**

*Samples of Challenges of EFL Teachers in Developing Strategies for Assessing Writing*

Themes	Prominent Notions
Important factors in assessing EFL students' writings	I believe coherence and cohesion are the most crucial factors to consider in writing.
	Students should be able to make logical relations between the sentences and paragraphs they write.
Applicable assessment	Two major factors in assessing students' writing include the software and hardware used for writing. The more complex software refers mainly to the generation and development of ideas, and the hardware refers to the mechanics of writing, including syntactic and semantic issues.
	They are expected to write grammatically correct sentences, and they should care about the content and delivery. Having a good vocabulary is also essential.
	Unifying assessment and instruction, and highlighting assessment for learning over assessment of learning, is significant. Working on portfolio assessment is useful, and I have recently been practicing dynamic assessment techniques in the classroom.
Reacting to the EFL students' errors	Students shouldn't be demotivated by highlighting the number of mistakes and errors found in their writing.

Whatever the quality of the writing, they are encouraged to produce better works.

We should analyze their errors in terms of complexity (lexical and syntactic), accuracy, fluency, and cohesion, including collocation errors.

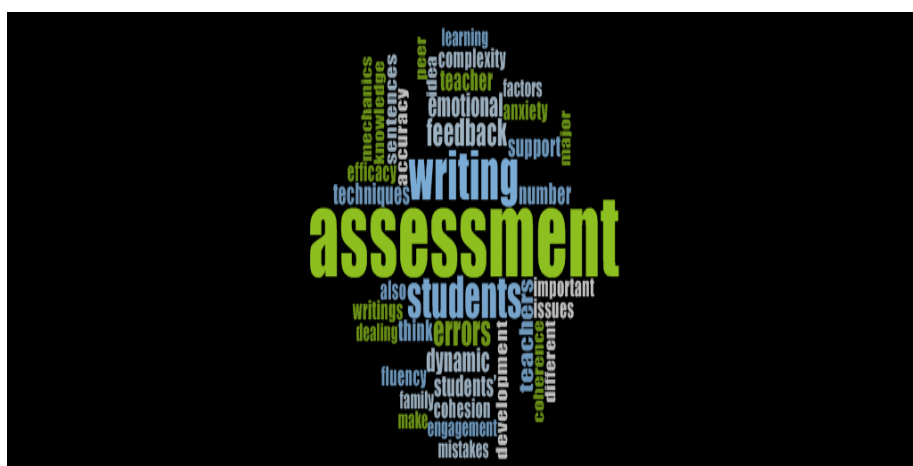
Teachers' writing  
proficiency and  
assessment literacy

Teachers' writing proficiency is a prerequisite for writing assessment literacy.

It would be challenging for teachers to provide their students with effective assessment techniques if they do not understand the constructs of proficiency in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency.

It is motivating and inspiring for the students when they see their teacher is proficient in writing.

Following data analysis, the researcher also entered the transcripts emerged from the participants' responses to the Nvivo software version 10 and he put the data in the Sources menu and organized the data by creating folders and sub-folders in the Nodes menu and then managed the coding procedure and finally run the Word Cloud by means of the Queries word frequency option, he came up with the following themes emerged from the teachers' responses (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.**

## Content Analysis for Teachers' Challenges in Assessing Writing

The researcher employed a systematic coding process for data analysis to ensure reliability. Two independent coders initially performed hand-coding on the interview

transcripts, identifying 35 preliminary themes. The inter-coder reliability was calculated to ensure consistency, following the standard procedure of dividing the number of coding agreements by the total number of coded segments (Campbell et al., 2013). The initial inter-coder agreement was 77% (27 agreements out of 35 total coded segments).

Subsequently, the coders engaged in a consensus-building phase to discuss and resolve discrepancies in their initial coding. Following this negotiation, a final inter-coder reliability of 88% was achieved, indicating a high level of agreement. This process refined the thematic framework, consolidating the initial codes into a final set of 24 distinct themes that robustly represent the data. For comparative purposes, automated coding software was also employed, which generated approximately 40 initial codes. The final hand-coded themes were retained for analysis, as they represented a more refined and consensus-driven interpretation of the data.

The 24 common themes that emerged from the teachers' responses were: *Assessment Knowledge, Assessment Techniques, Idea Development, Mechanics of Writing, Teacher Assessment, Motivation, Cohesion and Coherence, Portfolio Assessment, Sociocultural Issues, Complexity, Accuracy, Teacher Scaffolding, Peer Assessment, Engagement, Dynamic Assessment, Emotional Support, Writing Self-Efficacy, Feedback, Major Errors, Collocation Errors, Assessment Rubrics, Good Grades, Family Support, and Writing Anxiety.*

Out of the 24 emergent themes, analysis showed that 10 represented significant challenges for EFL instructors in assessing L2 writing. The challenges listed below are based on the frequency and nature of teachers' responses. Notably, they often relate to the opposite or absence of the positive themes identified earlier; for example, the challenge is not the concept of portfolio assessment itself, but rather the practical difficulty of using it effectively. The main challenges are summarized in Table 10:

**Table 10.**

*Participants Main Challenges in WAL*

1.	Developing sufficient assessment knowledge
2.	Mastering and implementing a variety of assessment techniques
3.	Addressing gaps in students' understanding of the mechanics of writing.
4.	Effectively employing portfolio assessment methods.

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|-----|--|
| 5.  | Navigating the influence of sociocultural issues on assessment.                |
| 6.  | Coping with a lack of emotional support for teachers in their assessment roles |
| 7.  | Determining appropriate applications for teacher and peer scaffolding          |
| 8.  | Managing the practical demands of dynamic, peer, and self-assessment methods   |
| 9.  | Developing and applying effective assessment rubrics.                          |
| 10. | Mitigating the impact of L2 learners' writing anxiety on performance.          |
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## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the complex landscape of writing assessment literacy among Iranian EFL instructors, revealing both their strategic practices and the significant challenges they face. The data indicate that teachers employ a range of common assessment strategies, including accepting assessment as a core professional duty, utilizing multiple-draft approaches, providing assessment rubrics, and delivering various forms of written corrective feedback. These practices underscore a methodological awareness that aligns with established principles of L2 writing pedagogy.

The findings resonate strongly with existing literature on strategic learning and washback. The identified strategies support the assertion by Tseng et al. (2006) that instructor assessment methods have a profound impact on learner strategies. Furthermore, this alignment demonstrates the powerful washback effect, wherein assessment practices directly influence teaching and learning behaviors in the classroom (Tsagari, 2009).

A notable convergence emerges between the present study and the work of Hamed Al-Azani (2015) in Oman. Both contexts reveal a strong instructor preference for rubric-based assessment, error correction, and explicit instruction on CAF. This cross-cultural consistency suggests that specific assessment challenges and approaches may be universal in EFL settings. However, it is crucial to distinguish, as Al-Azani did, between teaching strategies and pure assessment strategies, a boundary that sometimes becomes blurred in teacher reports.

A critical insight from this study is the discrepancy between teacher-reported practices and the challenges identified through in-depth interviews. While instructors confidently described their use of specific techniques, the interviews uncovered profound underlying difficulties. Key challenges included a need for deeper assessment knowledge, the logistical complexity of implementing dynamic and peer-assessment methods, a lack of emotional and institutional support, and the struggle to mitigate student writing anxiety.

These findings suggest that self-reported strategies may represent an idealized version of practice, whereas the interviews revealed the complex realities that hinder effective implementation.

The data further revealed a tension between product-oriented and process-oriented assessment philosophies. Instructor testimonials highlighted a belief in portfolio and essay-based assessment, yet also pointed to student unfamiliarity with these methods and a tendency toward “rubric-driven” writing that stifles creativity. This tension reflects the theoretical dichotomy outlined by Hyland (2019), where a product-oriented approach prioritizes mechanics and rater expectations, while a process-oriented approach favors dynamic assessment and gradual skill development. The challenges reported by teachers often stem from attempting to bridge this philosophical divide in practice.

The value of process-oriented assessment is reinforced by its connection to formative feedback. Lee’s (2017) research confirms that a process-focused approach creates opportunities for frequent error correction, underscoring the significance of corrective feedback within a formative, rather than purely summative, framework. This study’s support for portfolio-based assessment is also corroborated by a substantial body of ESL/EFL research (Nezakatgoo, 2011; Wu, 2018), which positions portfolios as a central tool for integrating teaching and assessment.

Furthermore, while Iranian EFL instructors demonstrate awareness of key assessment strategies, their effective development is hindered by a suite of interconnected challenges. These findings align with Zhou’s (2015) argument that moving beyond a product-oriented methodology is essential. A new, comprehensive model of writing assessment literacy must therefore not only catalog strategies but also provide a framework for overcoming these practical and conceptual hurdles, empowering teachers to translate assessment knowledge into effective, process-oriented classroom practice that ultimately enhances student writing development.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study identified a consistent repertoire of writing assessment strategies employed by Iranian EFL instructors, including treating assessment as a professional responsibility, utilizing multiple-draft approaches, using rubric-based evaluation, and providing both direct and indirect written corrective feedback. These practices illustrate how teacher

strategies impact learner development, highlighting the significant washback effect that assessment practices have on teaching and learning processes.

However, a critical finding arises from the potential divergence between these self-reported strategies and actual classroom practices. This study confirms that Iranian instructors encounter significant challenges in implementation, primarily due to exam-oriented systems that create conflicting assessment priorities and student expectations, which are mainly focused on grades rather than learning. The research revealed that a lack of practical assessment literacy compounds these challenges. Although participants completed formal testing courses, they demonstrated limited knowledge of established assessment standards. This theory-practice gap emphasizes the inadequacy of current professional training in developing the practical competencies needed for effective writing assessment.

The findings, therefore, strongly advocate for comprehensive in-service training focused on writing assessment literacy. Such programs should help instructors understand assessment as an integral component of instruction while addressing the practical application challenges. By bridging fundamental measurement principles with classroom realities, professional development can empower teachers to make assessment more applicable to their teaching contexts, ultimately enhancing both assessment practices and student writing development.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Describe how you feel about assessing writing.
2. In your course, do you utilize a multiple-draft approach in which students receive feedback and revise one or more times before a paper is graded?
3. When you give a writing assignment, do you provide students with a rubric or a list of criteria for which they will be held accountable on the assignment?
4. Do you create your own rubrics for your writing assignments?
5. Do you employ any strategies to ensure students understand your assignment criteria/rubrics?
6. If you use rubrics as a tool for writing assessment, do you provide any training to students regarding the information on the rubric?
7. What is your main approach to assessing language in student writing?
8. Regardless of your overall approach to assessment, which statement best describes the effects of using rubrics for grading writing assignments?
9. What are the main challenges of EFL teachers in developing strategies for assessing writing?