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# Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of writing assessment literacy: a countrywide study

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## Abstract

Despite a surge of interest in language teacher assessment literacy, teachers' writing assessment literacy (WAL) has received little attention. When considering the issue in the particular Iranian EFL context, it becomes more significant since exploring the context shows the lack of a countrywide and systematic study on EFL teachers' WAL. Considering this gap, the present study sets out to investigate the Iranian EFL writing teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices regarding writing assessment. To achieve this goal, an adapted version of Crusan's et al (Assessing Writing 28:43-56, 2016) WAL questionnaire was sent out to writing teachers in ten major state universities in the country. Overall, the researchers received back 118 questionnaires. The analysis of the results illustrated that although writing instructors had a positive attitude toward writing assessment and were aware of some basic concepts of writing assessment, their level of assessment literacy was not reflected in their practice, particularly when it came to the use of assessment rubrics. The results further showed that the teachers need to develop sound and clear conceptual understanding of WAL as well as the ability to use the knowledge in practice in the actual context of their practice. Generally, it can be argued that in the absence of systematic pre-service and in-service writing assessment training programs, Iranian EFL writing teachers relied on their individual expertise developed throughout their years of practice. The study also provides several pedagogical implications for training writing teachers and improving EFL writing assessment in the long run.

**Keywords:** Writing assessment literacy (WAL), Writing teacher, Knowledge, Beliefs, Practices, EFL writing assessment, Language assessment

## Introduction

Among the many tasks for which teachers are responsible, assessment is one of the most important responsibilities. Teachers especially writing teachers need to learn to do good and fair assessment (Crusan, 2010, 2022). For this, they need to be familiar with the basic concepts and procedures of assessment aka assessment literacy. Crusan (2010) stated that knowing about writing assessment and becoming involved in the “design, implementation, and politics of writing assessment” at institutions are important for teachers (p.11). Crusan et al. (2016) found that while many teachers consider themselves as assessors of writing, they lack confidence in their assessment evaluation. In addition, for developing, scoring, interpreting, and improving classroom-based assessment, teachers

need some measures of assessment training (Scarino, 2013). Also, for being assessment literate, they need to be provided with the appropriate teacher training (Jeong, 2013). For language teachers, being assessment literate means possessing assessment literacy skills combined with language-specific competencies (Inbar-Lourie, 2008). So, developing LAL among EFL teachers must be a necessary component of teacher training programs.

One of the fundamental tasks of writing teachers is assessing student writing, but teachers are not prepared to “construct, administer, score and communicate the results of valid and reliable classroom test” (Weigle, 2007, p. 195). Hamp-Lyons (2002) argued that many teachers do not consider writing assessment as an integral part of their job, while this work should be given attention because of its different applications and its idiosyncratic nature (Crusan, 2010). Weigle (2007) stated that many graduate TESOL programs do not require students to take a course in assessment and consider the importance of assessment in their course where this topic could be given attention. Furthermore, Hirvela and Belcher (2007) claimed that the preparation of second language writing teachers has been ignored by the field of second language writing. To further add to this problem, Weigle (2007) argued that teachers sometimes avoid learning about assessment or, worse, do not consider how they will assess their students until they are forced to do so, which in turn might question the validity and fairness of the assessment.

Although effective assessment practices are necessary in second language writing programs (Crusan et al., 2016), Herrera & Macías (2015) claimed that teachers’ classroom assessment practices are not often provided by wise curriculum and evaluation experts once they start teaching in the real school settings. Popham (2008) claimed that a lack of assessment knowledge can decrease the quality of education. In addition to assessment knowledge, teachers’ beliefs toward testing and measurement can affect the quality of learning and teaching. As Rogers et al. (2007) stated, designing, implementing, and interpreting the result of student assessments and evaluations can directly be affected by the beliefs that teachers and instructors have about assessment and evaluation. Richardson (1995) also suggested that knowledge, beliefs, and practices are interconnected (e.g., effective professional development can begin with changes to teachers’ knowledge or teachers’ beliefs). Once teachers know their knowledge or beliefs, they use this information in appropriate ways to do their words. On the other hand, Crusan et al. (2016) believed that “assessment literacy is not just about content or delivery but how this content is enmeshed with teachers’ knowledge, belief, and practices” (p. 45). Therefore, understanding teachers’ knowledge and beliefs is important in understanding their classroom practice (Calderhead, 1996). In fact, exploring the context revealed that there are few studies which have investigated the writing literacy among the teachers. Moreover, there is a theory-practice gap which hinders the sound assessment of writing (Crusan, 2022).

With regard to the Iranian EFL context, some few studies (Jannati, 2015; Mellati & Khademi, 2018; Tayyebi et al., 2022; Tayyebi & Moradi Abbasabadi, 2020) have explored different aspects of language assessment literacy. Among these, two studies (Tayyebi et al., 2022; Tayyebi & Moradi Abbasabadi, 2020) specifically investigated the writing assessment literacy of Iranian EFL teachers. However, although Tayyebi and Moradi Abbasabadi (2020) developed a WAL questionnaire to investigate how a group

of in-service EFL teachers perceived writing assessment and in 2022 Tayyebi, Moradi Abbasabady, and Abbassian administered a modified version of Crusan et al. (2016) WAL questionnaire to a group of conveniently selected participants, it is evident that there is a gap in the literature to conduct a countrywide study.

In fact, despite the contributions of these studies, to the best of our knowledge, no study has ever been conducted in the Iranian EFL writing assessment context to explore WAL at a countrywide level. Therefore, to fill this gap in the literature, the present countrywide study was designed to investigate Iranian EFL writing teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices regarding writing assessment. Therefore, the following research questions were posed in this study:

- How have Iranian EFL writing teachers obtained their assessment knowledge?
- What do Iranian EFL writing teachers believe about writing assessment?
- What are the assessment practices preferred by Iranian EFL writing teachers?

The specific novelty with the present study is its procedural innovation by administering an adapted version of WAL questionnaire (Crusan et al., 2016) to state university professors across the country. Therefore, the results could reveal how WAL with its three components (i.e., knowledge, beliefs, and practices) is perceived in the Iranian EFL writing assessment context. Consequently, the obtained results can be safely generalized to the whole Iranian EFL writing assessment context. In fact, to provide Iranian EFL university writing instructors with good assessment education, there is a need to know their know-how of the assessment practice.

Moreover, understanding the teachers' writing assessment literacy can be of great help for the professional development of writing teachers. In fact, as Tavassoli and Farhady (2018) stated, the first step in improving teachers' language assessment knowledge is to have information about their current language assessment knowledge. Furthermore, the result of this study would be helpful for educational system (e.g., university authorities, curriculum designers, and teacher trainers) since the effectiveness of any educational assessment program relies on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices due to the continual interaction between these dimensions (Calderhead, 1996).

## **Review of literature**

### **Assessment literacy**

According to Popham (2011), assessment literacy (AL) refers to an individual's awareness of basic assessment concepts and procedures involved in educational decisions. It is increasingly being recognized as an integral part of teacher professionalism (Brookhart, 1999; Schafer, 1993; Stiggins, 1995). Such growing interest in AL is because it is a powerful tool for learning, and also that teachers are key players in educational assessment (Leung, 2014). As Tavassoli and Farhadi (Tavassoli & Farhady, 2018; Tavassoli & Farhady, 2021) stated, improving student achievement requires teachers to have reasonable knowledge of assessment. Although teachers often assume that their students' learning is directed by teaching, in practice, assessment determines the student learning since the assessment system defines what is worth learning (Havnes, 2004). In fact, teachers should be assessment literate to "correctly implement classroom assessment, to explain

the results of standardized tests to stakeholders, and to follow the standards of assessment rules” (Jeong, 2013, p.346). By increasing their assessment literacy, teachers can accelerate their professional development. In addition, they can benefit their students and programs or institution in which they work. Besides, appropriate assessment literacy among teachers enables them to select the best alternatives and options for evaluating their students (Popham, 2009). It also helps them attain higher levels of academic achievement (Stiggins, 1995).

Along with the increasing influence of testing, the range and number of stakeholders who require a level of assessment have grown. They include policymakers, university admission officers, parents, language teachers or instructors, and politicians, in addition to those professionally engaged with testing and assessment (Taylor, 2009). However, despite the calls for expanding the knowledge of assessment, there has been hardly any discussion about the assessment literacy of many teachers who teach language assessment courses (Jeong, 2013).

In fact, many teachers are not prepared to effectively use and interpret assessment results, although they have shown competence in administering and scoring tests (Plake et al., 1993). Popham (2009) argued that today’s teachers know little about educational assessment. For some, “test is a four-letter word, both literally and figuratively” (p. 5). Furthermore, Nunan (1988) argues that despite the importance of assessment in the teaching and learning processes, many teachers lack knowledge, experience, and confidence in aspects related to language assessment. Popham (2009) in particular argues that teachers’ scarce knowledge of classroom assessment can negatively affect the quality of education. He suggested that assessment literacy is needed to inform the assessment decisions teachers need to make. Therefore, it is necessary for instructors to know the methods of gathering educational information as well as the kinds of information that these methods provide (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 2006).

Classroom assessment is affected by many factors among which teachers’ beliefs toward assessment and its goals is very important. Most of the tests used in the classroom are made by teachers, and they make decisions regarding students learning, progress, problems, and pass or fail based on their own assessment (Moiinvaziri, 2015). Hence, teachers’ and instructors’ beliefs about assessment and evaluation can directly affect how they design and implement their student assessment and evaluation and how they interpret the results (Rogers et al., 2007). Additionally, Brown (2004) argued that the way teachers conceive educational facts such as teaching, learning, assessment, and curriculum affects their evaluation of the learners’ deeds and performances. Therefore, Brown and Remesal (2012) stated that teachers’ beliefs on assessment matters for how and why assessment is implemented. Given this, teachers and instructors who possess positive beliefs about the assessment and evaluation are more likely to use assessment-related activities as part of their job and undertake lots of assessment procedures, while teachers and instructors who possess negative beliefs are likely to embrace assessment-related activities in less positive ways with a more restricted set of activities (Rogers et al., 2007). In an attempt to examine Iranian university teachers’ perceptions of the fundamentals of language assessment literacy (LAL), Rezai et al. (2021) interviewed a group of eighteen university teachers from two Iranian universities. Their findings pointed to two overarching LAL domains of knowledge which include constructs such as having

an acceptable level of digital LAL, satisfying ethical requirements, benefiting more from performance assessment, considering students' individual differences, making assessment valid, assuring that tests are reliable, and having an acceptable level of pedagogical content knowledge and skills that involve students in assessment, using alternative assessment methods, employing logically traditional assessment methods, informing students about test results, administering tests in standardized ways, using valid grading procedures, and bringing positive washback effects. In another study, Mellati and Khademi (2018) investigated teachers' assessment literacy and its impact on their current assessment practices and learners' writing outcomes. The findings of the study showed that teachers' assessment literacy has a statistically significant impact on learners' writing achievements. In addition, it was found that teachers' assessment awareness motivates effective and sound assessment design in the pedagogical context.

### Writing assessment literacy

Writing has a prominent role in the development of problem-solving and critical thinking abilities which are required for the academic growth of the students (Dempsey et al., 2009; White, 2009). However, this skill is often underestimated by teachers in the classroom mostly due to inadequate training in the teaching and assessment of writing. Yamtim and Wongwanich (Yamtim & Wongwanich, 2014 as cited in Lee, 2017) stated that writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy is essential in improving the quality of learning and instruction. Therefore, one major goal of assessment training for L2 writing teachers should be to help them become facilitators of learning (Fulcher, 2012). In the words of Lee (2017), L2 writing teachers' classroom assessment literacy development entails training in critical reflection, classroom inquiry, and relevant academic reading.

Dempsey et al. (2009) stated that teachers need practice making detailed assessments of student writing and to build their confidence for assessing student writing. They continued that since writing teachers do not receive practical meaningful practice and feedback which requires time, they perceive that the processes of writing assessment and feedback is difficult and beyond their control which next affect their confidence to include writing in their classrooms. In the same line, Crusan and Gebril (2016, p.46) argued in the following:

*Teachers may have received instruction in giving feedback to students; however, guidance in writing assessment involving scoring, grading, or making judgments about student work is also needed. In addition to the classroom assessment, writing is often assessed in general tests of English language proficiency and used in decision-making such as placement of students into classes. For language teachers to interpret and use scores from these large-scale measures, they need to understand the fundamentals of writing assessment.*

Needless to say, for writing teachers to develop effective writing assessment practices, they need assessment literacy (Lee, 2017). Therefore, prospective teachers need to be trained in writing assessment to learn to make judgment about student writing that is vital to effective writing instruction. Most pre-service teachers can judge about writing and place writing samples into broad categories from good to

bad, but “analyzing student writing at a molecular level is a new and complex task for them” (Dempsey et al., 2009, p. 40).

In order for writing teachers to be assessment literate, it is important to be guided in developing, scoring, and administrating writing task, identifying good assessment and understanding its use in the classroom, understanding both formative and summative assessment, recognizing components of a good paper, and acquiring literacy in the use of data obtained from the externally mandated tests (Weigle, 2007). In a study, Dempsey et al. (2009) examined online assessment activities and their effect on the teachers’ writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. The findings of the study revealed that practice and expert feedback improved teacher knowledge about writing assessment.

In another study, Ataie-Tabar et al. (2019) investigated the extent to which writing assessment literacy of Iranian English language teachers reflects its sociocultural construct from the perspectives of teachers and students. The results of the study showed that both teachers and students indicated to poor writing assessment literacy of the teachers. In addition, the results revealed the need to enhance the sociocultural aspects of writing assessment literacy among the Iranian EFL teachers.

Lam (2019) also examined the extent to which respondents achieved teacher assessment literacy from their perspectives within a context of writing assessment. The results showed that although participating teachers already possessed solid work experience and relevant academic profiles, they had only a basic perceived level of WAL in terms of knowledge base, conceptions, and practices. Also, the results showed that the participants believed that writing assessment could help improve writing. In the same vein, Thirakunkovit (2019) studied writing assessment literacy and classroom practices of Thai university instructors. The results showed that although majority of the teachers stated that they had received formal instruction in writing assessment, their survey responses did not correspond with their actual classroom practices nor their classroom writing assessment background.

In another study, Tayyebi and Moradi Abbasabadi (2020) used a researcher-developed online survey to investigate the components and structure of writing assessment literacy in the Iranian EFL context. Their results showed that the teachers considered most topics in writing assessment as essential to be included in a course of language assessment. In addition, the authors found that most teachers considered themselves to be slightly knowledgeable with regard to developing or using rubric, using portfolio assessment, and using analytic scoring. Later in 2022, Tayyebi, Moradi Abbasabadi, and Abbassian investigated writing assessment knowledge of a group of Iranian English language teachers selected through convenience sampling along with examining how their knowledge, conception, and practice of writing assessment are influenced by contextual and experiential factors. The results of the study showed inadequate levels of writing assessment knowledge of the teachers. The findings further showed that although the teachers preferred innovative assessment practices like portfolio and self/peer assessment methods, they rarely used them in their assessment practice. Moreover, the study revealed no impact of teaching experience and context on teachers’ writing assessment knowledge and practice.



## Methodology

### Participants

Participants in this study were a body of 118 EFL writing teachers who were randomly selected among the state universities in Iran. These groups were selected among a body of university writing instructors who had at least 5 years of teaching writing experience. These teachers had the experience of teaching both BA and MA writing courses. In addition, majority of them (70%) stated that they had received training on assessment as part of a course during their education. Both male and female writing teachers participated in this study. Moreover, there were no age limitations in the study. Table 1 below provides an elaborate description of demographic information of the participants in this study.

### Context of the study

Iranian EFL writing assessment was the desired context of the present study. For this purpose, English departments in 10 major state universities were selected for inclusion in the study. For this aim, using a convenience sampling procedure, writing teachers who had more than 5 years of teaching and assessing writing were selected to participate in this study.

### Research design

The study used a quantitative survey design to address the research questions posed earlier in the study. In fact, survey design is a method of collecting information by asking questions. In this study, the authors used the WAL questionnaire (Crusan et al., 2016) to find out how Iranian EFL writing teachers perceived writing assessment literacy in terms of their knowledge, beliefs, and practices.

**Table 1** Demographic information of the participants in the study

	Categories	<i>n</i>
<b>Degree</b>	PhD	97
	MA	48
<b>Teaching experience</b>	6–10	56
	11–20	43
	+21	19
<b>Teachers' training in writing</b>	Graduate courses in teaching academic writing	64
	Undergraduate courses in teaching academic writing	37
	Practicum or internship course in tutoring/teaching writing	2
	In-service workshops or training on teaching writing	14
	Professional conference presentation or workshops on writing	29
<b>Teachers' training in writing assessment</b>	Yes, as part of a course	68
	Yes, as part of a pre-service or in-service training for a current or former job	19
	Yes, at a professional conference	27
	No, I have never received any formal training	33

## **Instruments**

### ***WAL questionnaire***

In this study, teachers' writing assessment literacy (WAL) questionnaire developed by Crusan et al. (2016) was adopted and next adapted for the particular purpose of this study. This questionnaire includes 5-point Likert scale items along with the open-ended items which focus on what second language writing teachers know about writing assessment, how they have learned what they know, their beliefs about writing assessment, and common classroom practices. Responses were obtained on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Comment boxes allowed instructors to explain their responses to the open-ended items.

### ***Pilot study***

The main reason for conducting the pilot study was to determine the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. A group of teachers with similar characteristics to the main participants of the study were asked to fill out the questionnaire and also write their comments. Some items were ambiguous based on teachers' comments. So, the researcher provided comprehensible definitions for them. Some items were reported to be never used by Iranian teachers, so they were deleted. After developing the first draft of the questionnaire, the researcher asked for the assistance of two expert raters to comment over the structure of the questionnaire and more importantly if they would allocate the items under the same subscales as the researcher. The reliability coefficient obtained through Cronbach's alpha was 79.8 indicating an acceptable level of the reliability estimate.

### **Data collection procedure**

Upon piloting the questionnaire and estimating the reliability and validity of it, it was sent to the writing instructors in different state universities in the country. As mentioned, the questionnaire was sent to at least three experienced writing instructors from each university. The questionnaires sent back by the authors were next analyzed to provide answers to the three research questions of the study.

### **Data analysis**

In this study data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 22.0). For this aim, descriptive statistics (i.e., frequencies and percentages) were used to answer the questions of the study by grouping questions into three domains of interest (i.e., knowledge, beliefs, and practices).

## **Results**

### **How have Iranian EFL writing teachers obtained their assessment knowledge?**

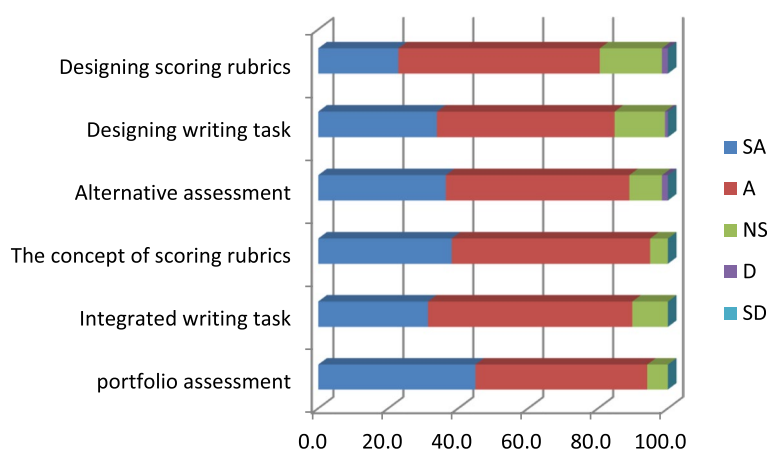
The assessment knowledge concerns two types of information: The first considers the teachers' knowledge in terms of experience and training, and the second is about the knowledge of certain key concepts in the writing assessment. In this study, more than half of the teachers had taught writing for more than 10 years (52.5%).



**Table 2** Teachers' knowledge of basic concepts of classroom writing assessment

Items	SA	A	NS	D	SD	M	SD
I understand the concept of portfolio assessment (Q44)	44.9	49.2	5.9	0.0	0.0	4.3	1.5
I know what is meant by integrated writing tasks (Q45)	31.4	58.5	10.2	0.0	0.0	4.2	1.3
I comprehend the concept of scoring rubrics (Q46)	38.1	56.8	5.1	0.0	0.0	4.3	1.4
I understand the concept of alternative assessment (Q47)	36.4	52.5	9.3	1.7	0.0	4.2	1.3
I know how to design good writing tasks (Q48)	33.9	50.8	14.4	0.8	0.0	3.9	1.3
I know how to design scoring rubrics (Q49)	19.5	57.6	21.2	1.7	0.0	4.0	1.1

SA strongly agree, A agree, NS not sure, D disagree, SD strongly disagree



**Fig. 1** Teachers' knowledge of basic concepts in classroom writing assessment (the bars represent raw numbers)

Also, many of them (40.7%) had PhDs in ELT and then PhDs in English literature (19.3%) followed by English translation (4.1%). Also, those teachers with MA degrees majored 19.3% in English language and literature, 17.2% in ELT, and 4.1% in English translation.

In addition to experience and education, the questionnaire asked teachers about any specific training in teaching writing, assessment, and writing assessment. As Table 1 above shows, this group of respondents received good training in teaching writing. In addition, 80% of them responded that they had received training in assessment and writing assessment. Despite the high numbers of participant with training in these venues, 22 of them (16.1%) had no training in assessment, and 33 (22.4%) reported that they had never received any training in writing assessment. The most common place to learn about writing assessment was in coursework (46.3%), followed by conference presentations (18.4%) and pre-service/in-service training (12.9%).

Another part of the questionnaire asked about their knowledge of several common aspects of writing assessment. The results showed that the respondents were aware of the concepts. More than 80% claimed that they were familiar with the concepts in the survey. So, based on the results, it seems that many teachers were knowledgeable about portfolios, integrated writing task, rubric use, rubric design, and writing task design. Table 2 presents the results in detail (Fig. 1).

### What do Iranian EFL writing teachers believe about writing assessment?

The second research question was concerned with the teachers' beliefs about writing assessment which form a critical aspect of assessment literacy. The results of the study showed that instructors believed that a wide range of activities were useful in assessing writing. Timed-in-class writing received the highest recognition (23.8), and then, out-of-class writing assignment (20.2), final exams (16.6%), and the quizzes (16.0) were the next assessment tasks selected by the teachers (Table 3, Q8). In addition, when asked about their attitudes toward writing assessment, almost 75% of the respondents reported that assessment is both interesting and challenging; however, 22% considered it as a necessary part of their job, and less than 5% reported a negative attitude to writing assessment. As Table 3 below shows, 72% of the respondents believed that scoring rubrics are important tools in helping students understand why they received a certain grade, and only 17% of the instructors believed that they were not certain whether the students usually pay attention to the rubrics (Table 3, Q16).

As Table 3 above shows, items 17–36 on the questionnaire addressed three areas of beliefs:

- Beliefs about scoring accuracy (18, 19, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29, 33)
- Beliefs about assessment methods used in writing assessment (17, 21, 22, 23, 27, 34)
- Beliefs about general assessment issues in writing classes (25, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36)

The first area concerned beliefs about scoring accuracy. Almost 60% of the respondents believed that scoring of writing is not inaccurate. In fact, only 20% of the participants believed that scoring of writing is inaccurate; however, when asked whether scoring of

**Table 3** Teachers' beliefs about writing assessment

Items		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Teachers' views on the writing assessment tasks in the study (Q8)	Quizzes	49	16.0
	Timed in class writing	73	23.8
	Out-of-class assignment	62	20.2
	Final exams	51	16.6
	Revisions	37	12.1
	Peer review	35	11.4
Teachers' attitude to writing assessment (Q9)	I find it interesting and challenging	89	75.4
	I don't particularly like it, but I accept it as a necessary part of a writing teacher job	27	22.9
	I hate assessing writing and usually try to avoid it	2	1.7
Teachers' views about the effect of using rubrics for grading writing tasks (Q16)	I feel that rubrics are important tools for accountability and help students understand why they received a certain grade	86	72.9
	I am not sure they pay Adequate attention to them or are able to use the information to improve their writing	21	17.8
	I don't think rubrics help so much	2	1.7
	I don't use rubric	9	7.6

writing is subjective, the participants were almost quite ambivalent with 42% agreed and about 41% disagreed. In addition, when asked whether it is difficult to achieve high inter-rater agreement in writing assessment, 55% of the respondents disagreed, 36% agreed, and 12% were not sure. Moreover, 46% of the participants believed that it was difficult to work with colleagues during the scoring. In addition, when the participants were asked if writing exams provided a good estimate of writing ability, 60% of them agreed, while 22% had no idea and 16% disagreed. They further believed that content should be given more weight than grammar when scoring (44%). The instructors were ambivalent to the role of self-assessment to provide an accurate picture of student writing ability (39% of the participants were not certain, 32% disagreed, and 26% agreed). With regard to rater training, 87% of the respondents believed that rater training is helpful for the writing teachers.

The second area addressed beliefs about the particular assessment method used in writing assessment. Many of the respondents (66%) believed in the suitability of essay exams for assessing writing, while only 27% agreed with the appropriateness of multiple-choice form for assessing writing. When asked about a good tool for assessing writing, 76% believed that self-assessment is a good technique for assessing writing, and they further agreed that portfolio is also a good tool. In the same line, it was found that almost 50% of the participants agreed with the integrated writing assessment. Furthermore, the teachers casted doubt if teacher-made writing tests are better than the large-scale writing exams.

The third aspect in this section was concerned with the general feeling about writing assessment. Almost 67% of the respondents considered themselves as good writing instructors. Moreover, 95% believed that assessment is an important skill that writing teachers should have. When asked whether writing assessment provides good feedback to the students, 82% of the respondents agreed. In addition, 93% of the participants believed that assessment plays an important role in the writing class. However, 67% of the respondents stated that writing assessment is time-consuming. Moreover, when asked if their students usually do poorly on the writing exam, about 55% of the participants disagreed, and only 29% agreed. In addition, the survey showed that some of the teachers received their training through the university writing courses, their self-studies, and writing textbooks.

#### **What are the assessment practices preferred by Iranian EFL writing teachers?**

The last research question in this study explored the practices preferred by Iranian EFL writing instructors. This section concerned teachers' views on writing assessment practices and also their actual writing assessment practices. Regarding the first issue, almost 88% of the respondents reported that they used multiple drafts in their writing class (Table 4, Q10). Also, while 60% of the participants stated that they used rubrics or criteria with their students, 30% reported that they provided rubrics but not for every assignment (Table 4, Q11). In addition, when asked whether they created their own rubrics, only 15% of the participants stated that they developed all the rubrics they used, 61% stated that they created some of the rubrics they used, and 16.9% stated that they did not have a role in the rubrics they used (Table 4, Q12). In the same vein, 80% of the instructors were certain that their students fully

**Table 4** Teachers' views on writing assessment practices in this study

Items		Frequency	Percentages%
<b>Teachers' views on multiple-draft approach in this study (Q10)</b>	Yes	65	55.1
	Sometime	39	33.1
	Never	14	11.9
<b>Teachers' views on using rubrics/criteria in the study (Q11)</b>	Yes, I always provide criteria/rubrics for every assignment	71	60.2
	Yes, but not for every assignment	36	30.5
	I seldom provide rubrics/criteria	9	7.6
	I never provide criteria/rubrics	2	1.7
Creating rubrics by teachers for writing assignments (Q12)	I create all the rubrics I use	17	14.4
	I create some of rubrics I use	73	61.9
	I create none of the rubrics I use	20	16.9
	I don't use rubrics	8	6.8
<b>Strategies used by the teachers to ensure students' full understanding of the rubric (Q13)</b>	Yes, regularly	58	49.2
	Yes, occasionally	37	31.4
	Not sure	15	12.7
	No	0	0.0
	Not applicable as I don't provide rubrics/criteria for my students	8	6.8
<b>Teachers' training to students regarding the information on the rubrics (Q14)</b>	Yes, I have a specific approach	28	23.7
	I provide an informal introduction to the rubric in use, but I wouldn't call it training	72	61.0
	I don't provide any training or introduction	10	8.5
	Not applicable as I don't use rubrics in my classes	8	6.8

understood the rubrics they used. It was also found that around 23% of the respondents had a specific approach to introduce the rubric to their students with 61% of them providing an informal introduction to the rubric in use.

The second part in this section (items 37–43) concerned the classroom writing assessment practices of the teachers (Table 5.5). Almost 90% of the respondents reported that they used scoring rubrics when grading essays. In addition, 60% of the respondents used integrated writing assessment, and approximately, the same percentage reported using portfolios in their class. When asked whether they have received any rater training in their program, only about 31% responded positively, 39% disagreed, and 26% were hesitant. Almost half of the respondents also reported that they discussed assessment results with their colleagues. With regard to the use of technology in the writing class, half of the teachers disagreed. Also, more than 70% of the participants agreed that they encouraged their students to do self-assessment.

From written comments on questions about practices surrounding rubric use, one of the respondents stated so, "I explain rubric to every student in my office"; the other reported that "I usually explain my criteria orally; the criteria are related to the objectives of the course." (Table 6, Fig. 2).

**Table 5** Teachers' beliefs about writing assessment

Items	SA	A	NS	D	SD	M	SD
Writing can be assessed indirectly through multiple-choice questions (Q17)	7.6	20.3	16.1	33.1	22.9	2.6	1.3
Scoring of writing is always inaccurate (Q18)	4.2	17.8	16.9	40.7	20.3	2.4	1.3
Scoring of writing is subjective (Q19)	1.7	41.5	9.3	37.3	3.4	3.1	1.1
It is difficult to achieve high inter-rater agreement in writing assessment (Q20)	8.5	28.8	12.7	50.0	5.1	2.7	1.1
Essay exams are best when it comes to assessing writing skills (Q21)	18.6	47.5	8.5	23.7	1.7	3.6	1.2
Writing is best assessed when integrated with other skills like reading and listening (Q22)	16.1	33.1	16.9	31.4	0.8	3.3	1.2
Self-assessment can be a good technique for assessing writing (Q23)	17.8	58.5	14.4	9.3	0.0	3.8	1.2
In general, writing exams provide a good estimate of writing ability (Q24)	11.9	49.2	22.0	15.3	1.7	3.5	1.1
Writing assessment provides good feedback for writing instruction (Q25)	22.9	53.4	16.1	6.8	0.0	3.9	1.2
Rater training is not helpful for writing teachers (Q26)	0.0	4.2	8.5	61.0	26.3	1.9	1.3
A portfolio is a good tool for assessing writing (Q27)	24.6	54.2	12.7	8.5	0.0	3.9	1.3
When scoring writing, I believe content should receive more weight than grammar accuracy (Q28)	9.3	34.7	20.3	31.4	4.2	3.1	1.1
Self-assessment provides an accurate picture of student writing ability (Q29)	6.8	20.3	39.8	29.7	3.4	3.0	1.0
Assessment plays an important role in writing classes (Q30)	30.5	67.3	6.8	0.0	0.0	4.2	1.4
Assessment is an important capability that writing teachers should master (Q31)	55.1	39.0	5.9	0.0	0.0	4.5	1.6
Writing assessment is time-consuming (Q32)	11.9	56.8	5.1	22.9	3.4	3.5	1.2
It is difficult to work with other colleagues during scoring of writing exams (Q33)	6.8	40.7	21.2	28.8	2.5	3.2	1.0
Teacher-made writing tests are better than large-scale writing exams (Q34)	0.0	28.8	50.0	21.2	0.0	3.1	0.7
I consider myself to be a good writing instructor (Q35)	19.5	48.3	19.3	12.7	0.0	3.7	1.1
My students usually do poorly on writing exam (Q36)	0.0	29.2	21.2	53.4	2.5	2.6	0.9

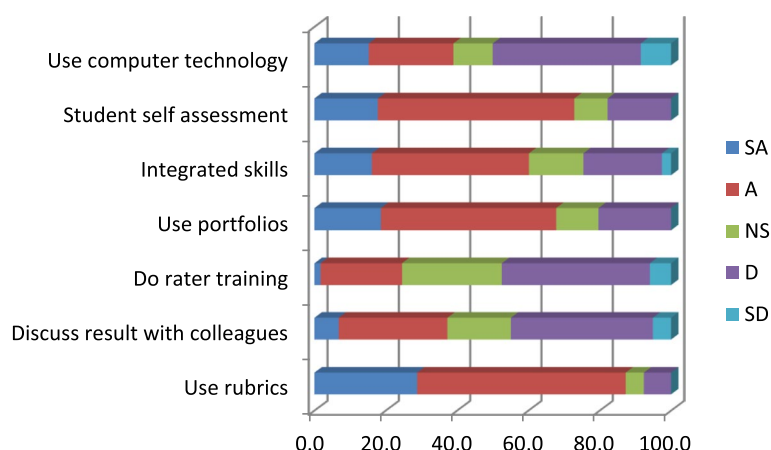
(SA strongly agree, A agree, NS not sure, D disagree, SD strongly disagree)

**Table 6** Teachers' actual writing practices

Items	SA	A	NS	D	SD	M	SD
I use scoring rubrics when grading essays (Q37)	28.8	58.5	5.1	7.6	0.0	4.1	1.4
I discuss with colleagues the result of my writing exams (Q38)	6.8	30.5	17.8	39.8	5.1	2.9	1.1
We do rater training in our program (Q39)	1.7	30.5	26.3	34.7	5.9	2.7	1.0
I use portfolios in my writing classes (Q40)	18.6	42.2	11.9	20.3	0.0	3.7	1.2
I integrate writing with other skills when I design writing exams (Q41)	16.1	44.1	15.3	22.0	2.5	3.5	1.2
I ask students to do self-assessment in writing classes (Q42)	17.8	55.1	9.3	17.8	0.0	3.7	1.2
I use computer technology in writing assessment (Q43)	15.3	23.7	11.0	41.5	8.5	3.0	1.2

## Discussion

Similar to many studies in the literature (Ataie-Tabar et al., 2019; Crusan et al., 2016; Mellati & Khademi, 2018; Ricky, 2020; Tayyebi et al., 2022; Tayyebi & Moradi Abbasabadi, 2020; Thirakunkovit, 2019), findings of the present study also revealed that although teachers had a positive attitude toward writing assessment and considered themselves as assessment literate, their level of assessment literacy was not reflected in their practice, particularly when it came to rubric use. This contradictory finding can be explained



**Fig. 2** Teachers' actual writing practices

on two main grounds: first concerns the nature of the questionnaire. Questionnaire is a self-study instrument. In this study, the respondents had selected prestigious assessment technical terms rather than accurately describe their usual assessment practices (Cruzan, 2010). The next ground is the training they had received. Although most instructors stated that they had received training as part of a course, their responses showed that they did not have enough knowledge about writing assessment which might be due to their lack of enough training in writing assessment. This was mostly due to the missing place of a special training program for writing teachers. Similarly, studies in different contexts (Alkharusi et al., 2012; Ghanbari & Barati, 2020; Jannati, 2015; Tayyebi & Moradi Abbasabadi, 2020; Taylor, 2009; Valizadeh, 2019) have revealed that many writing teachers receive little or no formal assessment training in the preparatory programs and often they do not have enough knowledge about assessment. Similar to the findings of the present study, the literature shows that in different EFL/ESL writing assessment contexts, the pre-service and in-service teachers are not provided with a holistic and experiential training program that enables them to integrate the theoretical knowledge of the teachers with the realities of their practice. Moreover, the traditional transmission-based approach of teacher education programs hinders the formation of a dynamic practical knowledge base among teachers.

Lack of a formal assessment training component is evident in the Iranian EFL assessment context (Alkharusi et al., 2012; Ghanbari & Barati, 2020; Jannati, 2015; Volante & Fazio, 2007). For instance, Iranian teachers believe that in-service programs help them little and pointed out to the poor quality of the training system (Atai & Mazlum, 2013; Baniasad-Azad et al., 2016; Nezakat-Alhossaini and Ketabi, 2013). Moreover, the teachers were dissatisfied with the current status of pre-service EFL teacher training programs (Mirhassani and Beh-Afarin, 2004; Razavipour et al., 2011). In fact, present in-service EFL teacher education programs and even EFL university programs in Iran are not effective in improving English teachers' assessment skills. Therefore, such courses and programs in Iran certainly need revision or reformation (Aliakbari & Ghoreyshi, 2013; Ghaemi et al., 2016; Ghanbari & Barati, 2020; Moivaziri & Razmjoo, 2016; Razi & Kargar, 2014; Soltanpor & Valizadeh, 2019).

Thus far, little attention has been paid to writing assessment preparation in ESL/EFL contexts (Lee, 2017). Similarly, the studies so far focused on writing assessment literacy showed that teachers do not receive enough training in writing assessment (Crusan et al., 2016; Lee, 2017; Weigle, 2007). In a study by Valizadeh (2019), it was found that although most of the teachers had already received prior training in WAL, a vast majority of them (over 90%) stated that they need to receive training in using predesigned integrated writing tasks, designing integrated writing tasks, giving feedback to students based on information from tests/assessment, using the scoring rubrics, designing good writing tasks/tests, and designing the scoring rubrics.

Likewise, there are many studies which refer to the inadequacy of teacher assessment knowledge and training writing skill (Nemati et al., 2017) in the Iranian EFL writing assessment context. Moreover, Soltanpor and valizadeh (2019) claimed that inadequate knowledge and preparation for writing assessment can be due to the fact that the majority of the Iranian EFL teachers only pass an intensive teacher training course. According to them, in order to enhance Iranian EFL teachers' competence and preparation for writing assessment, there is a great need for significant improvement in EFL teacher education programs and recruitment. As an example of poor writing assessment literacy among Iranian EFL writing teachers, Ghanbari and Barati (2020) found that there was no objective rating scale in use among the raters in the Iranian EFL academic writing assessment. Based on this, they suggested that higher educational planning bodies in the context should consider the design and implementation of rater training courses. In addition, the philosophy of existing teacher education programs should be redesigned so language teachers can receive professional and high-quality training which can be directly translated into their practice.

Moreover, it seems that in the absence of a training component in the Iranian EFL writing assessment context, the teachers could not differentiate between beliefs, knowledge, and practice components of WAL. Also, they were not prepared for the writing assessment practices they were engaged in. Writing assessment is a multifaceted and dynamic practice. Hence, teachers should be clear about the way they conceive assessment and how they actually do it. One way to ensure the ethicality and accountability in assessment is through the creation of valid and reliable rating scales. Iranian EFL writing assessment context suffers from lack of an explicit rating scale (Ghanbari et al., 2012). It is evident that the development of locally valid scales would promote a rigorous writing assessment in the context. This important goal can be fulfilled through providing feedback to the students and also developing teachers' confidence in providing a fair and valid assessment (Crusan, 2022).

## Conclusions

The present study showed that the majority of the participant teachers having different educational levels and teaching at various contexts received training in writing assessment and regarded themselves as being competent in writing assessment even though they performed differently in their assessment practice. This lack of congruence between the teachers' claimed competence and their practice showed that Iranian EFL writing instructors need to receive constant training about the theory and practice of writing assessment.



The findings of the present study provide several implications. In the first place, the results of the present study imply that writing teachers need to receive clear theoretical instruction for assessing the students' writing. In fact, although the results showed that the participants in this study had positive beliefs about writing assessment and claimed that they were aware of the principles of writing assessment, this awareness was not reflected in their practice, particularly when it comes to rubric use. In this way, this study has several pedagogical implications for policymakers, curriculum designers, and the whole educational system. Needless to say, literate teachers in assessment can act appropriately in response to test results and make the right decisions in the middle of the course, when they can work for the drawbacks of their own instruction and assessment system and learners' weaknesses (Mellati and Khademi, 2018). In addition, teacher trainers should consider two important points: the first important point is teacher beliefs about that program. Teachers' understanding can be determined by their beliefs about assessment. The second important point is the teachers' knowledge. Teachers' knowledge consists of the theoretical and pedagogical aspects. Teacher trainers should also focus on both aspects of teacher knowledge in the programs. In addition, training programs for writing teachers should focus on practice and find solutions for problems of teachers that they may encounter (Mellati and Khademi, 2018).

According to Crusan et al. (2016), teachers perform differently depending on whether they are providing formative assessment or summative assessment. Therefore, a future study can examine if the distinction between formative and summative writing assessment can affect the teachers' perceptions of writing assessment literacy. In addition, since the teaching experience affects beliefs about writing assessment and assessment literacy, a study can be deemed to investigate the impact of teaching experience on writing assessment knowledge, beliefs, and practices. Other teacher-related variables that can be examined in the future studies include whether gender and age affect the writing teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices.

The present study also suffers from several limitations. The main data collection instrument in this study was survey, and one inherent weakness with using survey especially online surveys is the possible shallow answers of the respondents. As a remedy, future studies can use interviews to further supplement the respondents' answers. Also, teachers might have more positive views about their assessment knowledge because the researchers only relied on self-reported data. The other limitation is the lack of distinction between formative and summative writing assessment. This study asked the respondent teachers to consider assessment activities that are both formative and summative to the classroom, including peer review, revision, timed in-class writing, out-of-class writing assignments, final exams, quizzes, and portfolios. All these assessment types were grouped into one category. Future studies can investigate the extent different writing assessment activities might affect the teachers' writing assessment literacy.

Finally, regarding the small sample size in this study, conducting studies with larger sample sizes, and using both quantitative and qualitative data like observations of teachers' practices as well as interviews and think-aloud protocols to validate their self-reports, can provide further insights in this field.

### Abbreviations

AL	Assessment literacy
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
LAL	Language assessment literacy
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
WAL	Writing assessment literacy

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### Authors' contributions

Ms. ZS was involved in the data collection and analysis. Dr. NG participated in the write-up stage. Dr. AA was also involved in editing and revising the earlier drafts. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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### Availability of data and materials

The data associated with this study would be available upon request.

### Declarations

#### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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