

Tapping into Assessment Literacy: Unfolding Assessment as Learning Strategies and EFL Learners' Writing Development

Navvab Hedayati & Mohammad Khoorsand *

Islamic Azad University, Quchan, Iran
M.Khoorsand2000@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Assessment literacy in EFL education has been a growing area of interest, yet there is a lack of experimental research on assessment strategies for writing skills. This study aims to explore the impact of assessment as learning on writing development for EFL intermediate learners. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, including quantitative and qualitative phases. Thirty male EFL learners participated in the quantitative phase, while six students took part in the qualitative phase. The experimental group, exposed to assessment as learning strategies, showed significant improvement in writing skills compared to the control group. Semi-structured interviews revealed positive student perceptions, highlighting the strategies as challenging, new, and beneficial for reducing stress and enhancing participation. The results of the study confirmed that the experimental group demonstrated significant improvement in writing skills compared to the control group. Following the inter-rater and agreement reliability, seven common codes emerged from the semi-structured interviews with the students regarding the effectiveness of assessment as learning strategies including: challenging, new, good experience, improvement, good feeling, less stress, and more participation. A further implication of the study for EFL learners and teachers is that the holistic execution of assessment as learning strategies could enhance learners' collaborative learning of writing skills and teachers' writing assessment literacy. In the end, the study suggests that implementing assessment as learning strategies can enhance collaborative learning and teachers' assessment literacy in EFL writing education, providing a new perspective on assessment strategies in language learning.

1. Introduction

Writing serves several purposes in communication, including creating academic essays, business reports, letters, websites, and emails, as well as providing brief offline communications via commonly-used messaging systems (Persky et al., 2003). Indeed, writing is a fundamental competency that enables individuals to effectively convey their thoughts and sentiments, disseminate information, foster interpersonal exchange, and participate in reciprocal feedback (Chappell, 2011). According to Walsh (2010), it is crucial to acknowledge the significant significance of writing abilities in acquiring higher education. According to Walsh (2010), the importance of learners' proficiency in communication skills, particularly in their interactions with peers and professors, cannot be overstated. This is because academic communication encompasses a range of written formats such as research papers, application forms, and emails. Hence, proficiency in expressive and effective writing enables people of all

cultures and backgrounds to convey their views and articulate their requirements successfully.

With the evolving language paradigm, there has been a transition in testing and assessment approaches. This shift has been from a reductionist, structuralism viewpoint towards an antireductionist, communicative language paradigm. Consequently, there has been a departure from the prevalent psychometric "testing culture" towards an isometric "assessment culture" (Inbar-Lourie, 2008a, p. 387). Indeed, whereas the testing culture is mainly related to 'assessment of learning' (Black et al., 2011; Modarresi & Jeddy, 2018) with a center of attention on grades and certification, the assessment culture is chiefly related to 'assessment for learning' with a focus on learning and development. That is, testing is at the service of learning development in an assessment culture. In this regard, Scarino (2013) declares that the notion of assessment culture refers to the awareness that individuals have about their own beliefs and preconceptions of assessment.

In the interim, teachers typically devote, at least, one-third of their class time to testing and assessing students (Bachman, 2014). The concept of assessment literacy, coined by Stiggins (1991), introduces what language teachers have been expected to know about assessment issues (Stoynoff & Chapelle, 2005). According to Fulcher (2012), assessment literacy is defined as “the knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, and evaluate large-scale standardized and/or classroom-based tests” (p. 125). Similarly, Malone (2008) emphasized the implementation of assessment knowledge in classroom practices. Assessment literacy is progressively crucial to teacher education and professionalism (e.g., Coombe, et al., 2012). Successful creative writing is an essential ability in the 21st century for achieving academic success. Further, writing is often used in several significant communication endeavors, including creating scholarly essays, composing commercial or journalistic reports, and developing web pages and electronic mail messages. Meanwhile, in light of the extensive proliferation of globalization and its impact on global communication, Naghdipour (2016) reiterated the need to possess a high level of proficiency in English writing abilities.

Actually, the existing literature acknowledges that the systematic implementation of new assessment techniques could help students become more positive toward this type of writing assessment (Crusan, et al., 2016). Indeed, the provision of structured mediation and learning from assessment can promote EFL learners’ writing skills (Sadeghi & Rahmati, 2017). Meanwhile, learning potential is not a capacity with fixed amounts but it can be increased through mediation (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004), and mediation can be offered to promote success for all (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, teachers’ feedback and support can promote students’ writing development. Actually, assessment as leaning could facilitate learning through which the teacher, who acts as the facilitator, interacts with all of the students, providing them with written corrective feedback.

Point taken, the current study sheds new lights into the field of English language teaching and learning because writing skills are interdependent to the writing strategies so that research into the practical elements of assessment could help EFL students in the Iranian context to fortify their written communication ability. Moreover, working with the students on these types of strategies yield fruitful results so that they could cope with the unpredictable situations to which they encounter in daily written communication such as e-mail and online learning. Thus, assessment as learning strategies can be employed to complement assessment techniques so that students who are leaning English in EFL context can resort to these strategies so as to overcome their communication breakdown. To the researchers’ knowledge, there is a paucity of research on the effect of assessment as

learning on writing proficiency in our classroom context. Therefore, delving into the role that assessment as learning strategies can play in written performance has been underrated in the EFL context. Indeed, research could shed light on EFL learners’ perspective on assessment practices (Malone, 2016). Likewise, if assessment is meant to be for learning, then language assessment literacy could represent evidence of language learning (Rea-Dickins, 2001). Assessment as learning is mainly defined as the active role that students can perform in monitoring and assessing their learning (Huang, 2015), and assessment strategies are the steps employed by the teacher to assist students to appreciate the goals of learning, and scaffold them to develop ownership of their own learning (Lee, 2016). In this study, the four-key assessment as learning strategies, developed by Lee (2016), is used to improve learners’ writing competence.

However, the previous literature witnesses that many teachers use assessment for learning “in letter rather than in spirit” (Hume & Coll, 2009, p. 269), with little focus on fortifying learners to perform an active role in learning language skills. In the same vein, in the Iranian context, although researchers have highlighted the importance of assessment, how it can be implemented has been unclear in practice, and the methodology for using assessment in class needs to be more specific (Khoramy & Modarresi, 2019). Therefore, an increasing body of data indicates that the personal beliefs held by teachers on assessment are just as important as their knowledge of assessment. These variables have the potential to facilitate and empower teachers in the effective implementation of assessment. According to Earl (2013), teachers must align their assessment with students’ learning to meet the demands of twenty-first-century goals, such as equipping students with lifetime learning skills and using hint-based instruction (Rouhani & Modarresi, 2023).

In the Iranian context, the existing literature on the linkage between assessment techniques including collaborative feedback and writing development is not many. Moreover, Talebinezhad and Esmaeili (2012) studied the effect of three types of tasks entailing dictation tasks, individual reconstruction tasks, and collaborative tasks on the acquisition of gerunds and infinitives, and they concluded that the group exposed to collaborative tasks outperformed the two other groups with respect to the grammatical structures. In a recent study, Modarresi (2021) investigated the impact of task-based collaborative output activities on improving EFL students’ writing skills. The researcher concluded that the students assigned to the dictogloss group showed noteworthy enhancements in six measures pertaining to complexity, accuracy, and fluency whereas those within the debate group exhibited noteworthy improvements across seven metrics regarding complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Furthermore, significant studies on dynamic

assessment have reported the use of dynamic assessment in second language acquisition (Pishghadam & Barabadi, 2012; Modarresi & Alavi, 2014). Nevertheless, the previous studies have failed to find a link between the unification of assessment training and language learning so that what mainly prompted this study was the novelty of this particular area of research. That is why a dynamic, loose descriptive model should replace a monolithic prescriptive framework of language assessment literacy which ‘sets general guiding principles for different assessment literacies although it is expected to be aware of local needs and is loose enough to contain them’ (Inbar-Lourie, 2016, p. 268).

More specifically, the recent development in exploring assessment literacy has led to a renewed interest in writing skills with the aim of making writing classes more creative and communicative for the students. Pondering on previous research acknowledges the need to supplement the prevalent assessment modes of teaching writing skills such as peer assessment, portfolio assessment, or dynamic assessment with assessment as learning strategies. The shift from an exam-oriented assessment of learning context where the students have a passive role to a learning-oriented assessment for learning context where students have an active role could assist students to change their viewpoints of assessment from a theoretical underpinning to a pedagogical tool that would act as scaffolding for their language development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Writing Skills in Second Language Acquisition

Although a considerable amount of literature has been published on writing competence in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (e.g., Skehan, 2009; Wolfe-Quintero et al., 1998; Modarresi, 2022), more recently, a growing number of researchers have argued for a need to focus on the assessment of writing ability in general and to three key dimensions of writing development in particular entailing complexity, accuracy, and fluency (e.g., Frear & Bitchener, 2015; Johnson, 2017). The aim of this section is to provide the theoretical background and experimental studies conducted by the researchers with respect to writing development with a focus on writing assessment literacy. Actually, in contemporary society, writing has transitioned from a specialized proficiency exclusive to the rich and highly educated to a fundamental aptitude indispensable for individuals across all educational backgrounds (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Subsequently, Lu (2011) investigated several metrics of syntactic complexity as indicators of writing skills and offered valuable insights for ESL educators in the university context. Norris and Ortega (2009) discovered that frequent use of coordination

signifies a lesser degree of competence, while consistent subordination indicates much more mastery over writing skills.

Similarly, Wigglesworth and Storch (2009) examined the effect of both collaborative and individual writings on the dimensions of complexity, accuracy, and fluency, and they concluded that collaborative writing improved in accuracy considerably; however, no significant changes were seen in complexity and fluency. In addition, Ellis and Yuan (2004) examined the effect of planning on the dimensions of complexity, accuracy, and fluency, and they found that pre-task preparation had a positive influence on learners’ fluency and complexity. Golparvar and Rashidi (2021), who reviewed the previous research on the impact of task demands on writing ability in independent tasks, concluded that task complexity had a substantial impact on some measures of syntactic complexity, lexical diversity, and causal cohesion.

2.2 Assessment and Second Language Learning

As witnessed by many scholars in the field of language learning, assessment literacy needs a distinct and universally agreed-upon characterization (Taylor, 2009; Modarresi et al., 2021; Jalilzadeh, et al., 2023). Indeed, within general education literature, Stiggins (1991) is credited as the originator of the concept of assessment literacy among classroom teachers, which refers to the extent to which teachers possess the knowledge and understanding of distinguishing between effective and ineffective assessment practices. In a previous study, Inbar-Lourie (2008a) provided further explanations for the concept of assessment literacy, which refers to teachers’ ability to understand the societal significance of assessment and possess knowledge of the linguistic aspects of assessment practices. According to Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith (2013), both social factors and cultural practice are interdependent in the evaluation of teachers. Moreover, Modarresi and Jalilzadeh (2020) investigated the impact of web-based assessment on the listening comprehension of high school students, and they concluded that participants in the web-based assessment group exhibited superior performance in their listening scores compared to those in the paper-based assessment group. Furthermore, an increasing body of data indicates that teachers’ personal views towards assessment are just as important as their understanding of assessment (Shepard, 2000; Modarresi, et al., 2020). These beliefs can facilitate and empower teachers in implementing assessments of high quality.

Furthermore, more studies have explored the correlation between teachers’ knowledge base in assessment and their corresponding assessment methods (Mertler, 2001). Based on Mertler’s (2001) findings, teachers who needed more knowledge and comprehension of the principles of validity and

reliability had no tendency to use statistical techniques in analyzing their assessment data which required them to engage in activities such as calculating test reliability or doing item analyses. In their qualitative study, Black, et al. (2010) investigated the knowledge and comprehension of validity in the context of summative assessment among L2 school teachers in Oxford Shire, United Kingdom, and they found that teachers need more understanding of validity and dependability. However, not only the current literature is in need of a more systematic and general study of context, but also it should focus on a more intensive survey of contextual factors that have been underrated so far. Just recently, professionals in language teaching and learning have explored parameters such as the demographics of language teachers such as experienced versus novice teachers (see Hildén & Fröjdendahl, 2018).

2.3 Assessing Writing Skills in Second Language

The existing literature acknowledges that writing assessment is mainly categorized by a combination of principles, notions, and approaches drawn from both applied linguistics and psychometrics (Bachman, 2000; McNamara, 2011). Over the years, the field of second language learning has made substantial development in theoretical analysis, empirical research, and methodology, finally realizing the “psychometric-communicative trend” (Bachman, 1990, p. 299). In this respect, according to Behizadeh and Engelhard (2011), the interdependence between linguistic and psychometric approaches to writing has resulted in the emergence of the new discipline of writing assessment. For example, Modarresi and Alavi (2014) developed and validated a comprehensive assessment tool for EFL learners, named computerized dynamic grammar test to evaluate the grammatical proficiency of EFL learners. The program provides three distinct scores for an individual who has taken a test: an unmediated score, a mediated score, and a score indicating their learning potential. Moreover, as for the complexity of assessing writing, Wolfe-Quintero et al. (1998) proposed that the most effective way to assess fluency in writing is by considering T-unit length, error-free T-unit (EFT) length, and clause length.

Moreover, Valeo and Barkaoui's (2017), focusing on how EFL teachers' conceptions influence their decisions in using writing assessment tasks, found that teachers have different conceptualizations about how to design and select writing tasks. Looking ahead, McNamara (2011) proposed one particular model, the many-facet Rasch model, as a “quantum leap in our capacity to investigate and to a considerable extent to deal with this psychometric challenge” (p. 436). However, as pinpointed by Taylor (2009), such models would be of value provided that they become the standard part of the training of those involved in overseeing the

assessment of writing which underscores the need to develop writing assessment literacy. In this respect, Inbar-Lourie (2017) called for a pluralistic, descriptive framework of localized language assessment literacies rather than a prescriptive monolithic literacy approach in defining the knowledge base of language assessment literacy. Indeed, with the shift from a reductionist and atomistic in language paradigm to an anti-reductionist and wholistic language paradigm, the emphasis in language testing has shifted from a psychometric testing approach to a beyond-testing approach, focusing on the practical use of assessment techniques, what has been mostly missing in the literature.

Having scrutinized the related literature, the researchers of the current study suggest that assessment as learning can be applied in teaching writing skills for L2 learners so that the present study aims to investigate the implementation of assessment as learning with respect to writing development. Therefore, to achieve this goal, the study, as an initial attempt, posed the following research questions:

- 1) *Does assessment as learning affect writing development for EFL intermediate learners?*
- 2) *How do the students react to the use of assessment as learning in writing classrooms?*

3. Method

The current study began with a quantitative approach using experimental design to investigate the effect of assessment as learning on writing development, supplemented by a qualitative interview method to carry out the current research. The obvious advantage of using a mixed-methods approach is that by implementing both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the researchers could benefit from the strength of both (Riazi, 2017). To be more exact, the study adopted a quantitatively dominant sequential mixed-methods research entailing a qualitative phase (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) to enrich the experiment further by conducting a semi-structured interview ‘that can greatly improve the study’s internal validity’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 173).

3.1 Participants

A pool of 30 male EFL learners (M=19.43; SD=2.07) from ‘Language Home’, an English private institute in Bojnord city, located in northeast Iran, participated in this study. They were selected from intermediate levels based on convenience sampling due to financial constraints. Although the sampling procedure was not purposive, it was practical and the participants were readily available. They were studying *American English File (2)*, written by Latham-Koenig et al. (2013). The participants were representative of a broader population since, in the Iranian context, most of the private English institutes introduce American English file series in their classes.

The age of the students was between 17 and 23. The researchers administered the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OPT) to the participants for homogeneity. Out of 46 participants, the frequency of the participants whose scores were between 30 and 44 was 30, so the number of students who remained to participate in this study was 30. The students were selected from two classes. They came to the classes two times a week and 90 minutes in each session. Moreover, six students participated in the interview phase of the study based on the data saturation method.

3.2 Instrumentations

In order to assess the language ability of L2 learners, the OPT, a language proficiency examination, was utilized including a total of 60 multiple-choice questions that focus on vocabulary and grammar. According to Allan (2004), the developer of the test, OPT has been calibrated against the proficiency levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the Cambridge ESOL Examinations, and other major international examinations such as TOEFL. Many supporting explanations have been provided about the well-established reliability and validity of the test in the Iranian context (Farvardin et al., 2017); for example, Birjandi and Siyyari (2010) calculated the concurrent validity of the OPT and a retired paper-based TOEFL which was highly acceptable ($r=0.90$). The test takers were classified into four distinct levels of English language competency based on the score criteria: elementary (1-14), pre-intermediate (15-29), intermediate (30-44), and upper intermediate (45-50). The current investigation comprised individuals who were categorized at an intermediate level.

To measure the writing proficiency of the students before and after the intervention, the researchers used the IELTS TASK 2 Writing band descriptors (academic version), which were endorsed by reputable institutions such as the British Council, IDP IELTS Australia, and the University of Cambridge ESOL Examination. The writing skill of the participants was assessed according to the band descriptors, outlined by the Cambridge English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Center. These descriptors include grammatical range and correctness, lexical resources, coherence and cohesion, and task accomplishment. The content validity of the tasks was checked by three experts in testing and assessment who have been teaching testing and assessment courses for MA students in English Language Teaching at Islamic Azad University of Quchan. A score ranging from one to nine was assigned to each criterion for the test-takers. The inter-rater reliability of scores was calculated by two raters. The correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores, provided by the two raters for evaluating students' performance on the pre-test and post-test of writing, was deemed satisfactory, with

values of $r=0.91$ and $r=0.61$. According to Farhadi, et al. (1994), reliability coefficients that fall below 0.50 are categorized as low, while those ranging from 0.50 to 0.75 are deemed moderate and values of 0.75 to 0.90 or above are regarded as high. Hence, the scores exhibited satisfactory levels of reliability.

The researchers used semi-structured interview questions to discover the students' responses regarding the influence of assessment as learning on their writing progress. The contents of the questions revolved around their familiarity with assessment concepts such as portfolio-assessment, dynamic assessment or peer-assessment, their expectations and feelings of employing assessment as learning in doing ask-based activities, and factors that contribute to writing development such as engagement in accomplishing writing tasks. Two professionals in English language instruction who have had extensive experience teaching MA courses at Islamic Azad University of Quchan assessed the content validity of the questions. After receiving their comments, the researchers revised the questions to enhance their alignment with reality.

3.3 Procedure

The study used a systematic approach in order to gather the relevant data. Before the commencement of the treatment phase, the students underwent the process of homogenizing their language ability via the OPT. Subsequently, the students were randomly allocated into two groups. The students' writing performance was measured using IELTS task II before the treatment.

Following this, the first group ($N=15$), as the control group, was exposed to the conventional way of teaching writing activities (Group A), and the second group ($N=15$), as the experimental group, was exposed to assessment as learning for writing activities (Group B). To do so, the teacher worked with the students during the term on writing skills for fifty minutes of each session, including 15 sessions. The relevant data were gathered between March 2022 and June 2022. The teacher collaborated with the students to help them engage in various activities and assignments during the lesson. As of Group A, the teacher used instructional techniques such as offering exemplars and delivering continuous feedback to facilitate the development of the students' writing abilities. He used the conventional assessment strategy to enhance their pedagogical practices. He assisted the students in identifying their strengths and limitations, focusing on areas requiring improvement, and facilitating the recognition and prompt solution of difficulties encountered by them.

During the treatment phase, in Group B, the teacher used assessment as learning techniques based on Lee's (2016) four critical assessments as learning approaches including: 1) helping the students to understand the goals of learning, 2) guiding them to establish their personal learning goals, 3) considering

them as learning resources for each other, and 4) supporting them to develop ownership of their learning. The objective was to enhance their writing proficiency. During the first step, the students were assisted to comprehend the objectives associated with acquiring the ability to monitor and assess their learning progress effectively. The teacher established the educational objectives and criteria for effective achievement in the designated writing assignment, including content development, genre structure, and language use. The major objective was assisting the students to write essays with reference to the topics provided by the teacher. This step was regarded as the first assessment as learning strategy in their class. During the second step, the students were given guidance to establish their personal learning goals, with due consideration given to their writing proficiencies and personal interests. The students were mainly inspired to gain the ability to communicate effectively via e-mails and social media applications such as Instagram, WhatsApp and Telegram. In the third step, the teacher saw the students as valuable learning assets to each other by using peer assessment and feedback to increase their engagement in accomplishing the writing tasks during the writing process. For example, the teacher offered the students leading questions, hints, and prompts, and they were required to help each other while they were given the chance to offer feedback to their peers.

Finally, in the fourth step, the teacher supported the students to develop ownership of their learning through assisting them to deploy self-regulation strategies, e.g. by pondering on their learning goals, assessing their own writings, and keeping learning log. For example, the students told themselves to do well or cope with distractions, highlighting the effectiveness of self-regulation strategies on the behavioral engagement. They challenged themselves to complete the work or learn as much as possible, focusing on both cognitive-oriented learning and cognitive engagement. It is worth mentioning that, according to [Hawe and Parr \(2014\)](#), assessment as learning techniques, although provided sequentially, are interconnected and collectively contribute to student learning in practical application.

After completing the treatment session, the teacher administered a post-test IELTS writing assignment to both groups. The abilities of the students in their pre-tests and post-tests were examined by two raters to establish the inter-rater reliability of the results. Finally, using the data saturation approach, the researchers interviewed six students to collect their responses to the interview questions about implementing assessment as learning in writing classrooms. As [Merriam and Grenier \(2019\)](#) stated, "the researcher is the primary tool for data analysis and collection" in qualitative research. The researchers conducted thorough and unbiased

analyses of the information, varying the duration of each interview session to gather comprehensive data.

3.4 Data Analysis

Regarding the primary objective of the study, the researchers opted for the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) test to investigate the potential impact of assessment as learning on the development of writing skills among intermediate EFL learners. This choice was made due to a single dependent and an independent variable with two levels. Writing development was considered the dependent variable and assessment type was considered the independent variable with two levels including conventional assessment and assessment as learning. As for the second objective of the study, which pertained to the students' responses to the role of assessment as learning in writing courses, the researchers used the semi-structured interview method.

Since the analysis of qualitative data obtained from open-ended interviews included basic qualitative analysis methods and particular interview analysis approaches, as outlined by [Dörnyei \(2007\)](#), the data emerged from the responses were organized and analyzed using the thematic approach. To elaborate, it included categorizing and classifying the responses based on common themes and patterns that emerged from the information that were reported in English. It is crucial to acknowledge that achieving inter-coder agreement requires the ability of both coders to reach a consensus via dialogue ([Garrison et al., 2006](#)). In order to ensure inter-coder dependability, it is essential that both coders exhibit agreement in selecting the same code for a given unit of text, as stated by [Krippendorff \(2004\)](#).

4. Results

The researchers report the results obtained from the study in two major steps. In the first step, the results obtained from the inferential statistics, and in the second step, the commonalities emerged from the interviews with the students are presented.

4.1 Assessments as Learning and L2 Writing Development

As for the primary goal of the study, which aimed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the conventional method of assessment and the assessment as learning in terms of writing proficiency, the researchers used ANCOVA. It is necessary to satisfy various assumptions to do One-way ANCOVA. These assumptions include linearity within each group, homogeneity of regression slopes between the covariate and the dependent variable for each group, and the assumption of equal variances. There was no evidence suggesting the presence of a curvilinear link.

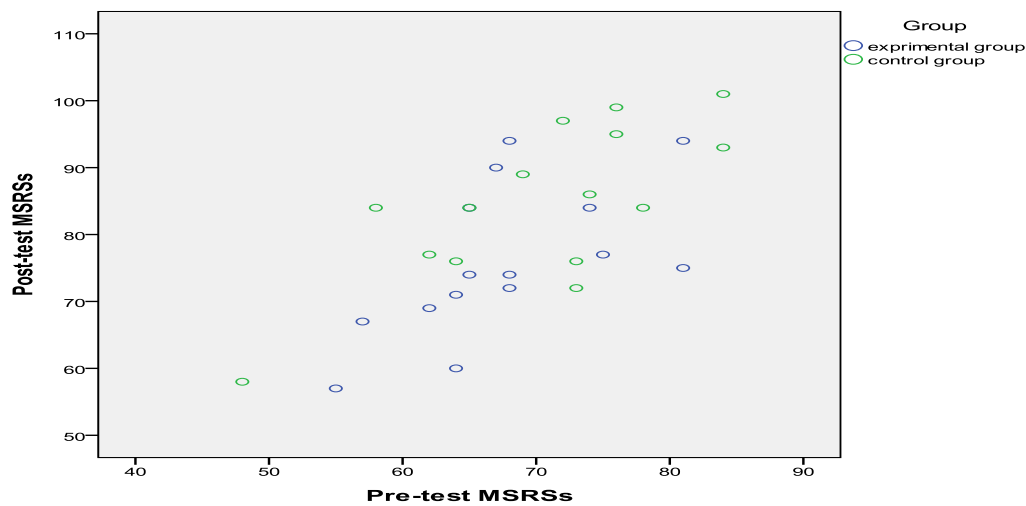


Figure 1. The linearity for assessment and motivational strategies

As displayed in Figure 1, the relationship between the variables was linear, indicating that the assumption of the linear relationship was not violated. Furthermore, the observed significance level of the interaction was above the predetermined threshold of 0.05, indicating a high degree of statistical significance so that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was not violated. That is, the only value that was needed to be checked in was the significance level of the interaction term, and if the

significant level for the interaction is less than or equal to .05, then the interaction is statistically significant, indicating that the assumption is violated (Pallant, 2002). The analysis of scatter plots for each group reinforced the mentioned finding. Additionally, Levene's test was conducted to see if there were any deviations from the assumption of equal variances. There was no violation of the data since the significance value of 0.21 exceeded the predetermined threshold of 0.05.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Control and Experimental Groups

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
control group	4.53	.64	15
experimental group	5.44	.43	15
Total	4.98	.71	30

As displayed in Table 1, the mean score for the control group was 4.53, with a standard deviation of 0.64. On the other hand, the experimental group had a

mean score of 5.44, with a standard deviation of 0.43. The control group consisted of 15 students, and the experimental group also consisted of 15 students.

Table 2. Results of ANCOVA for Two Sets of Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	11.30 ^a	2	5.65	45.33	.00	.77
Intercept	1.19	1	1.19	9.57	.00	.26
Pretest	5.11	1	5.11	41.01	.00	.60
Group	4.59	1	4.59	36.82	.00	.57
Error	3.36	27	.12			
Total	760.78	30				
Corrected Total	14.67	29				

Table 2. Results of ANCOVA for Two Sets of Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	11.30 ^a	2	5.65	45.33	.00	.77
Intercept	1.19	1	1.19	9.57	.00	.26
Pretest	5.11	1	5.11	41.01	.00	.60
Group	4.59	1	4.59	36.82	.00	.57
Error	3.36	27	.12			
Total	760.78	30				
Corrected Total	14.67	29				

a. R Squared = .771 (Adjusted R Squared = .754)

As seen in Table 2, the value in the row corresponding to the independent variable (here, Group) was found to be 0.00, much lower than the threshold of 0.05 so that it suggested a significant difference between the groups. Hence, the outcome yielded statistical significance in the writing scores of students between the control group and the experimental group, after accounting for the scores obtained in the pre-test conducted before the intervention ($F_{(1,27)}=36.82$, $p=.00$, partial eta squared=.57). Thus, the experimental group demonstrated superior performance compared to the control group after exposure to assessment as learning strategies.

4.2 Results of Interviews

As for the second objective of the study regarding the students' responses to the implementation of assessment as learning in writing courses, the researchers conducted interview sessions with six students, using the data saturation approach. To collect the pertinent data, the researchers contacted the applicants and comprehensively explained the objectives of the study. Upon receiving acceptance to participate in the research, the individuals were invited to engage in a comprehensive interview, whereby a pre-established collection of open-ended inquiries was used.

During the survey, the participants were presented with predefined questions and allowed to reply to the extent they deemed appropriate. Subsequent investigations were made based on the participants' replies to delve more into the necessary details of the topic. The details regarding the venue and timing of the interview meetings were arranged based on the convenience and preferences of the participants.

At the outset, the researchers requested the participants to provide an introduction of themselves. Subsequently, inquiries were made about their novel encounter with assessment as learning strategies. The primary topics derived from the interviews are presented herein: Mohammad mentioned that he was

satisfied with the assessment as learning. His comments included:

"The assessment strategies were interesting. I was happier with the support provided by the teacher and with the goals I designated for myself. At first, I had stress for writing my learning goals, but after I wrote two or three, I had no problem with them. I think this type of assessment is beneficial. Hints were teaching me" (S1, Int.2, 1'-1.12").

Actually, the idea of assessment as a learning strategy was challenging for the students working on writing skills. To one of them, the idea was creative and new although she said that she needed help to set her goals. She decided to study grammar again before working on writing tasks; however, setting the goals was a boost for her. Her comments included:

"The assessment strategy was new and interesting, and the peer assessment was a good experience. I did it not so well, but finally, I was happy [with] my assessment. Indeed, I thought I already knew grammar well, but during peer feedback, I found I needed more study and practice. I should study my grammar books again and again" (S2, Int.4, 1'-1.33").

Another student, who was exposed to the learning assessment, mentioned that he was satisfied with the assessment techniques provided by the teacher. His comments included:

"The way the teacher assessed our progress was interesting [and] I was happier with my writing. At first, I was stressed about being assessed every session, but after I felt that assessment is not just taking exams and quizzes, I felt good since the teacher said that assessment is for learning better. I think this type of assessment was beneficial [and] my writing skill was improved" (S3, Int.6, 1'-1.31").

Indeed, the students believed that the teacher tried to engage all of them in learning as assessment class

while assessing their progress and that assessment was at the service of learning. Indeed, the teacher kept all of the students responsible for their learning in this way. The students were engaged in the classroom activities and had no anxiety about being assessed by the teacher. The students were not mainly assessed on two interval times, including mid-term and final examinations. However, they worked on their writing activities and tasks during the course, and the teacher provided sufficient feedback.

Following the completion of coding the data, the first researcher shared the coded data with the second researcher for further coding. Subsequently, the second researcher coded the replies by identifying shared characteristics and formulating comparable conclusions, but with little variations. The inter-coder agreement was achieved because both coders reached a consensus. By the recommendations given by

Campbell et al. (2013), the researchers initially computed the ratio of coding agreements to the total number of agreements and disagreements. This calculation yielded an inter-rater reliability of 64 percent. A total of 14 themes were identified by at least one researcher, including nine instances when both coders had identified the same topic. Consequently, the inter-coder reliability would have been 64 percent based on the 9 out of 14 calculations. Nevertheless, after resolving disparities, they achieved a level of inter-coder reliability up to 77 percent (7 out of 9, or 0.77). Consequently, by coding reliability and agreement, the number of shared themes derived from the students' replies was condensed to seven codes. These codes included challenging, new, good experience, improvement, good feeling, less stress, and more participation.

Table 3. Common Themes Emerged from the Interviews

Participants	Themes
Assessment as Learning Group	1) challenging, 2) new, 3) good experience, 4) improvement, 5) good feeling, 6) less stress, and 7) more participation

As shown in Table 3, the content analysis of the interviews with the students exposed to assessment as learning strategies revealed that working on writing skills achieved by means of the practical mode of assessment is difficult but interesting to the students. This view was echoed by another student who stated that when they needed to revise their works, they were more willing to participate in peer assessment which is a key component of assessment as learning; meanwhile, they confessed that assessment as learning was a novel experience. The commonalities emerged from the interviews with the students showed that they could find more opportunities with lesser stress while using the words to communicate in group work and the teacher was also there to provide help in English language. Finally, the commonalities elicited from the interviews showed that the students found this type of instruction challenging and novel. They believed that the attention devoted to the four steps of assessment as learning in second language learning assisted them to have a good vibe about writing tasks and to become actively engaged in writing tasks.

5. Discussion

The two objectives of the presents study included whether assessment as learning affect writing development for EFL intermediate learners, and if the students were satisfied with the use of assessment as learning in writing classrooms. The results of the study in a high school setting confirmed that assessment techniques make statistically significant

differences in improving writing skills for EFL intermediate learners; the group exposed to learning as assessment indicated more improvement in writing than the one exposed to the conventional way of teaching writing.

Moreover, the content analysis of the results from the interviews revealed some common ground for discussion. The findings of the current study shed new light on the teachers' understanding of assessment strategies, which needs to be more manifested in the existing literature.

The results of the current study agree with the previous studies that underscore the role of assessment for learning, not assessment of learning (Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009; Popham, 2014). Putting emphasis on the variety of stakeholders' needs, Cooke, et al. (2017) stated that the existing language assessment literacy models provide only hypothetical assessment literacy profiles for certain stakeholder groups, and the results of the present study showed that more than knowledge of new assessment techniques is needed, and the teachers should implement that knowledge in practice. The study conducted by Popham (2009) also revealed that teachers with more assessment knowledge can implement quality assessments to augment instruction and student learning. Similarly, Davies (2008) and Fulcher (2012) posited that assessment literacy refers to the familiarity of EFL/ESL instructors with academic knowledge, valued skills, and a grasp of the concepts and processes associated with assessment.

While the previous research shows that educators strongly address specific aspects of assessment as learning (Hawe & Dixon, 2014), the present study attempted to incorporate all key assessment as learning strategies in the writing classroom. Moreover, working on collaborative activities enhances critical thinking and enables students to express their opinions, what has already been accentuated by Green and Klug (1990) who found that helping each other is an effective way to alter learners' opinions and to teach critical thinking and writing skills. Similarly, Farid et al. (2017) found that the collaboration aspect of learning augments the students' writing ability. Likewise, Hyland (2019) found that strategy-based pedagogy expands the lexical complexity of writing development. Additionally, the present study is in line with the study by Aziza and Soraya (2023) who concluded that strategy use enhances EFL students' writing skills. The results of the study are consistent with the findings of Lee (2016) who found that when teachers develop a more profound understanding of the pedagogics on which assessment and its principles are established, they try to ponder on their own practice. The present study revealed that assessment literacy is conducive to language development which is consistent with the study conducted by Alfian et al. (2022) who suggested that designing appropriate assessment guarantee teaching and learning quality.

The findings from the interviews indicated that the students could enhance their writing performance when they acquire knowledge of assessment strategies. This aligns with the observations made by Jianling (2018) regarding the transfer patterns observed in similar task activities, which have been described as a "generic relationship between the task" (Hyland, 2007, p. 149). The results obtained from the study are in also line with the previous research carried out by Poehner (2007) who concluded that mediation in the forms of strategy use and leading questions improves learners' language skills and their learning potentials. As accentuated by Hawe and Parr (2014), the potential of assessment for learning, and specifically assessment as learning, can only be fully recognized "when all strategies are present, to a greater or lesser extent, within a learning-teaching episode and when students are afforded opportunities to take responsibility for their learning" (p.212). The results of the study showed that the use of assessment as learning can results in good feeling and this factor is related to other important psychological factors such as energy, emotions and identity which are conducive to learning development (Modarresi & Javan, 2018; Kazemy et. al., 2022; Rahimi & Modarresi, 2024). The findings from the interviews revealed that implementing assessment as learning is associated with active engagement, enhanced motivation, a sense of enjoyment, and beneficial effects on stress reduction among EFL students, what has been accentuated by Modarresi (2019). Actually, the existing literature acknowledges a few studies that

focus exclusively on information emerged from the interviews such as the one conducted by Deneen and Brown (2016); however, in most cases, interviews are employed by researchers along with other data collection tools (Gu, 2014). Consistent with the social constructivist viewpoint proposed by Vygotsky (1978), collaborative practices such as peer feedback and instructor feedback may serve as scaffolding mechanisms, facilitating the growth of students' writing abilities. The results of the interviews with the students are consistent with the study by Lee et al. (2019) who found that teachers introduce all the assessment as learning strategies and follow them through, particularly those that refer to to students' goal-setting, self-monitoring, self-reflection and self-assessment.

Although some previous research on the issue shows that assessing learners' language knowledge is taxing by means of new resources in the domain of education (Johnson, 2002), the present study demonstrated that the work on new types of assessment with the learners reveals the complexity of interactional and instructional factors in language teaching and learning. That is why there is a challenge to the idea that assessment is the same thing across all kinds of conditions. Furthermore, it is necessary to help students process better their higher-level cognitive abilities when they become engaged in writing tasks, which could galvanize them to provide more constructive feedback to their classmates, and this sort of instruction is supported by a recent study of Chiu and Hew (2018) who found that focusing on peer feedback to improve higher cognitive processing in discussion forums has a significant correlation with the participants' academic performance. The results of the interviews with the students revealed that assessment as learning is more challenging and makes them more participate in doing the writing tasks which is in line with the study by Almeda et al. (2018) who found that engagement and interaction duration were positively associated with course achievement.

Furthermore, the present study is in line with the previous works such as the study undertaken by Fotos and Browne (2004) who concluded that students prefer to make use of computer resources and computer-based tools such as e-mail and additional software tools to enhance their writing skills. Indeed, new assessment resource can provide a new environment for the students that would be more interesting to them in comparison to the traditional exam-based instruction, and this viewpoint has already been supported by the previous research conducted by Cameron (1999) and Lambropoulos, et al. (2006) who confirmed that new types of assessment techniques enhance the opportunities for interactive learning. Moreover, these new types of assessment can be incorporated to internet-based assessment to make online assessment more motivating and inspiring for EFL learners, as Lai and Kritsonis (2006) stated, while the use of task-based

materials has been explored in SLA, there are many more areas of synergy that arguably deserve further attention among which computer-aided materials with focus on learner-based education. Computer-aided materials could be further developed to take account of a branch of education that has largely been overlooked thus far: Computer-aided assessment.

This study indicated that assessment as learning is closely related to writing tasks where the students become more engaged in accomplishing the tasks which is in line with the previous research which confirmed that engagement in doing the writing tasks enhances the writing ability of the learners such as the study conducted by [Mercer and Dörnyei \(2020\)](#) who equated engagement in a learning task to active participation, focused attention, and involvement. The obtained results revealed that EFL learners experienced increased engagement in writing through collaborative tasks through which they help each other which is in agreement with the study carried out by [Shernoff et al. \(2003\)](#) who concluded that task-based group work instruction increases students' learning engagement. Actually, the use of feedback forms could provide better guidance and enhance the quality of peer assessment. The results of the study are in line with the study conducted by [Yang \(2008\)](#) who showed that the interplay between speaking activities and writing tasks improves writing development.

Previous studies on assessment practices support the viewpoint that language teachers tend to adopt assessment practices through experience and by observing others (see [Vogt & Tsagari, 2014](#)) rather than following the practical elements of assessment. In this line, [Berry et al. \(2017\)](#) investigated the training needs, practices, and beliefs of English language teachers in a number of countries by means of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teachers' written feedback on an assessment literacy workshop, and they confirmed previous studies on teachers' assessment literacy levels and beliefs that English language teachers lacked adequate knowledge of assessment literacy, and they are in need of training in practical elements of assessment and clear criteria in assessment. Supporting previous studies on the issue, [Berry et al. \(2017\)](#) pinpointed that teachers mostly had a testing-oriented conception of assessment and they were not confident about assessment.

In the same vein, [O'Loughlin \(2013\)](#) suggests that the assessment literacy of university teachers and administrative staff should be enriched if they expect the students to put their learning into practice in real life communication. This is why O'Loughlin's suggestion is of great value to be investigated in practice and generalized for other stakeholders. The results obtained from the interviews are also consistent with the study carried out by [Hasselgreen et al.'s \(2004\)](#) who supplemented their study by a follow-up interview section, and the findings of their

study was replicated by [Kvasova and Kavyska \(2014\)](#) survey on the language assessment literacy levels of Ukrainian EFL teachers who found that that Ukrainian teachers make use of the compensation strategies which supports the reporting by [Vogt and Tsagari \(2014\)](#) regarding the significance of learning on the job and assessing as they themselves were assessed. Meanwhile, [Hidri \(2016\)](#), in his study on assessment conceptions of Tunisian English language teachers, came up with evidence of wrong and conflicting conceptions about assessment.

The current research underscores the significance of assessment, as shown by [Inbar-Lourie \(2008b\)](#), where the notion of assessment literacy was found to be in its nascent stages of development ([Fulcher, 2012](#)). The results of the study support the study carried out by [Lee et al. \(2019\)](#) who attempted to incorporate all key assessment as learning strategies in the writing classroom, putting emphasis on the sharing of learning goals and success criteria. According to [Kremmel and Harding \(2019\)](#), a thorough description of the language component should comprise the core of language assessment literacy. This research provides compelling evidence for the need to address the problem of assessment activities and adopt a forward-looking approach to developing EFL learners' writing skills. There has been a notable change in language instruction towards a more comprehensive and communicative approach in recent years, departing from the formerly dominant reductionist structuralist viewpoint. This shift has also included integrating a focus on form while placing significant importance on evaluation procedures. Indeed, assessment and types of feedback are considered tools that could enhance the relationship between language learning and the context in which they are used ([Nassaji & Fotos, 2011](#)).

Moreover, [Jubhari et al. \(2022\)](#) confirmed the effectiveness of contextual learning, and teaching approach in improving Indonesian EFL secondary learners' narrative writing skills, and [Modarresi \(2009\)](#) found that collocational use and contextualization are conducive to writing development. Likewise, the previous research acknowledges that contextual factors have a significant effect on the development of language assessment literacy and the implementation of assessment practices ([Tsagari, 2017](#)).

Moreover, the existing literature shows that although assessment practices as well as language assessment literacy development are affected by contextual considerations, there is still a need for a clear definition of these considerations ([Cheng et al., 2014](#)). Providing practical assessment to any individual learner is a challenging and sometimes unmanageable task for language teachers. Considering the large size of university undergraduate-level classes, assessment techniques would yield fruitful results in promoting learners' development.

In the conventional testing procedure in our country, assessment and instruction are separated or 'antagonist', as Poehners (2008) mentioned, and because of the high power of testing in our educational system in decision-making, students think of their testing scores as the end product of their learning endeavors. For this reason, if they perform poorly on a language test, this would lead to their discouragement and frustration. Worse than this, the teachers leave them while they need help to compensate for their lack of or inadequate knowledge, and teachers are not held accountable for their low scores. Therefore, providing students with assessment techniques during the course would reduce their anxiety about being assessed by the teacher and help them determine their lessons' weaknesses.

Now that assessment as learning has been empirically documented to be effective in L2 learning, there are potentially helpful implications for language teachers and learners in this regard. EFL teachers are expected to utilize new assessment types in their classrooms and encourage the students to think of assessment as a tool for learning, not testing. They are suggested to provide appropriate situations and emotional feedback so students can express themselves easily and project their voices in their writing without anxiety and stress. Educators can hold TTC courses for in-service and pre-service teachers to learn how to use assessment as learning strategies. Teachers can help students foster positive personality traits, eradicate negative ones, and enable learners to regulate their emotions (Farsad & Modarresi, 2023; Khorsand & Modarresi, 2023).

Moreover, EFL learners must become more familiar with assessment techniques and try to interact with other students and their teachers via appropriate writing corrective feedback and new assessment techniques. They should use assessments as learning activities to monitor their learning and observe their development. Students can benefit from not only human resources and teacher feedback, but they can also use self-assessment. They should know that assessment as learning is there to help them promote their learning compared to assessment of learning based on which assessment is at the service of testing, not learning.

While the present investigation offers certain avenues for further research, it is not without its limits. It is essential to use care when generalizing the findings of this study since the sample used needs to adequately reflect the average population of English students at private English institutions. Concerning the influence of assessment as learning on the advancement of writing skills among EFL students, a promising avenue exists for additional scholarly investigation. This context could explore how assessment methods enhance language proficiency in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Additionally, it could delve into concepts such as involvement or the utilization of computerized

dynamic assessment. Consequently, this factor offers researchers the opportunity to further explore how assessment techniques and strategies enhance writing skills in the Iranian educational context, potentially building a detailed understanding of assessment as learning.

6. Conclusions

Consequently, many interacting factors are at play to elevate students' engagement in writing skills, among which are the types of assessment. We should also consider the students' reactions to a testing system. This study strengthens the idea that assessment as learning is a new and creative attempt and offers more opportunities to answer the questions and that assessment for learning is more effective than assessment of learning. Nearly all of us have already experienced testing situations in which we would perform better if we were given more opportunities to respond to the questions. Students who cannot cope with the difficulties of writing skills benefit more from assessment as learning. Therefore, they become more motivated to enhance their learning development. The empirical findings in the study provide a new understanding of assessment culture in the academic contexts of school and university that make students more involved through practical use of assessment strategies and not just focusing on the assessment knowledge so that the students can see the beneficial role of assessment as a pedagogical tool in practice while accomplishing their language tasks inside and outside the classroom. Focusing on the application of new assessment tools such as assessment as learning strategies would help educators to measure better the students' writing development in terms of complexity, accuracy and fluency. Whereas the number of teachers who are found to lack assessment literacy (Crusan, et al, 2016), the current study concluded that through undertaking an assessment innovation that concentrates on assessment as learning, teachers can improve their assessment literacy and create a better understanding of how they can use assessment in the classroom to promote student learning.

Moreover, another study is needed to be carried out for such activities as assessment as learning in relation to other language skills like reading and speaking skills in the EFL learning situations. There is room for another research to examine the relationship between assessment as learning, corrective feedback, and peer assessment in writing development. Finally, we are in the rather initial steps of experimentally investigating the role of assessment as learning approach in aspects of writing development in the Iranian context, and now the door is open for holding workshops, teacher training courses and carrying out further research concerning the impact of assessment-based instruction on language skills in order to create a complete picture of the practical elements of assessment in relation to learning foreign languages.

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