

Research Article

Writing Assessment Literacy of Iranian Secondary School English Teachers: A Focus on Conceptions, Knowledge, and Practices

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ABSTRACT

The study of assessment literacy has been an active research agenda over the last couple of decades. Yet, studies exploring English teachers' writing assessment literacy (WAL) are comparatively rare; more so in the Iranian context. This study investigates Iranian secondary school English teachers' conceptions, knowledge, and practices in assessing writing. Data was collected using a questionnaire consisting of 27 items. Using Google forms, the questionnaire was administered to 50 teachers accessed through social media. Descriptive statistical analysis of the data showed the following. The main motivation for assessing L2 writing appeared to be learning, grading, and reporting, respectively. Major language areas that could potentially be improved through assessing writing were found to be accuracy, coherence, diction, fluency, and creativity. Furthermore, teachers' perceptions of assessing L2 writing were rather mixed. Whereas they seemed to endorse a process approach to writing, they held a timed, exam-like perception of writing assessment. Further, they were mostly in favor of a combination of grading and corrective feedback along with diagnostic information on students' writing. Subjective holistic rating was also reportedly common among the respondents. Regarding their knowledge, most teachers estimated their knowledge of key assessment concepts as either average or above average. Likewise, the participants appeared to assess L2 writing in summative, formative, and dynamic ways. In addition, the major barriers in the way of teachers' expanding their writing assessment knowledge were reportedly lack of access to effective training courses or the theoretical and prescriptive nature of the available language testing courses. In terms of assessment practice, writing in small groups, take-home compositions, in-class writing and textbook homework were found to be among the most frequent. These findings carry implication for L2 writing pedagogy and assessment.

Introduction

It is not exaggeration to call the current age the writing age. Never before in history, have human beings engaged in so much texting and writing. In other words, today, people write more than they talk (see Brandt, 2015 for a full account of the rise of writing). As such, whereas writing has traditionally been considered a luxury afforded only by a few elites, in today's digital age, writing is an everyday ubiquitous practice integrated with different phases of social and individual life. Given this significance of writing, some scholars deem the right to write as a basic human right (Cameron, 1999).

In English language teaching (ELT), writing has been traditionally marginalized due to an emphasis on oral skills promoted by audiolingualism (see Matsuda, 2003). Yet, in the digital age, where the boundaries between language modalities have been blurred, mastery of writing is key to effective communicative practices. Given this need for writing, the pedagogy of writing takes on unprecedented importance, a crucial dimension of which is how writing is assessed.

Assessing writing has never been straightforward. This is because of the complex nature of writing which is entangled with a whole host of cultural, social, individual, historical, and textual forces. Additionally, given the washback that assessment exerts on learning, it is of utmost importance for teachers to implement assessments that not only sensitive to the complexity of writing but also learning friendly. For teachers to be prepared to conduct such sound writing assessments, they need healthy doses of language assessment literacy (LAL). While there is now a considerable body of scholarship on teacher LAL, relatively less work has addressed teachers' writing

assessment literacy. Relatedly, writing assessment literacy becomes even more complex when we consider that a teacher's writing assessment practices are tied to teachers' writing identity (see Cremin & Locke, 2017; Looney, et al., 2018). Accordingly, in explaining the observation that most teachers focus on surface level form and structure in their feedback on students' writing, Zamel maintains that this tendency to do with the fact most teachers see themselves as language teachers not writing teachers.

Given this importance of writing assessment literacy, there is an emerging literature on teachers' assessment literacy (see Crusan, et al., 2016; Lam, 2019). Yet, studies focusing on Iranian English teachers LAL (see Firoozi et al., 2019; Tajedin et al., 2023) in general and WAL in specific are few and far in between (see Ataie-Tabar, et al, 2019; Jalilzadeh et al, 2024; Sohrabi et al., 2022; Tayyebi, et al., 2022). While this literature is divided in their assessment of the level of WAL among teachers, most of them have in common the proposition that there is a misalignment between teachers' assessment knowledge and their assessment practices (see Xu & Brown, 2016 for more on this). The present study contributes to this literature through a survey study of secondary school English teachers. More specifically, we address teachers' conceptions of writing assessment, their knowledge of assessing writing, and their writing assessment practices.

Literature Review

In the last few decades, the issue of teacher assessment literacy has become an important issue in second language pedagogy. As a result, this subfield of language assessment has grown both in terms of its theoretical trajectory (Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Fulcher, 2012; Kremmel

& Harding, 2020; Taylor, 2013) and empirical studies (see Gan & Lam, 2022 for a scoping review). This rise in interest in teacher assessment literacy is partly because of heightened awareness as to the ideology surrounding the authority of teachers which for centuries was never questioned (see Weir, 2004). This coupled with the authority of written language and the language of math and numbers rendered tests infallible (see Shohamy, 2001). Public awareness of the power of tests and their potential as instruments with no inherent neutrality has contributed to the rise of research and thinking about teacher assessment literacy. As public trust in assessments has dwindled, the need for justifying assessment outcomes and decisions has increased. Accordingly, institutions and teachers need assessment arguments (Bachman, 2005) to advance in support of their assessment related decisions. This would demand of teachers to master the language of assessment. In addition, assessment is known to exert washback on learning. This would also make it imperative for teachers to be fluent with assessment for learning.

Past research has addressed the nature of teachers' assessment literacy. Some scholars have tried to produce theoretical frameworks enabling the specification of the components that constitute teacher assessment literacy (see Fulcher, 2012; Krenmel & Harding, 2019; Inbar-Lourie, 2008; Taylor, 2013). Inbar-Lourie (2008), for instance, argues that change in assessment practices should start from teachers' epistemic practices. As such, for teachers to adopt different assessment practices, they should migrate from a testing culture to one of assessment culture, where knowledge is constructed through a discourse community. Accordingly, for change to

happen to assessment practices, teachers need to internalize a constructivist epistemology in lieu of an objectivist epistemology.

More recently, Deluca et al. (2023), proposed that teachers assessment literacy should be approached from a Bernsteinian discursive perspective. According to Bernstein (2000), knowledges can be categorized along a vertical-horizontal continuum, where vertical knowledge is highly codified and has strong solid boundaries. In contrast, horizontal discourse is local, loosely framed, mostly integrated, and mostly messy and implicit. Accordingly, most assessment literacy research has so far conceptualized assessment knowledge as vertical, which might be divorced from actual teachers' assessment practices. One consequence of this conceptualization is that there is no fund of assessment knowledge or skills which would transfer across different assessment settings. Therefore, assessment practice is always changing, contingent, and local. Accordingly, different components of communicative language ability might demand that teachers be willing to learn new assessment practices. This logic would warrant studying writing assessment literacy in its own right, given the normative, institutionalized nature of second or foreign language writing.

With the advent post process pedagogy, awareness of the complexity of assessing writing has heightened. While in the process era, writing was taken to be going through certain universal cognitive stages, in post-process pedagogy, writing is inevitably public, interpretive, and situated (Kent, 1999). As such, although when we think of writing, we mostly tend to imagine a sole writer putting pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, writing is never a private cognitive endeavor. Rather, a sense of audience is always accompanying

writing. This audience is not an objective reality; rather, we interpret the audience, ourselves, the world, and our relationship with them. Moreover, writers never write from nowhere; they are always situated and whatever they write comes from a certain positionality in the world. Such recognitions add to insurmountable layers of complexity to writing. The bottom line is that in post-process era, any totalizing theory is believed to be a grand narrative that is remote from the constantly local nature of writing.

That said, the assessment of writing seems to have been influenced more by advances in measurement theory than by those in writing theories (Behizadeh & Engelheart, 2011; Razavipour, 2025). The implication of such an orientation is that teachers might be well versed in the how of assessing writing and less so on the what (i.e., construct definition) of writing assessment (see Davies, 2008).

One of the earliest empirical studies on writing assessment literacy was Crusan et al. (2016) that inquired into how writing teachers obtain assessment knowledge. They also probed into teachers' beliefs about and their actual writing assessment practices. More specifically, they probed into how teachers feel about assessing writing and what writing practices they engage in. Regarding the former, a majority of the participants believed that assessing writing is both frustrating and challenging. As to the latter, Crusan et al. asked the participants whether they do rater training, use portfolios, use computer technology, integrate writing with other communicative modalities, and self-assessments. In a similar study, Lam (2019) studied teachers' writing assessment literacy in Hong Kong. He found that "most respondents had pertinent assessment knowledge and positive conceptions" of alternative writing

assessments (p. 1). Additionally, teachers were found to be fluent of assessment of learning but had partial understanding of assessment for and assessment as learning. This attests to the proceduralization of writing assessment noted by similar voices in the field (Behizadeh & Engelheart, 2011; Jeong, 2015).

Whether explicitly translated into a written rubric or not, when teachers assess writing, they have criteria for their assessment. Jeong (2015) asked five teachers to devise rubrics for assessing a descriptive writing task and he found that in their rubrics all participants have in common a focus on surface and structural aspects of writing. This implies that they had a tendency to focus on those dimensions of writing that lend themselves easily to quantification. It is this nature of writing that poses the most serious challenges to writing assessment. As noted above, writing is a social construct subject to multiple definitions and interpretations (see Razavipour, 2025). This multiplicity in the character writing makes it imperative for teachers to engage in lifelong learning when it comes to learning to assess writing (see Deluca, et al., 2023). Relatedly, researchers need to engage in praxis to work closely with teachers to both learn about their assessment practices and help them tie their practices to research-based knowledge and theories (see Poehner & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). This study adds to the current limited knowledge on Iranian teachers' WAL.

Methods

Data for this study was collected during Covid.19 years. A total of 72 EFL secondary school teachers from seven cities (Shoushtar, Ahvaz, Tehran, Rasht, Shiraz, Yasooj, and Khorram-Abad) contributed data to this study. Twenty-two teachers participated in the pilot phase and 50 teachers (16 males and 34

females) participated in the main phase of the study. Both samples were selected conveniently given the limitations of the recent pandemic (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2). The

participants constituted a heterogeneous sample both in terms of teaching experience and academic qualifications.

Table 1

Participants' demographic information

Education	Experience			
	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	Above 15 years
B.A	4	1	1	10
M.A	6	6	3	13
Ph.D	0	2	2	2
Total	10	9	6	25

Data was collected using a questionnaire that tapped into various aspects of WAL including teachers' knowledge, conceptions, and practices of assessing English writing. The researcher drew on recent work on LAL (Kremmel & Harding, 2020) and WAL (Lam, 2019). In particular, Lam's work comes very close to present study, so the researcher adapted Lam's questionnaire to be applicable in Iranian context. Yet, both LAL and WAL are heavily dependent on the socio-educational contexts wherein teachers work, which precludes easy adoption of an instrument designed in another context. Therefore, we both translated and adapted Lam's Likert-scale questionnaire to the educational culture of secondary schools in Iran. Following the revisions, the online questionnaire was piloted with a sample of 22 English teachers through email.

In access participants, the second author joined a Telegram group for English teachers from different cities. Then the purpose of the study was explained to the group members and they were asked to send their email addresses to the researcher in case they were willing to participate. The respondents were ensured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. However, only a

few teachers opted to complete the questionnaire. Since schools were closed because of Covid 19 pandemic, the second author joined several additional groups of English teachers on social media (e.g., Whatsapp and Telegram) to access more participants. The volunteered respondents were also asked to forward the questionnaire link to their colleagues and friends in a sort of online snowball sampling approach (Parker & Scott, 2019). After four weeks, 22 questionnaires were completed and returned. Then based of obtained data, the results were analyzed to complete the pilot study. In light of the pilot participants' responses, due revisions were made to the questionnaire items.

After these adaptations, the revised version of the questionnaire was checked the first author and it underwent another round of major revisions because the translation was found to be too literal, which would be a big threat to the validity of the data that would be collected ((Dimova, Yan, & Ginther, 2020; Weir, 2005). Afterwards, initial statistical analyses were conducted using the SPSS software. Specifically, it turned out that the questionnaire enjoyed a moderately acceptable level of internal consistency (alpha

= 0.739). The final version of the questionnaire comprised of 27 items in various formats including five-point Likert type items, yes/no items, and constructed-response questions. It included items about teachers' knowledge base in writing assessment, teachers' conceptions of writing assessment and teachers' writing assessment practices. The conceptions section covered the respondents' opinions about the nature, purpose and effectiveness of (alternative) writing assessment. The knowledge base section included questions on testing/assessment theories, understanding of and rationale behind AoL, AfL and AaL, and challenges they face in acquiring writing assessment theories. Items in the writing assessment practices elicited data on the frequency and types of writing assessment assigned to students, types of feedback provided and their effectiveness, and the factors that facilitate or inhibit writing assessment practices. The final version of the questionnaire was sent to 140 teachers, which yielded 50 completed questionnaires, hence a response rate of 35%. As there was no substantial data missing, all the 50 questionnaires were regarded valid for data analysis.

To analyze the data, we made a conscious choice not to engage in any parametric data analysis, which rests on the premise that the measurement intervals are equi-distant. Though it is often observed that data collected

via Likert scale questionnaires are treated as interval data, the reality is that the points on the Likert scale are not identical or the same. That is, there is no evidence that the distance between, say, *agree* and *strongly agree*, is the same as the distance between *agree* and *somehow disagree*. For the noted reasons, the collected data were of the nominal or ordinal scale of measurement, which preclude sophisticated statistical analysis or reasoning. Therefore, frequency counts and graphic representation of frequencies were used in the analysis of data. Moreover, in order to analyze open-ended items, we coded the responses qualitatively and recurring themes were identified.

Findings

This section is structured around three major subsections, namely, teachers' perceptions of writing assessment, teachers' knowledge of writing assessment, and teachers' writing assessment practices.

Teachers' perceptions of writing assessment

Conceptions of assessment are known to bear on teachers' assessment practices (Xu & Brown, 2016). which holds true for writing assessment too. In other words, what teachers think of the function of assessments bears on their assessment practices. Table 2 displays the participants' responses in regard to the major functions of writing assessment.

Table 2

Perceptions of writing assessment.

1. <i>What is the major purpose of writing assessment?</i>	Grading	Learning	Reporting	Other
Frequency	18	21	11	-

The obtained data revealed that the 21 teachers believed that the main purpose of writing assessment is learning (Table 2). In contrast, 32 teachers thought that the main purpose of writing assessment is grading and reporting. This figure should give us pause

given that in a classroom context, assessment should primarily be formative; that is, it should be at the service of learning (i.e., assessment for learning).

Table 3

Aspects of writing that could improve consequent to assessment.

	Accuracy	Fluency	Coherence	Creativity	Clarity	Expressive- ness	Length	diction
Frequency	19	9	17	9	2	2	8	13

Regarding areas that can be improved as a consequence of assessing students' writing, accuracy was the most likely (N= 19), followed by coherence (N= 17), and diction (N= 13). The other aspects (e.g., fluency 18%, creativity 18%, length 16%, clarity 4%, and expressiveness 4%) were deemed to be comparatively less likely to improve (Table 3). Overall, this suggests that most teachers

adhere to a skills discourse of writing where accuracy is the major concern (see Ivanic, 2004). In other words, teachers view writing as a site for language learning, rather than a truly communicative purpose of value on its own. Such a view stems from the dominant view that most teachers of writing see themselves as language teachers not writing teachers.

Table 4

Teachers' perceptions of the nature of writing assessment (SD= Strongly disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly agree).

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
<i>Writing assessment is timed and takes place in exam-like conditions.</i>	0	2	17	21	10
<i>Writing assessment only involves one single draft.</i>	13	20	10	4	3
<i>Students are not allowed to discuss and/or collaborate their writing with other fellow classmates.</i>	6	16	11	9	8
<i>In writing assessment, teachers assign a grade with minimal commentary to students.</i>	13	24	5	6	2
<i>In writing assessment, teachers assign a grade, a mark, or a percentage in relation to a marking scheme.</i>	2	9	13	17	9
<i>Teachers encourage students to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of their performances in the writing assessment.</i>	2	2	7	16	23
<i>Teachers assign subjective grades without regarding a marking scheme for WA.</i>	2	11	17	14	6

As Table 4 illustrates, the majority of teachers perceived of writing assessment as a

timed, exam-like event, indicating the dominance of a summative notion of

assessment among teachers. In contrast, most teachers (n=31) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with a single draft approach to assessing writing, showing the popularity of a process approach to writing among the participants. On the other hand, teachers were rather divided about allowing the collaboration of learners in writing. Moreover, most teachers were opposed to the idea of assigning a grade with minimal commentary to students' writings. Around half of the participants believed that teachers grade students' writing using writing rubrics. In contrast, around twenty participants maintained that teachers assign holistic,

subjective grades in assessing L2 writing. Finally, most teachers (n= 39) believed that teachers encourage learners to reflect on their areas of strength and weakness as pinpointed in assessments.

Teachers' Knowledge of Writing Assessment

One component of assessment literacy in general and WAL in particular is knowledge of theories, concepts, and principles of language testing and assessment. Table 5 gives the results from teachers' self-assessment of their knowledge based in assessment.

Table 5

Teachers' knowledge about major issues in language assessment

	Very minimal	Minimal	Average	Well-versed	Very well-versed
Validity and reliability	5	6	25	11	3
Test construction	3	6	19	19	3
Fairness	1	4	12	24	9
Test usefulness	2	1	12	19	16
Washback	1	2	24	14	9
Classroom assessment	2	5	9	23	11

The overall message from Table 5 is that the participants consider themselves rather knowledgeable about major issues in language testing and assessment. We see that 14 respondents believed that they were either versed or well-versed in theories of validity and reliability. Half of the teachers considered their knowledge to be average and 11 reported minimal or very minimal familiarity with validity theories.

Twenty teachers were of the idea that they were either competent or highly competent in constructing tests, 19 considered themselves average at test design, and nine participants considered their test construction knowledge to be either minimal or very minimal. As to

test fairness, 33 respondents saw themselves either well-versed or very well-versed, 12 teachers reported average knowledge about test fairness, and only five teachers reported less than average familiarity with test concept. Regarding test usefulness, the participants appeared to be even more knowledgeable: 35 teachers judged themselves either well-versed or very well-versed, 12 reported average knowledge, and three teachers assessed their knowledge as either minimal or very minimal. A somehow similar trend was observed with regard to test washback and classroom assessment.

An important consideration in today's assessment is teachers' familiarity with the

three paradigms of assessment of learning (AoL), assessment for learning (AfL), and assessment as learning (AaL). We asked

teachers to judge their knowledge of the rationale behind each of the noted paradigms.

Table 6

Teachers' knowledge of the rationale behind AoL, AfL, and AaL in writing assessment.

Assessment paradigm	To a very small extent	To a small extent	To a certain extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
AoL	2	4	26	13	5
AfL	3	5	17	19	6
AaL	5	9	17	11	8

As Table 6 indicates, teachers' knowledge of the three assessment paradigms seems to be promising and, in a sense, out of our expectations. Thirty-five teachers were reportedly knowledgeable about the rationale behind assessment for learning either to a large (19) or to a very large extent (6). Regarding assessment of learning, 18 teachers reported either high or very high levels of knowledge, 26 reported average familiarity with its rationale, and six participants judged their knowledge to be low or very low. The participants were more diverse with regard to their knowledge of assessment as learning as they were rather evenly scattered along the continuum of very little knowledge to very high level.

In open-ended questions, when asked about when and where teachers had learnt about the rationale behind AfL, AaL, and AoL, the most frequently cited source of learning was academic degree programs with a frequency of 18. Self-study (n= 7), workshops (n=5), and personal experience (n= 4), and in-service programs (n= 2) were other reported sources of learning about various assessment paradigms.

When the participants were inquired about the major hurdles in their way if they planned to enhance their literacy in assessing L2 writing, the participants' responses were the following.

Table 7

Main challenges prohibiting teachers' enhancing their WAL

Challenges	Frequency
Lack of relevant professional training about writing assessment.	30
Lack of time to take writing assessment courses.	8
Prescriptive and theoretical nature of language testing courses	36
Lack of conceptual understanding to translate theory into practice.	9

It appeared that the challenge most teachers agreed upon was the theoretical and prescriptive nature of assessment courses that are offered. This aligns with the nature of academic courses of assessment which are

known to be of discursively vertical (see Deluca, et al., 2023). Whereas assessment is known to be a messy, unpredictable, local and context-bound social practice, in academia, assessment is present as a totalizing discourse

that is readily transferable across different settings. The second major barrier to teachers' enhancing their WAL was lack of access to relevant professional training in assessing writing. Lack of time to attend such courses and lack of the competence to put theories into assessment practice were also among the challenges with lesser frequency.

Teachers' Writing Assessment Practices

The next part of the questionnaire tapped into the actual assessment practices teachers engage in assessing L2 writing. This section is structured around type of assessments, grading practices, the efficiency of practices, and factors influencing assessment practices. Table 8 gives the frequency of seven assessment practices teachers use in assessing L2 writing.

Table 8

Teachers' writing assessment practices.

<i>Assessment practice</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Small-group writing projects	27
In-class essay writing	24
Take-home essay writing	24
Homework based on textbook	24
Grammar quizzes	19
Seen dictations	8
Unseen dictations	3

According Table 8, the most frequently used classroom assessment practices are small-group writing projects, in-class writing essays, take-home essays, and doing homework in the textbooks they use. Grammar quizzes are also among the frequently used practices. In contrast, dictations, both seen and unseen, seem to be used far less frequently. The respondents' take on group writing projects, however, runs counter to their responses on a similar question in Table 3, where the majority appeared to be against collaborative writing.

Table 9

Participants grading practices

<i>Assessment practice</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Letter grades or marks with qualitative commentary	18
Detailed comments only	15
Marks with a scale of various levels of writing performance	12
Letter grades with a brief rubric like content/ language/ organization	10
Marking schemes of public writing exams only	8
Pre-designed rubrics for self-assessment	7
Pre-designed rubrics for peer- assessment	6
Letter grades or marks only	5

One important issue in assessing writing with which scholars and practitioners wrestle is how to rate or grade the writing product or process (see Broad, 2003). Therefore, the participants were asked about the grading practices they use to communicate the quality of written work. As Table 9 illustrates, the most frequent grading practice is the use of letter grades or marks in conjunction with

qualitative commentary. The next common practice is detailed comments with no numerical or letter grade. Marks according to a developmental scale of writing comes next with a frequency of 12. Another grading practice used is the use of letter grades assigned in light of a brief rubric. Eight teachers reportedly use the marking schemes of high stakes tests in their classroom

assessment practices. Rubrics designed to support self-assessment and peer assessment are comparatively less commonly used and the least common grading practice is the use of letter or numerical grades in isolation. Overall, these findings are more or less aligned with what is considered best practice in writing assessment (see Weigle, 2002).

Teachers do not work in a vacuum; rather, their pedagogy and assessment practices are situated within a complex network of social, institutional and personal forces and relations. Table 10 contains data regarding the factors that aid teachers in their writing assessments.

Table 10

Factors facilitating teachers' writing assessment

<i>Assessment practice</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Exchange of comments among colleagues	26
Personal commitment and enthusiasm	25
Professional training (e.g., workshops, seminars, or academic courses)	23
Clear understanding of alternative assessments	21
Provision of resources (e.g., teaching relief and grants)	13
Support from school management	6

As Table 10 suggests, peer learning as well as teachers' personal commitment and enthusiasm are the top factors that bear on their assessment practices, with a frequency of 26 and 25, respectively. The next sources of influence are professional training and clear understanding of alternative assessments such as peer and self-assessment. Thirteen teachers pointed to the provision of resources as importation in affecting their assessment practices and support from the management

was least likely to affect teachers' assessment practices.

Teachers were also asked about major factor inhibiting their L2 writing assessment practices. The four top barriers in order of frequency were heavy teaching duties, planning and designing curricular materials, marking student work, and lack of autonomy to exercise their agency.

Table 11

The possible factors that inhibit teachers' writing assessment practices.

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Teaching duties	24
Design of curriculum	21
Marking	20
Lack of autonomy	20
Teacher appraisal system	15
Lack of knowledge base and understanding	14
Lack of support from senior management	13
Lack of initiative and motivation	9
Administrative duties	8

The teacher appraisal policy and lack of support from senior management were also mentioned as factors that hold back teachers from adopting ideal writing assessment practices. Lack of assessment literacy and of motivation were also factors that were pointed to (see Table 11).

Discussion and Implications

Writing, especially, in a second language is difficult to master. For teachers to help their students in the roller-coaster of learning writing, they need to have adequate competence in both the pedagogy and assessment of L2 writing. That said, the literature on writing assessment literacy is rather slim (Crusan, et al 2016; Lam, 2019). This study intended to add to the existing limited body of knowledge on teachers WAL by surveying a sample of Iranian English teachers on their perceptions, knowledge, and practices in assessing English writing.

As the findings of this study suggest, the majority of teachers saw the main purpose of assessing writing as grading and reporting, which can be attributed to the dominant exam-driven culture of the country. This in turn rooted in the centralized educational system of the country (see Marefat & Heydari, 2018). This is unfortunate because the main purpose of writing assessment is to help learners become writers (Ruecker & Crusan, 2018). What is concerning is that when teachers' dominant conception of assessment is accountability, this has serious washback on their pedagogical decisions. Particularly, teachers would inevitably be driven to focus on aspect of writing that are most commonly tested and it is known that the important dimensions of writing are the least amenable to testing and measurement (see Broad, 2003; Haswell, 2004). This would translate into

focusing on surface issues in writing pedagogy. Therefore, one major step towards fostering teachers' WAL is to help them question the taken for granted assumptions regarding the ontology of English language in general (see Canagarajah, 2020) and that of writing in specific. This would entail understanding and tailoring multiple discourses of writing in light of local needs and demands (see Ivanic, 2004)

Teachers' beliefs about and conceptions of assessment are known to influence their pedagogical and assessment practices (Brown & Xu, 2016; Inbar-lourie, 2008; Kwak, 2019). It was observed that most teachers believe that bureaucratic rituals of accountability, reporting, and grading are the major purpose of assessing writing. As long as such beliefs are there, changes in practice are difficult to imagine. At the same time, conceptions and beliefs are shaped within a socio-historical temporality and spatiality and as such do not lend themselves to short-term fixing. Grand changes in broad national and teacher education philosophy must take place; otherwise, expecting change in conceptions of assessment to take place in isolation from wider socio-cultural spaces is not realistic.

In this study, most teacher complained that university assessment courses are divorced from the reality of school assessment practices. The implication for mentors and university instructors of assessment courses is that they should be aware of Bernstein's (2000) distinction between vertical and horizontal discourses. That is, assessment as a social practice is always local, unpredictable, and open-ended. As such, it defies totalizing vertical discourses which apparently have off-the-cuff solutions for each assessment situation. In other words, assessment is far from an exact science. Instead, it is social practice with epistemic, embodied, ethical,

and institutional dimensions, which if ignored, assessors lose their touch with the reality of classroom and school assessment. Accordingly, it is fruitful for assessment instructors to adopt an epistemology of an action so that they can approximate their academic courses to the actual world of language classrooms (see Poehner & Inbar-Lourie, 2020). Most current assessment textbooks make the flawed assumption that knowledge of large-scale assessment automatically carries over to classroom assessment. This mindset has to change because the discourse of classroom assessment necessitates epistemologies that are entirely different from those of the dominant testing culture (see Inbar-Lourie, 2008). As such, instructors may need to abandon the (post)positivism which informs Applied Linguistics in general (Leki & Silva, 2004) and language testing in particular (McNamara & Roever, 2006) to remain open to the local, the contingent, and circumstantial in language assessment practice.

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