

## Research Article

# INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION, TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND WRITING PROFICIENCY ON CLASSROOM-BASED WRITING ASSESSMENT: A CASE OF RATERS' FAIRNESS IN SCORING

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## Abstract

One significant aspect of teaching development is to acquire the ability of Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL). However, it is neglected in Iranian context. Taking the importance of academic qualification, writing proficiency and teaching experience with regard to writing assessment, the present quantitative study made attempt to investigate the effect of academic qualification, writing proficiency and teaching experience on writing assessment. In order to achieve the research objectives, 30 EFL teachers who teach English language in different language institutes in Iran along with 20 advanced level EFL learners from ILI were selected. Data were gathered through teachers' writing proficiency test, students' writing proficiency test and an assessment rubric. The Findings indicated a small relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment as well as between writing proficiency and writing assessment. However, the relationship between teaching experience and writing assessment was medium.

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## Introduction

Classroom assessment has been known to as an immediate way of witnessing student learning and progress [1]. Over the last decades, teaching practitioners' willingness has witnessed a paradigm shift from using assessment to grant credits and scores to students to a more homogeneous effort of enterprise on student's optimum learning [2,3].

A key concept of Assessment For Learning (AFL), Teacher Assessment (TA) is known as educational methodology and "dialogic learner-centered" assessment means of writing [4, 5]. As an query for further research, previous studies on EFL writing have seen disagreements over the adjustment of TA from different aspects, including the simplicity of language in peer feedback with regard to teacher corrective feedback [6], relative success of TA in developing L2 writers' evaluative judgment.

Teachers' lack of assessment literacy as well as poor assessment practices can have negative impact on students' time, motivation, and confidence. Therefore, despite considerable amount of teachers' professional time on assessment-related work, they do not often have the

competence to do it well [7-15].

In addition, Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) has an increasingly significant role in language pedagogy and makes a constitutive part of language teachers' professional competence [16,17]. In Iran, studies on LAL has received researchers' attention by large. Previous research show concerns with regard to teachers' level of LAL (e.g. Abbasian & Koosha, 2017; Afsahri & Heidari Tabrizi, 2017; Afshar & Ranjbar, 2021; Ahmadi & Mirshojaee, 2016; Rezaei Fard & Tabatabaei, 2018). Teachers' LAL has been shown to have important connections with students' writing achievement.

Writing skill is often underestimated in L2 classroom because teachers do not have adequate training in writing instruction and assessment [18]. Teachers' abilities and expertise in teaching and assessing writing and practice play a key role in their academic life [19]. As Hyland (2013) states "teacher feedback should play an important role in scaffolding cognitive development, alerting students to their strengths and weaknesses, and contributing to their acquisition of disciplinary subject matter and writing conventions". Therefore, a teacher who does not have the

expected and standard writing proficiency will not be able to help a learner to improve his/her writing. Surprisingly, teachers' writing proficiency is under-researched.

In EFL contexts, language teachers still control writing assessment through the use of writing activities in order to make summative judgments about student performance [20]. Taking the potential of assessment to "scaffold" the students writing into account, it seems that assessment should be re-conceptualized as the building block of classroom writing. Over the past few years, WAL has attracted research attention [21]. EFL teachers often underestimate the teaching and detailed assessments of writing in their classrooms because they did not receive adequate relevant training [18]. "Good assessment practices are essential to the teaching of second language writing" [7], so to provide the in-service and pre-service EFL teachers with adequate assessment training to make them able to monitor student progress and to improve the learning potential of assessment is a necessity [14,22-26]. However, few studies have touched L2 teachers' writing assessment literacy, beliefs, and training requirements.

The research gap in WAL is referred to the major hindrance to the proper application of writing assessment [27]. In addition, Iranian EFL teachers' WAL, and training needs attention because it could provide support for further learning on this issue. Besides, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, as far as the researches are concerned, little if any research has been done to look at teachers' AL in the Iranian education context. Therefore, taking into account the important role of teachers in an EFL context, their teaching expertise, as well as their academic qualification, and regarding a research inquiry for doing more WAL research to come into more context-specific conclusions [7,27], discontent with the contemporary LAL of Iranian teachers, and Iranian writing teachers' lack of tendency to incorporate innovative assessment techniques, this study was an attempt to fill the gaps in the literature regarding teachers' writing proficiency, their academic qualification and experiences in an EFL classroom context. The potential role of teachers' pedagogical literacy and also their academic qualification as well as experience remain under-investigated and so deserving more attention. More specifically, this study with a critical view about writing assessment employs a contrastive analysis method to compare the effect of a variety of factors including academic qualification, writing proficiency and teaching experience. Therefore, the innovative aspect of the present study could be applied in the investigation of the interplay among these parameters in a single study. In other words, to the best of researcher's knowledge, none of the studies investigated the interplay among these parameters in a single study. In line with the research objectives, the following questions were raised:

- Is there any significant relationship between academic qualification on writing assessment in case of raters'?

- Is there any significant relationship between writing proficiency on writing assessment in case of raters'?

### **Review of the Related Literature**

A few studies have examined the L2 teachers' writing assessment literacy, beliefs, and training needs. For instance, attempted to investigate WAL of Iranian English language teachers along with their perceptions and practices of writing assessment based on study to shed light on the current situation and to predict and accommodate for future writing assessment needs as well as how contextual and experiential factors affect teachers' WAL, conception, and practice [7, 21]. Hence, a test of WAL along with an adapted version of questionnaire for writing assessment conceptions and practice was distributed among 120 Iranian in-service teachers chosen based on convenience sampling [7]. Based on the analysis results, WAL of participant teachers were not adequate. Regarding the conceptions of writing assessment, most of the participants give momentum to innovative assessment techniques like portfolio and self/peer assessment methods, however, practically speaking, these methods were rarely used. Moreover, teaching experience and context had no effect on teachers' WAL and practice.

Valizadeh M investigated the Turkish EFL teachers' previously received assessment training courses, their perceived needs for training in this field as well as their attitudes towards the testing/assessment practices in language programs [28]; however, the focus of the present research was not the general domain of language testing and assessment, but the testing and assessment in L2 writing.

Recently, Mede and Atay investigated the assessment literacy of Turkish English teachers working at the preparatory programs offered by state and private universities in Turkey [29]. A majority of the Turkish EFL teachers lacked training and were in need for more advanced training in preparing classroom test, using ready-made tests, providing feedback on assessment, and applying self- or peer-assessment.

In another study, Mahfoodh's invested students' emotional responses toward teachers' WCF practices [30]. He observed that the receiving unfocused WCF on their writing made students frustrated. They react toward their teachers' WCF in the following classification: accepting WCF, rejecting WCF, surprise, happiness, dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, and satisfaction. He believes that some of the students' emotional reaction was due to miscommunication between teachers and students.

More recently, Nemati, Alavi, Mohebbi and Panahi Masjedlou examined 311 elementary, intermediate, and upper-intermediate and advanced language learners' understandings, beliefs, and preferences about teachers' feedback practice in Iranian classes [31]. The findings indicated some similarities and differences across the three

proficiency levels under scrutiny. They all were interested in direct unfocused WCF, however, they had different standpoints on the satisfaction with their teachers' WCF strategy and practice; requiring to revise their writing after receiving teacher's WCF; the intended structures on which teachers should give WCF; and how they feel after receiving WCF. Furthermore, the findings revealed some differences between research findings, teacher's WCF practice, and learners' preferences.

Crusan et al. were among those who studied the mentioned issues in relation to ESL and EFL writing teachers from 41 countries on five continents [7]. A significant difference was found among teachers in terms of their linguistic background and teaching experience, but generally, 26% of the teachers had received little or no training in teaching and assessing writing.

Lee et al. explored the efforts made by two secondary teachers in Hong Kong to improve WCF innovation [32]. Interestingly, the teachers were unable to effectively use the WCF principles they have learnt from teacher training courses.

In another study, Junqueira and Payant examined novice teacher's WCF beliefs and practices [33]. They observed that, despite teacher beliefs in giving WCF on global concerns, in practically speaking, he provided WCF on local issues most of the time. Focus is another issue.

Öz explored 120 Turkish EFL teachers' preferences of common assessment techniques and practices [34]. It was found that "most Turkish EFL teachers rely on conventional methods of assessment rather than formative assessment processes". Furthermore, he found significant differences among teachers in their assessments "according to years of teaching experience, gender, and private vs. public schools' variables". He concluded that teachers should develop assessment for learning (AFL) strategies and feedback procedures. They also need support from different sources to recognize the effect of their previous perspectives on their practices and weigh them against the insights offered by the new assessment culture.

In another study, Han and Kaya examined the assessment practices as well as preferences in 95 Turkish EFL teachers about assessment [35]. The results of data analysis results revealed that listening and writing skills were viewed as less important for the teachers whereas speaking was the most challenging skill to assess. Additionally, even if the teachers underwent pre- or in-service assessment training, they did not alter their personal assessment preferences and they most often depended on them.

### **The Present Study**

The first group of participants of this quantitative study consisted of 20 EFL advanced learners learning English in a private foreign language institute called ILI in Zanjan.

Both male and female learners participated in this study. Their age ranged between 20-35. The participants of the present study were selected from Turkish and Persian backgrounds, from 2 classes, using snowball sampling.

The second group of participants was selected among 30 EFL teachers teaching English language in different language institutes in Iran which were also selected through snowball sampling. Both male and female teachers were included in this study. The participants of the present study were selected from Persian backgrounds. Their age range was between 30-50. They had different educational background and years of experience. They teach at different language institutes.

To comply with the objectives of the present study, the following instrumentations were utilized:

#### *Teachers' writing proficiency test*

In order to assess the writing proficiency of the teachers, an essay writing with a minimum of 250 words written in 40 min was adopted from Cambridge IELTS 11 (General Module) because IELTS essay writing task was a valid measure of assessing writing proficiency. It includes authentic International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam papers. To select these types of writing tasks, Coniam and Falvey's (2013) Hong Kong language proficiency assessment for teachers of English (LPATE) and Arizona's Spanish proficiency test for bilingual teachers (Grant 1997) was followed. The writings were assessed by one of the researcher herself. To ensure the reliability of the assessment, writing task was rated again by another expert. The Pearson correlation coefficient interrater reliability was estimated .96.

#### *Students' writing proficiency test*

In line with the objectives of the present study, a writing test from the TOEFL Preparation Test were administered to student participants. TOEFL Test Preparation is an achievement test used as one of the dominant instruments in educational settings to determine if students have met specific learning goals. So achievement test was used to decide upon the amount of the instructions learned by the EFL learners. Therefore, it was not necessary to check reliability and content validity because TOEFL Preparation Test is a standard test and its reliability and validity have already been determined. The results of the performance on this test were analysed using IELTS TASK 2 Writing band to find any significant differences.

#### *Assessment Rubric*

The public version of IELTS TASK 2 writing band descriptors was used as a means to assess the participant students' writing. Comprising of 9 bands, the assessment criteria include: task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy.

In order to conduct this study as mentioned in the participants' section, 30 EFL teachers who teach English language in different language institutes in Iran were selected to take part in the present study. Also 20 advanced level EFL learners from ILI were selected to fulfil the objectives of the present study. The participants were given a brief introduction to the study. It is important to note that, permission obtained from the students involved in the project to record their voices while being interviewed. These records were then transcribed by the researcher.

Teacher participants were first asked to provide fill in a datasheet with regard to their academic qualification, writing proficiency and teaching expertise. Then, content analysis framework was used to analyse the data collected from interview.

Next, in order to test teachers' writing proficiency, participant teachers took the writing proficiency test. Later, participant students took the writing test. Afterwards, participant teachers assessed participant students writing based on writing assessment rubric. The quantitative data, gained by scoring, were analysed using SPSS version. The mean score for each item of the questionnaire were calculated using correlation coefficient. Finally, the researcher presented the results of quantitative data in form of tables.

**Results**

*The relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment*

In order to test any significant relationship (if any) between

academic qualification and writing assessment in case of raters', an Eta test was run between the results obtained from data with regard to participant teachers' academic qualification and their writing assessment obtained through IELTS writing assessment Rubric. The results are displayed in Table 1.

As it is evident in Table 1, on the basis of Kohen table, the analysis of correlation between academic qualification and writing assessment in case of raters' is a small relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment (.335). Moreover, it is required to test the homogeneity of variances (Table 2), therefore, we can run Anova test to see any significant relationship (Table 3). The result of the Anova test Table 3 also indicates a small relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment (.305).

*The relationship between teaching experience and writing assessment*

In order to test any significant relationship (if any) between teaching experience and writing assessment in case of raters', another Eta test was run between the results obtained from data obtained with regard to teaching experience and their writing assessment obtained through IELTS writing assessment rubric. The results are displayed in Table 4.

As shown in table 4, on the basis of Kohen table, the analysis of correlation between teaching experience and writing assessment in case of raters' is medium. Moreover, it is required to test the homogeneity of variances (Table 5).

Table 5 shows homogeneity between teaching experience

**Table 1**

Eta correlation between teachers' academic qualification and writing assessment.

		Value	
Nominal by Interval	Eta	Mean of Scores Dependent	0.335
		Education Dependent	0.915

**Table 2**

Test of Homogeneity of academic qualification and writing assessment.

Mean of Scores			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.873	2	20	0.18

**Table 3**

ANOVA (Academic Qualification and Writing Assessment).

Mean of scores					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.192	2	0.596	1.261	0.305
Within Groups	9.455	20	0.473		
Total	10.647	22			

**Table 4**

Eta Correlation between teaching experience and writing assessment.

		Value	
Nominal by Interval	Eta	Mean of Scores Dependent	0.36
		Experience Dependent	0.969

and writing assessment, therefore, we run Robust Tests of Equality of Means, Post Hoc Tests and Anova to see any significant relationship (Tables 6-8).

As shown in Table 7, there is also a medium relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment.

As shown in Table 6, there is also a medium relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment.

As Table 8 indicates, there is also a medium relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment (0.249).

**Table 5**

Test of homogeneity of variances.

Mean of Scores			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.863	2	20	0.181

**Table 6**

Robust tests of equality of means.

Mean of Scores				
	Statistic <sup>a</sup>	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	1.289	2	9.379	0.32
Brown-Forsythe	1.293	2	12.76	0.308
a- Asymptotically F distribute				

**Table 7**

Post Hoc tests.

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Mean of Scores						
Tukey HSD						
(I) Experience	(J) Experience	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Novice	Semi experienced	0.307738	0.378635	0.7	-0.6502	1.2657
	Experts	0.578571	0.335389	0.22	-0.27	1.4271
Semi experienced	Novice	-0.307738	0.378635	0.7	-1.2657	0.6502
	Experts	0.270833	0.351446	0.73	-0.6183	1.16
Experts	Novice	-0.578571	0.335389	0.22	-1.4271	0.27
	Semi experienced	-0.270833	0.351446	0.73	-1.16	0.6183

**Table 8**

ANOVA (teaching experience and writing assessment).

Mean of Scores					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.383	2	0.692	1.493	0.249
Within Groups	9.264	20	0.463		
Total	10.647	22			

**Table 9**

Eta Correlation between writing proficiency and their writing assessment.

Value			
Nominal by Interval	Eta	Mean of Scores Dependent	7%
		Writing Course Dependent	91%

**Table 10**

Independent Samples Test of Assessment Training

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances								
	F	Sig.	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal Variances assumed	0.009	0.926	0.463	0.21	648	0.143542	0.310146	-0.501442	788525
Equal variances not assumed			0.475	15.84	642	0.143542	.3.2288	-0.499021	786105

Table 11  
Independent Samples Test of Writing Courses.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances								
	F	Sig.	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal Variances assumed	1.439	0.244	-0.3	21	0.767	-0.089015	0.296581	-705790	527760
Equal variances not assumed			-0.249	16.412	0.772	-0.089015	0.30268	-729362	55331

*The Relationship between Teachers' Writing Proficiency and their Writing Assessment*

In order to test any significant relationship (if any) between writing proficiency and writing assessment in case of raters, another Eta test was run between the results obtained from data obtained with regard to writing proficiency and their writing assessment obtained through IELTS writing assessment rubric. The results are displayed in Table 9.

As shown in table 9, on the basis of Kohen table, the analysis of correlation between writing proficiency and writing assessment in case of raters' is small. In addition, an independent t-test was run to test the relationship between writing courses/assessment training and writing assessment in case of raters' (Tables 10 & 11).

As shown in Table 10, there is no significant between assessment training and writing assessment.

As shown in Table 11, there is no significant between writing courses.

**Discussion**

Assessment remains an ever-present issue of any writing classroom and is necessarily important to the academic success of students [14]. To understand what a good assessment practice is often referred to as assessment literacy is necessary for teachers. Teachers' abilities and expertise in teaching and assessing writing and practice play a key role in their academic life [19]. Recently, Crusan et al. argued that assessment literacy entails what and how to assess and also the issues of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices [7]. Additionally, the factors which affect teachers' decisions about what and who to do things in the classroom "include teaching context, teachers' prior language learning experiences, and teacher learning, both as a practitioner and a student" [7].

Such literacy is a necessary skill, which contributes to motivating or undermining students' learning [7,11,14,26,29].

Given this, though teachers spend much of their professional time on assessment-related activities, they often fail to do it well [7-15,36,37].

Writing is a necessary for literacy and any higher academic

achievement [38]. Nearly every academic effort involves some kind of writing varying from putting up a few sentences to composing pages of coherent and rigorous texts. Writing is interesting for students, educators and even professionals. First, some have nurtured an affirmative improvement towards writing; second, the majority has different levels of aversion towards writing. However, writing is the most feared skill amongst all the four language skills, both academically and professionally.

EFL teachers often undermine the teaching and detailed writing assessments in their classrooms because they have adequate relevant training [18]. Writing assessment in EFL contexts is still controlled by language teachers' use of writing activities to make summative judgments about student performance [20]. Taking the potential of assessment to "scaffold" the students writing into account, it seems that assessment should be re-conceptualized as the building block of classroom writing.

Teachers' assessment literacy and beliefs contribute to strengthen or weaken students' learning; thus, examining such literacy is important so as to fulfil the teachers' training requirements. The main purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment of Iranian EFL teachers. The results of data analysis showed that there is a small relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment, this finding is consistent with that of Han and Kaya (2014) examining the assessment practices as well as preferences in 95 Turkish EFL teachers about assessment. They revealed that speaking was "the most challenging skill to assess" [35].

The following discusses the results of the research by referring to the research questions posed by this study.

The results of data analysis indicate a small relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment as well as relationship between writing proficiency and writing assessment. However, the relationship between teaching experience and writing assessment was medium. It can be concluded, although not much important, teaching experience is among factors which can affect writing assessment of teachers, therefore, it is necessary to be taken into account.

In the meanwhile, the present study investigates the

relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' teaching experience and writing assessment. In this regard, the results indicate that there is a medium relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' teaching experience and writing assessment. Some participants recognized the importance and relevance of teaching experience with WAL for Iranian EFL context. This finding matches with Öz (2014) who sowed significant differences among teachers in their assessments "according to years of teaching experience" [34].

In addition, this study investigates the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' writing proficiency and writing assessment. In this regard, the results indicate that there is a small relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' writing proficiency and their writing assessment. In this sense, the finding of the present study is inconsistent with that of Mede and Atay (2017) who concluded that majority of the Turkish EFL teachers lacked training and were in need for more advanced training in assessment [29].

#### *Limitations, Implications, and Suggestions for Future Research*

Like any study, this study is pertinent to some limitations and delimitations. The issue of gender was not addressed. In addition, despite various rubrics, this study examined the effect of different factors such as academic qualification writing proficiency and teaching experience on writing assessment using IELTS writing assessment rubric, other rubrics were not taken into account. Moreover, participants were only selected among English advanced learners. The future studies may well use the following insights to carry out research.

The present study has some pedagogical implication for EFL. From a theoretical point of view, this study also tries to make a contribution to the existing knowledge on language studies focusing writing assessment in EFL settings as underrepresented settings, the current understanding of WAL development and provide a more accurate picture of writing assessment training needs of Iranian teachers and the development of more efficient teacher education courses. Practically speaking, given the fact that teaching experience turned to be influential in developing WAL, it is recommended to make use of experienced teachers for writing courses. In addition, the study has raised teachers' awareness on writing assessment; this result in their being more aware of WLA in situations they are exposed to. This study is of importance as it may also be applicable for language teachers in recognizing the importance of assessment in teaching-learning process. It also paves the way for all teachers and students to improve writing assessment.

The future studies may well use the following insights to carry out research. The assessment of other language-related skills can be investigated in relation to academic qualification, teaching experience and assessment. It

is suggested to develop tests of writing assessment in terms of their relationship among academic qualification, teaching experience and assessment. Similar studies can be carried out in other learning contexts such as schools and universities. Other proficiency levels are suggested to be investigated. Gender differences can be taken into account as another research avenue. The relevant issues identified in this study also provide a departure for better understanding and further researching factors affecting writing assessment to develop teaching/learning English language [39,40].

#### **Conclusion**

To prepare teachers for WCF practice, writing instruction, and assessing writing is a necessity. It is important to incorporate WAL into teacher training programs. We hope this study triggers more research on Iranian EFL teachers' academic qualification, writing proficiency and teaching experience with regard to writing assessment which is currently under-researched. Future research needs to pay attention to the role of teacher language proficiency in shaping teachers classroom practice and the differential impacts of teacher language proficiency on different language skills and different aspects of classroom instruction.

Since CAL is essential for teachers, to prepare the students to tackle with the final exams and to carry out their classroom-based assessment and make informed decisions with regard to their students' achievements, assessment with the learning promotion and improvement of the students' performance should be given more attention. The theoretical and philosophical knowledge of assessing students' learning, selecting appropriate assessment techniques, designing valid assessment tasks, offering feedback to students' performances, and evaluating the process of teaching and learning should receive utmost attention, particularly, with regard to writing instruction and assessment. The results of data analysis indicated a small relationship between academic qualification and writing assessment as well as relationship between writing proficiency and writing assessment. However, the relationship between teaching experience and writing assessment was medium. It can be concluded, although not much important, teaching experience is among factors which can affect writing assessment of teachers, therefore, it is necessary to be taken into account.

In the meanwhile, the present study investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' teaching experience and writing assessment. In this regard, the results indicated that there is a medium relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' teaching experience and writing assessment. Some participants recognized the importance and relevance of teaching experience with WAL for Iranian EFL context.

In addition, this study investigated the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' writing proficiency and writing

assessment. In this regard, the results indicated that there is a small relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' writing proficiency and their writing assessment.

Taking the aforementioned results into account, it is concluded that to pay close attention to the content of teacher training programs and include content in relation to what is referred to as knowledge-for-teaching which is already called content knowledge or pedagogical knowledge by policy makers is of great significance. Material developers should improve writing by the inclusion of areas in the syllabus which needs more practice. Teachers are required to increase WAL to increase their class output in writing.

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