

Writing Assessment Literacy and Its Role in Shaping EFL Student Learning and Performance in Indonesian Universities

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Abstract

Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) is an essential competency for English lecturers in higher education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts such as Indonesia, where cultural and pedagogical traditions often shape assessment practices. Despite growing attention to assessment literacy, limited research has explored how different WAL levels relate to students' learning experiences and writing performance. This study addresses that gap by examining how lecturers' WAL influences student outcomes in Indonesian universities. Using a sequential mixed-methods design, Phase 1 involved 24 EFL lecturers who completed a Writing Assessment Literacy Test. Results identified three WAL groups: Excellent (50%), Good (29.2%), and Low (20.8%). One lecturer from each group was selected for Phase 2, along with their respective student cohorts ($n = 66$). Data sources included student responses to an Assessment Experience Questionnaire, writing samples evaluated with a standardized rubric, and statistical analyses using Kruskal-Wallis tests and Spearman rank correlations. Findings revealed significant differences in student learning experiences across groups ($K = 40.791$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta = 0.616$), with the Low WAL group reporting the highest learning scores. In contrast, the Good WAL group achieved the highest writing performance ($K = 6.531$, $p = 0.038$, $\eta = 0.0719$), suggesting a possible "optimal zone" of assessment practice. Strong positive correlations were found between student learning and writing outcomes ($\rho = 0.63-0.84$, $p < 0.05$). These findings indicate that WAL influences student outcomes, but not in a strictly linear way, emphasizing the need for context-aware and pedagogically responsive assessment literacy development.

Keywords: writing assessment literacy, student learning practices, writing performance, EFL context.

INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is widely recognized as a fundamental component of academic success in higher education, serving not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for critical thinking, knowledge construction, and disciplinary engagement. However, despite the central role of writing in academic development, writing assessment remains one of the most underdeveloped and inconsistently applied areas of language education in many

EFL university contexts ([Ahmed, 2018](#); [Lee, 2017](#); [Guo & Xu, 2020](#); [Wang et al., 2020](#); [Huhta et al., 2023](#)). In Indonesia, for example, writing assessment practices are often shaped by institutional norms, personal teaching experience, or traditional grading systems, rather than by research-informed principles of effective assessment ([Maharani et al., 2024](#); [Aryana et al., 2024](#); [Sudimantara et al., 2025](#)). Studies by [Fitriyah et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Nurhayati \(2020\)](#) also found that many lecturers rely heavily on surface-level corrections or generalized scoring, which fail to provide students with meaningful feedback that supports revision and deeper learning. This issue is further compounded by the assumption that linguistic competence or teaching experience alone is sufficient for assessing writing, which overlooks the specialized knowledge and reflective judgment required for high-quality assessment.

Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL), defined as the ability to design, implement, interpret, and use writing assessments appropriately ([Valizadeh, 2019](#); [Jalilzadeh et al., 2023](#)), is not consistently developed through pre-service training or in-service professional development. As noted by [Tayyebi et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Crusan et al. \(2016\)](#), many teacher education programs fail to build lecturers' capacity to develop or apply clear rubrics and assessment criteria. Consequently, lecturers lack both the theoretical foundation and the practical strategies needed to align assessments with learning goals, interpret student writing reliably, and provide feedback that promotes revision. These limitations directly influence how students engage with writing tasks, respond to feedback, and improve their academic writing performance ([Mellati & Khademi, 2018](#); [Lee & Coniam, 2013](#); [Cui et al., 2021](#)). Without adequate assessment literacy, even well-intentioned instruction hinders rather than enhances students' writing development. Therefore, attention to how writing is taught and assessed in EFL university settings is essential for improving both teaching effectiveness and student writing outcomes.

Recent studies in the Indonesian context have highlighted several critical issues concerning EFL teachers' writing assessment literacy (WAL), particularly in terms of knowledge, beliefs, and practices. [Maharani et al. \(2024\)](#) found that teacher educators' WAL is shaped by their academic and professional experiences, such as teaching IELTS preparation and prior training, yet their assessment practices remain limited in diversity and are challenged by factors such as heavy workloads, low student proficiency, and time constraints. Similarly, [Munasih et al. \(2024\)](#) reported that vocational school teachers often lacked formal training in writing assessment, resulting in inconsistencies between their conceptual understanding and classroom implementation. In a different educational setting, [Sukenti et al. \(2022\)](#) revealed that madrasah teachers' writing assessment practices are strongly influenced by personal identity and religious values, highlighting the role of faith-based beliefs in shaping assessment approaches. Meanwhile, [Aryana et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasized teachers' demands for assessment models aligned with 21st-century learning, calling for greater emphasis on critical thinking, collaboration, objectivity, and procedural clarity. Complementing these findings, [Ramadani et al. \(2023\)](#) observed that teachers tended to rely on limited assessment task types and holistic scoring, often hindered by time constraints, low student motivation, and inadequate assessment criteria. Together, these studies suggest that while Indonesian EFL teachers recognize the importance of effective writing assessment, their practices are often constrained by a lack of training, contextual challenges, and limited access to diverse and research-based assessment tools.

While existing studies have explored writing assessment literacy (WAL) among Indonesian teachers across various educational settings, including vocational schools, madrasahs, and higher education, most have focused primarily on teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom practices in isolation. These investigations have offered valuable insights into the challenges teachers face, such as limited training, assessment task design, personal values, and the need for 21st-century-oriented models. However, little attention has been given to how lecturers' assessment competencies, particularly in higher education, translate into measurable student outcomes. Specifically, the relationship between lecturers' WAL and students' learning practices and writing performance remains underexplored, despite the increasing emphasis on assessment as a tool for learning and development. Moreover, existing studies rarely examine this relationship through empirical data that connect teacher competencies with student achievement. This study addresses this critical gap by investigating the influence of lecturers' writing assessment literacy on students' learning engagement and writing performance in Indonesian EFL university settings. It contributes a novel perspective by not only assessing lecturers' WAL levels but also linking these levels to actual student outcomes. Guided by three research questions, this study seeks to examine (1) how lecturers' writing assessment literacy impacts students' learning practices, (2) how it affects students' writing performance, and (3) what relationships exist between these variables. In doing so, the research offers empirical evidence that can inform assessment training, curriculum development, and policy decisions in EFL higher education.

METHOD

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and comparative approaches across two distinct phases. Sequential mixed-methods designs are particularly effective for exploring complex educational phenomena where one phase builds upon the findings of the previous phase to inform deeper investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Ivankova et al., 2006). Phase 1 involved a quantitative assessment of lecturers' writing assessment literacy (WAL) using a standardized instrument, while Phase 2 adopted a non-experimental causal-comparative design to examine the impact of differing WAL levels on student learning practices and writing performance. The preliminary phase was conducted at the Department of English Education, a public university in Karawang, Indonesia, and aimed to establish baseline WAL levels among lecturers. A total of 24 English lecturers were recruited through a university-wide invitation. All participants held at least a Master's degree in TESOL, Applied Linguistics, or closely related fields and had a minimum of two years of experience teaching academic writing in EFL contexts.

To measure WAL, the researchers developed and administered the Writing Assessment Literacy Test (WALT), which assessed multiple domains of assessment competence, including knowledge of assessment purposes, scoring methods, rubric use, and feedback principles. The WALT was designed with reference to validated frameworks of writing assessment literacy (Inbar-Lourie, 2013; Fulcher, 2012) and reviewed by experts in writing assessment and language education. Data from the WALT were analyzed using the Kruskal-Wallis H test, a non-parametric statistical procedure appropriate for comparing three or more independent groups with ordinal data or non-normal distributions (Field, 2018). The analysis identified three distinct performance groups: Excellent performers ($n = 12$; 50%) with a central score of 42.333, Good performers ($n = 7$; 29.2%), and Low performers ($n = 5$; 20.8%) with a central score of 28.200. To ensure balanced representation across WAL levels,

one lecturer was randomly selected from each group ($n = 3$ total) for further participation in Phase 2.

Phase 2 employed a non-experimental causal-comparative design, which is suitable for examining differences between naturally occurring groups without manipulating variables (Gall et al., 2007; Fraenkel et al., 2019). Each selected lecturer's intact writing class was involved in the study, resulting in a total student sample of 66 participants distributed across three groups: Excellent WAL group ($n = 18$), Good WAL group ($n = 24$), and Low WAL group ($n = 24$). All three lecturers retained the same eligibility criteria as in Phase 1, holding at least a Master's degree and possessing a minimum of two years of experience teaching L2 writing. This design enabled the researcher to explore how variations in lecturer assessment literacy influenced both students' reported learning practices and their demonstrated writing performance in real classroom contexts.

The Writing Assessment Literacy Test (WALT) employed in Phase 1 was adapted from well-established assessment literacy frameworks and tailored for use in the Indonesian EFL context. The WALT consisted of 50 items, including both multiple-choice and constructed-response formats, and covered four key domains: (1) assessment principles and theory, (2) assessment design and implementation, (3) feedback and scoring practices, and (4) assessment interpretation and use. Content and construct validity were ensured through expert review by three specialists in language assessment and writing pedagogy, while a pilot trial with a small sample of university instructors helped refine item clarity and response options. Internal consistency reliability was established through Cronbach's alpha, following guidelines by DeVellis (2016), to ensure the instrument's psychometric robustness.

In Phase 2, student learning experiences were measured using the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ) developed by Gibbs (2005), which evaluates learners' perceptions of assessment practices, feedback, and the extent to which assessments support learning. The AEQ was administered using a 5-point Likert scale format and has been widely used and validated in higher education research to assess students' affective and cognitive responses to assessment contexts (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). To measure writing performance, student essays were collected using standardized descriptive writing prompts under uniform time constraints across all groups to ensure comparability. All writing samples were evaluated using a standardized analytic scoring rubric, which included five components: content, organization, language use, vocabulary, and mechanics. The rubric was adapted from Jacobs et al. (1981) and modified for appropriateness in an EFL university context, ensuring alignment with typical academic writing expectations and scoring consistency across raters.

Quantitative data were analyzed using non-parametric and correlational techniques suitable for small and non-normally distributed samples. The Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to identify significant differences in learning perceptions and writing performance across the three groups, a method appropriate for comparing independent groups without assuming normality (Field, 2018). To explore associations between students' perceived learning experiences and their writing performance, Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was employed. Effect sizes were calculated and interpreted based on Cohen's (1988) benchmarks (small $\geq .10$, medium $\geq .30$, large $\geq .50$) to evaluate the practical

significance of observed differences. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software, with a significance threshold set at $\alpha = 0.05$ to determine statistical significance.

FINDINGS

This section presents and discusses the results of the study, addressing the three research questions concerning the distribution of lecturers' writing assessment literacy (WAL) and its impact on students' learning practices and writing performance. Findings from the Kruskal-Wallis test and Spearman correlation analyses are reported to identify group differences and relationships among variables. These results are then interpreted in relation to relevant literature, with attention to emerging patterns and their implications for EFL writing instruction and assessment in higher education.

Table 1. Writing assessment literacy distribution of lecturers

WAL Level	Number of Lecturers	Percentage (%)	Mean Score	Competency Description	Lecturer Selected for Phase 2	Score
Excellent	12	50.0%	42.33	Strong competency	Lecturer C	43
Good	7	29.2%	35.00*	Moderate competency	Lecturer B	35
Low	5	20.8%	28.20	Limited assessment literacy	Lecturer A	28

Table 1 presents the writing assessment literacy (WAL) levels distribution among the 24 participating lecturers. The analysis revealed three distinct clusters: Excellent, Good, and Low. Half of the lecturers ($n = 12$, 50%) were categorized as having excellent WAL, with a mean score of 42.33, indicating strong competency across assessment domains. Seven lecturers (29.2%) were classified as having good WAL, with a mean score of approximately 35, reflecting moderate competency. The remaining five lecturers (20.8%) fell into the low WAL category, with a mean score of 28.20, suggesting limited assessment literacy. From each group, one representative lecturer was randomly selected for further participation in Phase 2: Lecturer C (Excellent, score = 43), Lecturer B (Good, score = 35), and Lecturer A (Low, score = 28).

Table 2. Impact of WAL on student learning practices

WAL Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	Sample Size (n)
Low	71.784	9.197	24
Good	52.014	8.293	24
Excellent	52.551	7.738	18

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for students' learning practices as measured by the Assessment Experience Questionnaire, grouped by their lecturers' Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) levels. The results show that students taught by the Low WAL lecturer reported the highest mean learning score ($M = 71.784$, $SD = 9.197$, $n = 24$), which is notably higher than those taught by the Good WAL lecturer ($M = 52.014$, $SD = 8.293$, $n = 24$) and the Excellent WAL lecturer ($M = 52.551$, $SD = 7.738$, $n = 18$).

Table 3. Kruskal-Wallis test results for student learning practices

Statistic	Value
Observed K	40.791
Critical K (df = 2)	5.991
p-value	< 0.0001
Effect size (η)	0.616

These results are surprising, as one might expect students under lecturers with higher assessment literacy to report more positive learning experiences. However, the higher perceived learning in the Low WAL group may reflect contextual factors such as the lecturer's interpersonal engagement, leniency in evaluation, or emphasis on student comfort rather than assessment rigor. This pattern warrants further interpretation, especially considering the statistically significant group differences confirmed by the Kruskal-Wallis test ($K = 40.791$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta = 0.616$), indicating a large effect size. Overall, the data suggest that students' perceptions of learning are not always directly aligned with their lecturers' assessment of literacy levels.

Table 4. Impact of WAL on Student Writing Performance

WAL Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (SD)	Sample Size (n)
Good	82.021	3.913	24
Low	80.771	2.043	24
Excellent	79.861	1.348	18

Table 4 presents students' mean writing performance scores grouped according to their lecturers' Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) levels. The results indicate that students taught by the Good WAL lecturer achieved the highest average writing score ($M = 82.021$, $SD = 3.913$, $n = 24$), followed by those in the Low WAL group ($M = 80.771$, $SD = 2.043$, $n = 24$), and finally the Excellent WAL group ($M = 79.861$, $SD = 1.348$, $n = 18$). Although the differences in scores are not large, they are statistically significant, as confirmed by the Kruskal-Wallis test ($K = 6.531$, $p = 0.038$, $\eta = 0.0719$), indicating a medium effect size.

Table 5. Kruskal-Wallis test results for student writing performance

Statistic	Value
Observed K	6.531
Critical K (df = 2)	5.991
p-value	0.038
Effect size (η)	0.0719

The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in student writing performance across the three WAL groups. The analysis yielded an observed K value of 6.531, which exceeds the critical value of 5.991, with a p-value of 0.038. Since the p-value is below the significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05$), the result indicates a statistically significant difference in writing performance between at least two of the groups. The calculated effect size ($\eta = 0.0719$) corresponds to a medium effect based on Cohen's guidelines, suggesting that the differences, while not large, are educationally meaningful. This supports the interpretation that variations in lecturers' writing assessment literacy levels are associated with measurable differences in students' writing outcomes.

Table 6. Spearman correlation between learning and performance

WAL Group	Spearman ρ	p-value	Interpretation
Excellent	0.79	0.0001125	Strong positive correlation
Good	0.63	0.0011320	Strong positive correlation
Low	0.84	0.0000021	Strong positive correlation

Table 6 presents the results of the Spearman rank-order correlation analysis, which examined the relationship between students' learning experiences and their writing performance across the three WAL groups. The results show a strong positive correlation in all groups, indicating that students who reported higher engagement with assessment-related learning practices also tended to perform better in writing tasks. Specifically, the Low WAL group showed the strongest correlation ($\rho = 0.84$, $p = 0.0000021$), followed by the Excellent WAL group ($\rho = 0.79$, $p = 0.0001125$), and the Good WAL group ($\rho = 0.63$, $p = 0.0011320$). All correlations were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that regardless of the lecturer's assessment literacy level, a consistent and meaningful link exists between how students perceive their learning experiences and their actual writing outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a contextualized understanding of how lecturers' Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) may be associated with students' learning engagement and writing performance in Indonesian EFL higher education. As shown in Table 1, the analysis revealed varying levels of assessment competence among lecturers, with only half classified as demonstrating strong proficiency in essential areas such as assessment principles, task design, and feedback provision. This variation reflects broader concerns in teacher education literature, where the quality of assessment is frequently linked to the quality of teacher preparation programs (Al-Jarf, 2022; González, 2021; Tayyebi et al., 2022). Several scholars argue that effective teacher education should go beyond theoretical instruction to include the development of practical, context-sensitive assessment skills (Afshar & Ranjbar, 2021; Beziat & Coleman, 2015; DeLuca et al., 2013). Lam (2019) similarly found that although many teachers expressed positive beliefs about classroom-based writing assessment, their preferences often leaned toward more student-centered and alternative forms of assessment.

In response to the first research question, the study found a statistically significant relationship between lecturers' Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) and students' perceptions of their learning practices (Table 2). Interestingly, students taught by the lecturer with low WAL reported the highest levels of perceived learning engagement, significantly surpassing those in both the good and excellent WAL groups ($K = 40.791$, $p < 0.0001$, $\eta = 0.616$). Although this result may seem counterintuitive, it points to the possibility that factors beyond assessment expertise, such as the quality of interpersonal interactions and classroom climate, can influence how students perceive their learning experiences. Research has shown that positive emotional factors such as grit, wellbeing, self-efficacy, academic engagement, motivation, and foreign language enjoyment can mediate the relationship between teacher-student dynamics and learners' academic success (Zhang, 2022; Zhong & Zhan, 2024). In this context, a more flexible or approachable instructional style may have fostered a comfortable classroom atmosphere, which students interpreted as supportive and engaging. Brown and Gao (2015) argue that teachers' assessment

conceptions are complex and interpretive in nature, and do not always translate directly into classroom practice. Additionally, a teacher's prior training and professional experiences can shape how assessment knowledge is acquired and applied. Echoing earlier studies (Lam, 2015; Giraldo, 2021; Giraldo & Murcia, 2018), the findings in this study suggest that students' learning perceptions are shaped not only by a lecturer's assessment literacy, but also by how that literacy is enacted through pedagogical choices, relational dynamics, and broader classroom conditions.

The second research question examined the impact of Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) on student writing performance. In this case, the results were more in line with initial expectations: students taught by the lecturer with good WAL achieved the highest average writing scores, followed by those in the low and excellent WAL groups (Table 4). The differences were statistically significant ($K = 6.531$, $p = 0.038$, $\eta = 0.0719$), indicating that the WAL level may influence student writing outcomes. These results suggest that a moderate level of assessment literacy could offer the most balanced approach, combining pedagogical clarity with practical accessibility. Lecturers in this category may apply assessment principles effectively while avoiding overly complex or rigid practices that could hinder student performance. This interpretation is consistent with the view that sound assessment practices are a core element of effective writing instruction (Beck et al., 2018; Nodoushan, 2014). Moreover, the finding challenges the assumption that higher assessment literacy leads to better student outcomes. Instead, it highlights the importance of context-sensitive and student-centered approaches, where assessment practices are adapted to meet learners' needs without sacrificing rigor (Crusan et al., 2016; Valizadeh, 2019; Rad & Alipour, 2023). This emphasizes the need for assessment literacy not only as a technical skill set but also as a flexible pedagogical competence.

The third research question explored the relationship between students' learning practices and their writing performance. The Spearman correlation analysis revealed strong, statistically significant positive correlations across all three WAL groups (Table 6), with coefficients ranging from 0.63 to 0.84. These results suggest that, regardless of the lecturer's assessment literacy level, students who reported higher engagement with assessment-related learning activities, such as understanding criteria, using feedback, and self-monitoring, tended to perform better in writing tasks. This pattern highlights the importance of fostering student involvement in assessment through formative practices that promote metacognitive awareness and goal-oriented learning (Pat-El et al., 2024; Wafubwa, 2020). It also aligns with the principles of Assessment for Learning (AfL), which emphasize the formative use of assessment to enhance both student engagement and academic achievement (Deneen et al., 2019; Lee & Coniam, 2013). Research has shown that critical feedback, when delivered constructively, provides students with specific insights into their thinking, weaknesses, and learning processes, enabling improvement over time (Rabbani & Husain, 2024). In this study, the consistent association between learning engagement and writing outcomes supports the view that students who are meaningfully involved in the assessment process, through reflective and feedback-driven practices, are more likely to demonstrate improved writing performance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) in shaping student learning practices and writing performance in Indonesian EFL higher education. Through a

sequential mixed-methods design, the research explored how variations in lecturers' WAL levels, categorized as Excellent, Good, and Low, influenced students' perceptions of learning and their actual writing outcomes. The findings revealed that while students taught by the Good WAL lecturer achieved the highest writing scores, those taught by the Low WAL lecturer reported the highest levels of perceived learning engagement. These outcomes suggest that WAL alone does not guarantee improved student learning or performance; instead, how assessment knowledge is enacted in the classroom plays a crucial role. Additionally, strong positive correlations between students' learning practices and their writing performance were found across all groups, reinforcing the importance of engaging students in formative assessment processes. These findings underscore the need for teacher education and professional development programs to enhance lecturers' assessment competence and foster context-sensitive and student-centered pedagogical practices.

However, this study is not without limitations. The sample size in Phase 2 was relatively small and limited to three intact classes, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on the cognitive and affective dimensions of student learning without accounting for other contextual variables such as institutional policy, classroom culture, or teacher-student rapport, which may also influence outcomes. Future research could explore WAL in a broader range of institutional settings using larger, more diverse samples and adopt longitudinal or intervention-based designs to examine how changes in assessment literacy over time affect teaching practices and student achievement. Additionally, qualitative inquiry into students' perspectives could deepen our understanding of how they interpret and respond to assessment practices in varied EFL writing contexts.

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