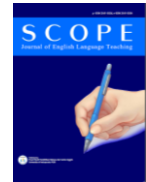




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Research Article

English Writing Assessment in EFL Classrooms at Junior High Schools: What are Teachers' Perceptions?

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KEYWORDS

teacher perceptions;
 writing assessment objectives;
 writing assessment procedures.

A B S T R A C T

This study was conducted to investigate more about how Salatiga junior high school teachers perceived the EFL writing assessment. This study was focused on teachers' perceptions of objectives for writing assessments and their procedures. This research was conducted using the qualitative research method. The subject for this research is 40 English teachers with above 4 years of experience and over twenty-five years of experience. They were chosen by using a purposive sampling technique. The data were collected by distributing the online questionnaire using Google Forms. The data were analyzed by describing the result of the questionnaire. The research findings showed that the assessment process was carried out to enhance the learning process, according to all the teachers. Most teachers did not agree that writing assessments were just to rank the students. The teachers mostly agreed about the purposes of assessing writing for students, defining the construct when assessing writing, establishing standards to evaluate students' writing, informing students of their progress, giving comments rather than marks, giving diagnostic feedback for students, align feedback with the assessment criteria, use different methods, use alternatives for assessing writing, and use writing tests to obtain a good estimate of students' writing ability. The study suggests that teachers should evaluate all elements for a good writing assessment, whether in the objective or procedure comprehensively, especially for junior high school students. Teachers' professional development in assessment must be examined to strengthen teachers' abilities to improve their writing assessment practice and ensure that written assessments are effective.

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INTRODUCTION

In the literature, assessment's effect on teaching and learning has received a lot of attention (Furaidah et al., 2015; Xu & Liu, 2018). Language testing and assessment have been shown to have a significant impact on the quality of academic achievement (Green, 2013). To construct a thorough understanding of what students know, understand, and do with their knowledge as a result of their

insightful interactions, gathering and discussing data from various and diverse sources, the process is called assessment. The process is finished when future learning is improved using the evaluation results (Babaie & Farrokh, 2019).

Nowadays, there is a radical shift occurring in educational assessment away from traditional testing and toward assessing learning. In other words, because traditional approaches to writing assessment are insufficient for a variety of reasons, numerous researchers have made an

effort to examine the effectiveness of implementing new methods of assessing the language learning of various learners. First of all, they lack the acumen to evaluate students' writing abilities based on a single draft that was produced under pressure and on an unfamiliar subject. Second, it is impossible to evaluate a student's overall writing proficiency using a single piece of writing. (Hamid Reza Iraj, Mostafa Janebi Enayat, 2016; Khodashenas & Rakhshi, 2017)

Writing as a language skill, the difficulty of performing it has long been recognized. Various studies supported the notion that writing skills are on a greater level than other main language skills as it needs to pay special attention to how students as English learners perform their capabilities to use language protocol to achieve the goal or intention they arranged as the foundation of their writing. As a result, writing becomes the most difficult skill to master, particularly for EFL students (Nezakatgoo, 2011). There is little attention on how to assess writing effectively and frequently. Assessing language skills is overlooked. Furthermore, some teachers believe that assessing writing entails assigning students a theme to write on and then grading their writing (Yu & Lee, 2015)

Writing proficiency is still a crucial aspect of being educated. While learning to write in one's mother tongue is challenging, learning to write in a foreign or second language is much more challenging. Assessment techniques for student writing are also getting more complicated. This creates a wealth of opportunities for more innovative formal writing assessments as well as assessment-based instruction to support students' writing processes (Tzagari, 2018). According to (Könings & Seidel, 2014), each teacher and student views education differently, and correlated viewpoints support effective teaching and learning processes and also the achievement of the best learning outcomes. To better understand how teachers' perceptions of junior schools in Salatiga in assessing EFL writing, a study was conducted. This study was focused on procedures of classroom writing assessment and their purposes.

Based to (Cizek, 1997), the process of collecting and synthesizing data appropriate to finding and summarizing students' weaknesses and strengths, arranging and improving instruction, or reviewing progress and attempting to make decisions about students, is called assessment. Based on (Rea-Dickens, 2000), in addition to its primary role as a diagnostic tool for teachers to receive feedback on their student's academic progress and achievement of course objectives, this process serves several other purposes. Second, to assist teachers in determining the students' competency in their strengths and weaknesses to guide teachers in improving education. Third, to support educators and educational authorities in assessing the success of instruction and learning. (Angelo,

1995) said that assessment is a continuing activity aimed at understanding and improving students' learning. Its functions are as follows: (a) creating expectations obvious and public; (b) designing to set a set of criteria and high expectations for the effort to improve; (c) methodically collecting, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to evaluate how well outcome meets those requirements and goals; and (d) to use the greatest data to report, describe, and enhance learning.

The evaluation process can be defined as follows, first, provide learning opportunities (ensuring sufficient opportunities for students to achieve these goals). Secondly, evaluate student learning (systematically gather, examine, and interpret data to assess how well student learning satisfies goals). Third, use results (to assess student progress). Formative and summative assessments are the two primary techniques for gathering these learning outcomes (Abdao, 2015). Summative assessment is done at the end of the learning process, while formative assessment is done throughout.

Data about a student's education are gathered through assessment. It can be utilized for summative purposes (evaluating the calibre of student work) or formative purposes (adjusting instruction). Teachers regularly engage in it as a crucial instructional activity in a range of informal and formal settings (Horvath, 2000). To evaluate their students' learning, teachers ought to ask both written and oral questions. Alternative assessment techniques that are more effective for evaluating students and influencing classroom instruction include teacher observation, direct communication, student performances, demonstrations, and portfolios (Brookhart, 1999; Stiggins, 1994).

Based on (Barksdale-Ladd, & Thomas, 2000), according to teacher research, there are five best assessment practices. The first is giving students feedback so they can enhance their learning. Recognizing assessment as a part of a student's work that can be added to a working portfolio is the second step. Third, enabling flexibility to prevent the assessment from taking over the curriculum. The fourth step is to make sure that assessment is used to inform instruction so that teachers can enhance their instruction and ensure student learning while also using multiple measuring tools to evaluate students' learning.

Congruence between instruction, assessment, and outcomes, according to (Reynolds, Doran, Allers, & Agruso, 1995), is required for learning effectively. To inform decisions that have an impact on students' learning, assessments are the systematic gathering of information about student learning (Barbara, 2010). Another national movement that has great potential to enhance student learning is assessment. Assessment involves three steps according to (Walvoord, 2014). First, *Objectives*, this

section discusses what we hope students will be able to do after completing the courses. The objectives or outcomes are other names for the goals. Second, *What elements affect students' learning and how well do they accomplish these objectives?* Measures or evidence are terms used to describe information. Third, *Take action*. How can we make use of the information to improve student learning? (Closing the loop is the process of putting the information to use).

Evaluation and assessment of student writing is a process. At various points throughout the course, there should be an evaluation of student writing and performance in class. This evaluation can take many different forms. In the assessment process, teachers frequently take on a variety of roles, such as critic, motivator, evaluator, collaborator, and so forth (see Brooke Horvath for more on these roles), and respond in a variety of ways (Horvath, 2000). There are some ideas for evaluating students' writing. First, know what the teacher wants their students to be able to do and why. It implies that the teacher should be aware of the assessment's goals. Second, create and implement activities that help students achieve their learning goals. It is about methods and activities that the teacher provides to help students with their writing.

Third, provide feedback early in the writing process. Fourth, there should be opportunities for feedback at various stages of the writing process, and the teacher should offer multiple or varied feedback early on. The instructor should permit students to get writing feedback at different stages. Fifth, communicate your expectations to students openly and honestly. The students should be aware of the teacher's objectives. Sixth, avoid overburdening students with feedback. The teacher provides students with concrete revision options or strategies. Seventh, allow students to keep control of their papers. The teacher should assist students in learning to evaluate their writing. Eighth, reason for responding, the teacher should respond in a variety of ways at various times.

Perception as the method by which we derive meaningful information from physical stimulation (Sainn & Ugwuegbu, 1980). We interpret our emotions in this way. Three critical points about perception are highlighted by Sainn et al. To start, experience, intention, and social needs all play a role in how someone perceives a stimulus in addition to the stimulus itself. Second, when someone perceives something, they are not passive and uncaring; rather, they are actively choosing information and formulating hypotheses to ascertain what is taking place. Third, perception is a more sophisticated mental process that helps a person create a mental model of the world to prepare for and respond to future events. Physical stimulation from a person's sensory receptors, therefore, DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.30998/scope.v8i2.19608>

offers only a small amount of information and cannot be understood without the aid of additional data derived from prior experiences and memory. Physical stimuli become an individual's perceptions when they are correctly interpreted.

Based on (Dave, Laura, & Liz, 2013) emphasize that it requires a lot of effort to construct the meaning of phenomena and that it is not as easy as simply accepting the world as it is. According to her, it is made up of three interactive processes: selecting first, organizing second, and interpreting third. Age, culture, and physiological state are also influencing factors. Many contend that teachers' perceptions affect how they act in class. Student perceptions and language learning issued a warning that teachers should take into account how their students see them in the classroom because this can conflict with individual philosophies and attitudes toward teaching.

The present study reviewed the previous study to compare the results and have much insight. (Fitriyah & Jannah, 2021) conducted research on the advantages and disadvantages of online assessment on student learning behaviour and teacher preparation. Thirty Intensive English Course (IC) students, three EFL teachers, and six IC program students from one of the Islamic Universities in Kediri participated in this case study using the questionnaire. Frequency analysis results from another study (Kirkgoz, Babanoglu, & Ağçam, 2017) showed that performance tasks, classroom observations, and paper-and-pencil tests were the most frequently used assessment tools. The performance-based and communication-based test question types made up the majority of the chosen response items. Base-based assessment types are increasingly used to evaluate student achievement in EFL learning rather than traditional types.

According to (Nasri et al., 2010), A sample of 50 secondary teachers in Brunei were surveyed using a researcher-developed instrument. The study found that teachers had positive opinions of alternative assessments, but the main impact is increased paperwork and time constraints. Alternative assessments can enhance students' critical thinking and creativity. However, respondents feel that alternative assessments enhance their work.

(Agnes & Anam, 2022) conducted research about teachers' perceptions towards the practice of assessment in online classrooms during pandemic of covid-19. Four English teachers of secondary schools participated in this study. The results were as follows; teachers reported issues such as poor internet connection, lack of physical communication, illogical scoring, uninterested students, and low integrity of outcomes. Teachers rated the online evaluation positively and negatively. The teachers were thrilled to try out the new technology to improve the

evaluation process. However, many of them wanted an offline class to evaluate the students.

Compared with the previous study which investigated assessment in general. Besides, the sample was taken from university students, lecturers and senior high school teachers. The present study investigated perceptions specifically in writing assessments to fill the gap. Also, this study took teachers of state junior high schools in Salatiga as a sample. The goal of this study was to examine state junior high school teachers' perceptions toward the writing assessment objectives and writing assessment procedures.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative method. The data analysis technique was used and the data analysis was presented in the form of a description. This study applied purposive sampling. This study included 40 English teachers of state junior high schools in Salatiga, with 15 men and 25 women as participants. Four to more than twenty years of teaching experience were represented in the samples. This study examined teachers' opinions of EFL writing assessments.

An instrument for this study was a questionnaire that was modified from (Nguyen & Truong, 2021). The use of questionnaires is helpful because they can accommodate a huge quantity of data that reflects the population's attitudes, beliefs, habits, and trends while also reducing sampling error (Cresswell, 2012). The whole questionnaire contained 16 statements. There were 6 items in the section on teacher perceptions of writing assessment goals and 10 items in the section on teacher perceptions of writing assessment practices. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale, where 5 was for strongly agreeing (SA), 4 was for agreeing (A), 3 was for being unsure (U), 2 was for disagreeing (D), and 1 was for strongly disagreeing (SD). The instrument was distributed online by using Google Forms. The data was analyzed using descriptive analysis. Then, in the findings and discussion sections, the data were reported and discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were presented based on the thirty-five teachers' answers in the open-ended questionnaire. There were sixteen questions in the questionnaire that had been answered. These findings answered two research questions, they are; what are the teachers' perceptions toward the writing assessment objectives and what are the teachers' perceptions toward the writing assessment procedures.

Perception of Teachers in Writing Assessment Objectives

The Items of questionnaire number 1 to 6 were about knowing the perception of the teacher related to the writing assessment objectives. As stated by (Nguyen & Truong,

2021), the purposes of assessing writing consist of six points as follows, first, assessing students' writing is conducted as part of teaching and learning English. Second, it is part of teaching and learning English. Third, to mark students' writing. Fourth, to evaluate students' competency of course objectives. Fifth, to rank students. The final is to alter current instruction and enhance the learning process.

Table 1. Perception of Teachers in Writing Assessment Objectives

No	Statements	SA%	A%	U%	D%	SD%	TOTAL
1	Assessing students' writing is conducted as part of teaching and learning English.	87,5	7,5	2,5	2,5	0	100
2	Assessment is conducted to mark students' writing.	10	25	32,5	25	7,5	100
3	Assessment is conducted to evaluate students' mastery of course objectives.	22,5	40	32,5	2,5	2,5	100
4	Assessment is conducted to rank students.	7,5	15	2,5	67,5	7,5	100
5	Assessment is conducted to modify ongoing teaching.	12,5	60	0	25	2,5	100
6	Assessment is conducted to improve the learning process	70	30	0	0	0	100

According to Table 1, 7,5% of respondents and 87,5% of respondents strongly agree that evaluating students' writing is a necessary component of teaching and learning English. So, almost all respondents have the same perception of statement number 1. Regarding item number 2, 35% strongly agree and agree that evaluations are done to mark students' writing. 32,5% of respondents cannot decide the statements and 32,5 % of respondents disagree and strongly disagree. It means that the respondents had other techniques to mark writing. Nearly all respondents (62,5%) strongly agree and agree with statement number 3 that assessments are used to gauge students' understanding of course objectives. But (5%) of respondents disagree and strongly disagree with that statement.

Another perception is statement number 4, the teacher's view of whether writing assessment is done to assess student writing or to rank students. Respondents (74%) strongly disagreed with the statement, that the writing assessment did not rank the students based on them. The respondents to item 5 (72,5%) also believed that writing assessments were done to change current instruction. So, They evaluated the assessment and used it to modify the next lesson to be better improved. Item 6 showed that all respondents (100%) believed assessments were done to enhance the learning process. They had the same perception about it.

Perceptions of Teachers in Writing Assessment procedures

This section looked at and talked about how high school EFL teachers used classroom writing assessment techniques. The procedures talked about how teachers should define the construct when evaluating students' writing, set assessment criteria, inform students of the criteria in advance, inform students of their writing progress, provide comments rather than grades on students' writing, provide diagnostic feedback so students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, align feedback with the assessment criteria already set, and use a variety of different assessment methods (Nguyen & Truong, 2021).

Table 2. Perceptions of Teachers in Writing Assessment Procedures

N	Statements	SA%	A%	U %	D%	SD %	TOT AL
7	Teachers should define the construct when assessing writing.	50,0	45	2,5	2,5	0	100
8	Teachers should set criteria to evaluate students' writing.	10,0	85	2,5	2,5	0	100
9	Teachers should inform students of the assessment criteria beforehand.	87,5	7,5	5	0	0	100
10	Teachers should inform students of the progress they make in the writing process.	7,5	82,5	7,5	2,5	0	100
11	Teachers should give comments	37,5	57,5	5,0	0,0	0,0	100

12	Teachers should give diagnostic feedback for students to realize their strengths and weaknesses.	52,5	40	5	2,5	0	100
13	Teachers should align feedback with the assessment criteria already set.	10	50	32,5	7,5	0	100
14	Teachers should use different methods for assessing writing.	80	12,5	2,5	5	0	100
15	Teachers should use alternatives for assessing writing.	55	32,5	10	2,5	0	100
16	Teachers should use writing tests to obtain a good estimate of students' writing ability.	32,5	55	5	5	2,5	100

Table 2 shows the research findings in the section of the writing assessment procedure. The respondents gave the dominant result (95%) in statement number 7 defining the construct when assessing writing, and item number 8 setting criteria to evaluate students' writing. Informing students of their writing progress is item No. 9. They assumed that those three items were very crucial in assessing writing. As illustrated in number 7 although most respondents agree 2,5% disagreed and 2,5% were undecided about the agreement. The same response was also given in number 8. No one disagreed with the statement that students should be informed of the assessment criteria in advance for item number 9, which indicates that they believed the statement to be significant for students. The students should know the writing assessment criteria to prepare themselves to get high scores and do their best effort.

The majority of respondents (90%) agreed with the statement in item 10 that students should be informed of their writing progress. Students needed to know the progress of their learning process in writing according to them. Item number 11 asked respondents if they agreed (95 %) or disagreed (0 %) with providing comments rather than grades on students'

writing. They claimed that giving comments rather than marking was an appropriate feedback technique. The respondent 92,5% showed agreement with providing diagnostic feedback to help students identify their strengths and weaknesses. They assumed diagnostic feedback crucial to know the student's ability and to decide the technique and methods to learn for the student.

As analyzed in item number 12 aligning feedback with the assessment criteria already set, 60% of their agreement and the rest 40% undecided and disagreed. The majority of participants (92,5%) agreed with the statement that teachers should use various methods for evaluating writing in item number 14. They should assess writing using a variety of methods. All strategies may be advantageous; however, utilizing methods rather than a variety of techniques may not aid in the development of student proficiency. In other sayings, various techniques of evaluation should be used (Brown, 2004). In addition in numbers 15 and 16, they (87,5%) agreed. Teachers should use alternatives for assessing writing to measure writing assessment differently and also have variations to break the boredom. The consensus was also seen in response to item number 16, where participants agreed that writing assessments provide a reliable indication of students' writing abilities.

The findings were visible in the questionnaire results. The following section will delve into a thorough analysis of the questionnaire results in light of pertinent theories. According to the data, EFL teachers at state junior high schools in Salatiga believe the writing assessment procedures were beneficial in improving students' writing skills. They all agreed that writing assessments were essential for the development of English writing skills. Writing assessments were significant. Teachers demonstrate their commitment to doing writing assessments in the classroom. Teachers who have a positive perception of writing assessments can help students get better results. Teachers emphasized the importance of writing abilities for students to succeed academically. According to (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010), teachers should establish clear objectives and criteria for writing assessments.

Almost all of the participants agreed on defining language constructs before writing assessments. Many responders agreed on the importance of identifying the writing assessment concept. According to (Phan, 2008), defining the concept of writing is important for teachers to provide criteria for evaluating students' work. Table 2 shows that almost all teachers emphasized the need to establish criteria for writing assessments. Most participants had positive impressions of telling students about evaluation standards, as evidenced by the high agreement percentages compared to disagreements. Teachers emphasized the need to set and discuss criteria with students to ensure fair evaluations and focus on meeting expectations. When students write in class,

the teacher frequently merely assigns a title or a topic. Students create a text, while the teacher merely checks for grammar, vocabulary, and spelling mistakes. As a result, assessing students' writing abilities is not an easy undertaking.

Teachers should establish clear goals and criteria for evaluating students' writing abilities, including proper word form, paragraph order, and topic development. Teachers emphasize the need to master assessment standards for both themselves and their students. (Khongput, 2010; Lee, 2017; Phan, 2008), agree that clear criteria for classroom assessment are crucial for positive feedback. By providing students with success criteria and learning goals, they can assess their progress and improve their writing in the future.

Participants valued progress updates and feedback. Teachers strongly agreed on providing diagnostic feedback to help students understand their strengths and weaknesses, aligning input with pre-established criteria. According to relevant literature (Lee, 2017), feedback should inform students of their strengths and areas for improvement when integrated with planned criteria. The current study found that teachers valued the formative function of writing assessment, which aligns with the type of feedback and progress reporting. Teachers agreed that they should utilise different approaches to assess writing. (Brown, 2004) suggests that while all strategies can be beneficial, relying solely on one strategy may not lead to increased student competency. Different ways of assessment should be used. The teachers who gave responses of unsure or disagreed, lacked confidence in their replies, indicating a limited awareness of other assessment methods. They were unfamiliar with alternative assessment terminology, such as portfolios, journals, or self-assessments. According to (Brown & Hudson, 1998), alternative assessment involves real-world tasks, assessing students' true abilities, focusing on process, and problem-solving skills, and providing information about their strengths and weaknesses. (Klimova, 2011) suggests that teachers should establish a clear evaluation target and use diverse and demanding assessment methods. The strategy was aimed at helping students attain their learning objectives.

Many teachers agreed that writing assessments should be conducted to measure writing ability. According to (Pujianto, 2014), correcting students' writing in large courses can be challenging, even when teachers request peer correction. To effectively reprimand students in this situation, teachers must be both imaginative and careful. According to (Jamalinesari, 2015), the practicality of writing assessment is limited by teachers' ability to provide and students' willingness to accept corrections. (Ozdemir & Aydin, 2015) recommends addressing practical issues with writing assessments. To improve students' writing achievement,

teachers should organise assessment activities that align with the process-based approach.

Compared to the research results of the previous study which the participants from senior high school and university students, this study's value lies in its comprehensive investigation of writing assessments for junior high school students. The analysis is geared towards junior high school students. Focusing on this age group acknowledges the unique characteristics, talents, and challenges they face when completing writing assessments. These factors might influence the strategies which should be used in the assessment process. So, the teacher in junior high school should consider the process of preparing the assessment well.

CONCLUSION

The research findings in the part on the purpose of assessing writing showed that the teachers mostly agreed about the purposes of assessing writing for students. Most teachers did not agree that writing assessments were just to rank the students. The assessment process is carried out to enhance the learning process, according to all the teachers. Defining the construct when assessing writing, establishing standards to evaluate students' writing, and informing students of their progress in the writing process were the most important findings agreed upon by most participants. The results also showed that almost all teachers agreed to give comments rather than marks, give diagnostic feedback for students, align feedback with the assessment criteria, use different methods, and use alternatives for assessing writing, use writing tests to obtain a good estimate of students' writing ability.

The study suggests first, teachers should evaluate all elements for a good assessment, whether in their purpose or process of writing assessment comprehensively, especially for junior high school students. Second, teachers can improve the practicality and authenticity of assessments by improvising existing methods. Third, teachers should be given clear instructions on how to conduct writing assessment-related activities in class by way of relevant references, rules, and guidelines. Teachers can only successfully implement writing assessments when they have theoretical and practical knowledge of assessment methods. Fourth, teachers' professional development in the assessment must be considered to build teachers' ability to enhance their assessment practice and ensure that writing assessments work effectively.

Further researchers should focus on first, identifying effective writing assessment methods that can demonstrate students' progress in English learning. The approach should meet assessment criteria such as practicality, dependability, validity, authenticity, and washback. Second, They may also consider doing a larger-scale study

to gain a better understanding of junior high school teachers' perspectives and practices on writing assessments. These suggestions may help to strengthen the decisions of stakeholders concerning language teaching and evaluation reform in Indonesia's curriculum system.

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