

Comprehensive Review of Writing Assessments in EFL Contexts: A Meta-Synthetic Study

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ABSTRACT

Writing assessments in the EFL context today have put a great concern on language acquisition and proficiency testing. However, diverse techniques and practices require a comprehensive synthesis to better understand trends, gaps, and best practices. This study reviews and synthesizes prior research on writing assessments in EFL contexts. It examines the dominant assessment approaches, their effectiveness, and their impact on EFL learners' writing skills holistically. The study employs a meta-synthesis approach. Fifty journal articles indexed by Scopus, ERIC, Crossref, Google Scholar, DOAJ, Copernicus, and other indexing databases between 2018 and 2024 were selected as the data to review in this study. The data selection was conducted to ensure the relevance and quality of the literature reviewed. The results include a variety of assessment practices such as teacher feedback, self-assessment, peer-assessment, blended or collaborative assessment, automated writing evaluation (AWE), and artificial intelligence in EFL writing settings. The study also concludes that, despite the diversity and complexity of writing assessments in EFL contexts, there is a strong need for more standardized and contextually valid assessment practices. Effective assessments align with instructional goals and offer meaningful feedback that supports student learning. The study recommends developing comprehensive assessment frameworks tailored to specific EFL contexts, providing more training for educators in assessment literacy, and conducting further research into the long-term impact of various assessment practices on the writing development of EFL learners.

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1. Introduction

Writing assessments in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have a significant impact on students' language learning experiences and outcomes (Ataizi & Aksak, 2021). Previous research has emphasized the necessity of trustworthy and valid writing assessments, which not only measure students' existing writing abilities but also influence instructional methods and curriculum development (Liu, 2016; Ratminingsih et al., 2018). With the boom of advancement in technology, traditional methods of writing assessments have been increasingly replaced by automated writing evaluation (AWE) systems and artificial intelligence (AI) tools (Galuh & Romadhoan, 2024). These innovations offer potential improvements in efficiency and consistency but also introduce new challenges regarding their impact on student learning and teacher practices (Barrot, 2024; Farazouli et al., 2024).

Traditional teacher feedback has always been a key part of writing assessments in EFL contexts. Research shows that students really value this feedback because it is direct and personalized. However, this method can be time-consuming and often varies in quality, which impacts its reliability and effectiveness (Gan et al., 2019). Additionally, teachers may struggle to provide detailed and helpful feedback, especially in large classes where they can't give individual attention to every student (Aisya Virgin & Anggani Linggar Bharati, 2020; Mariano et al., 2022). This situation led teachers to improve their assessment skills to ensure that feedback is both useful and aligned with teaching goals (Weng, 2023).

Peer assessments have become a useful tool to help teachers in giving feedback, allowing students to engage critically with their peers' work (Chang & Lin, 2020; Jin et al., 2024; Matsuno, 2009; Wu & Schunn, 2020). Research has shown that peer assessments can enhance students' writing performance by fostering a deeper understanding of writing criteria and encouraging reflective learning (Aghajanzadeh Kiasi & Rezaie, 2021; Hicks et al., 2016; James et al., 2018; Nhat & Quynh, 2021; Zhu & Carless, 2018). Additionally, peer assessments can promote a sense of ownership and responsibility among students, as they actively participate in the learning process (Meletiadou, 2021). However, the success of peer assessments depends on students' ability to give and receive helpful feedback, which can vary based on their skill levels and training (Cheong et al., 2023).

Self-assessments are important for helping students develop their metacognitive awareness and independence (Alek et al., 2020; Huda et al., 2020; Teng & Wang, 2023; Yan, 2022). By conducting the assessment of their writing, students are allowed to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, which leads to more focused revisions and better overall writing (Gholami, 2016; Hati et al., 2021; Teng & Wang, 2023). Studies have found that self-assessments are particularly effective when combined with clear rubrics and guidelines that help students accurately evaluate their work (Teng & Wang, 2023). However, the success of self-assessments largely depends on students' self-efficacy and their ability to apply assessment criteria effectively (Jin et al., 2024; Wei et al., 2024). In addition, Jalilzadeh and Coombe (2023) aver that lack of coordination hinders teachers' use of alternative assessments which requires teachers' autonomy and competence.

AWE systems, such as Grammarly, Pigai, and Criterion, have become increasingly popular in EFL contexts since they offer promising benefits in terms of immediate and consistent feedback for learners (Wilson & Roscoe, 2020). AWE tools are handy for addressing surface-level errors, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling, which can help students improve their writing mechanics (Barrot, 2024). However, these systems have limitations in evaluating higher-order writing skills, such as coherence, argumentation, and creativity, which are crucial for academic writing. As a result, there is ongoing debate about how AWE systems can replace or complement traditional teacher feedback (Steiss et al., 2024).

Given the strengths and limitations of both traditional and technology-driven assessments, there has been a growing interest in blended approaches that combine multiple assessment methods. Blended assessment strategies aim to leverage the immediacy and scalability of AWE systems while retaining the depth and contextual relevance of human feedback. Studies have suggested that such approaches can provide more comprehensive assessments of students' writing skills, addressing both lower-order and higher-order concerns (Jin et al., 2024). Moreover, blended approaches can reduce the workload on teachers, allowing them to focus on more complex aspects of students' writing that require human judgment (He & Mei, 2020).

The field of writing assessments in EFL contexts is changing quickly, with new technologies and methods being introduced (Barrot, 2024; Yang et al., 2024). Recent trends include the use of generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, which can assist both students and teachers in the writing process (Farazouli et al., 2024; Steiss et al., 2024). These tools offer innovative ways to support writing

instructions, but their roles in formal assessments remains a topic of ongoing research and debate. As the field progresses, there is a need for further studies that explore the long-term impact of these technologies on writing development, as well as their integration into existing educational frameworks (Galuh & Romadhoan, 2024; Steiss et al., 2024). This overview emphasizes the variety of assessment methods used in EFL writing instructions and the challenges and opportunities each presents. As research progresses, there is an increasing focus on finding balanced and suitable solutions to support students and educators in reaching their writing objectives.

Despite the extensive research on writing assessments in EFL contexts, several areas of research should be further investigated. Firstly, there is a need for a comprehensive synthesis that not only compares the effectiveness of different assessment methods but also examines their applicability across various educational contexts and proficiency levels (Xie, 2020). Secondly, the integration of AI in writing assessments is still in its beginning stages, and its long-term impact on student writing development and assessment practices is yet to be fully understood. Moreover, while the potential of AWE and AI tools is recognized, there is limited research on how these tools can be optimally integrated with traditional assessment practices to support holistic language development. Additionally, the long-term impact of AI and AWE on student writing development and overall assessment practices remain largely unexplored (Zhai & Wibowo, 2023). Understanding how these technologies can be effectively integrated with traditional assessments methods is crucial for supporting holistic language development (Taufiqulloh et al., 2023).

This study contributes to the current knowledge by providing a comprehensive analysis of writing assessments in EFL contexts, focusing on the growing influence of AI and automated writing evaluation (AWE) systems. Unlike previous research that mainly examined individual assessment methods or tools, this study offers a broader overview that combines findings from various assessment practices. It also investigates the effects of integrating AI-driven assessments with traditional feedback methods, providing new insights into how these tools can improve writing instructions in different EFL environments. By addressing existing research gaps, this study enhances our understanding of writing assessments in EFL contexts and offers practical recommendations for educators and policymakers looking to implement effective and suitable assessment strategies.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Teacher Feedback in EFL Writing Assessments

Teacher feedback plays a crucial role in writing assessments within EFL contexts, particularly in influencing students' writing development. Various studies have examined the nature and impact of teacher feedback, revealing a complex landscape marked by both strengths and weaknesses in methodologies and findings. Research consistently highlights the importance of personalized feedback in enhancing the quality of students' writing. For instance, Shuguang and Qiufang (2018) and Aliakbar et al. (2023) found that students highly value detailed feedback, fostering a sense of ownership over their writing. They further emphasized that teacher feedback not only addresses immediate writing issues but also promotes long-term skill development. However, despite its acknowledged value, variability in feedback quality poses a significant challenge. Carless & Winstone (2023) pointed out that the effectiveness of feedback often depends on teachers' assessment literacy and their ability to provide constructive criticism, indicating that not all feedback is equally beneficial.

Several studies have put great concern on investigating teachers' feedback on students writing and many of them rely on qualitative approaches, such as interviews and classroom observations, to gather insights on teacher feedback (Gan et al., 2021; Jiang & Yu, 2021). While these methods provide rich, contextual data, they often lack generalizability. For example, Gan et al (2021) employed a quantitative approach, surveying students' perceptions of teacher feedback. This broader data collection allowed for some generalizable findings but may have overlooked the nuanced interactions in real classroom settings. This contrast underscores a critical methodological divide, namely qualitative studies excel in depth but may struggle with breadth, while quantitative studies offer generalizability but may miss contextual subtleties.

The implications of these findings for practice are significant. Educators must recognize the dual role of feedback that are not only as a corrective tool but also as a means to foster reflective learning and self-efficacy among students. Moreover, the need for professional development in assessment literacy is evident; teachers must be equipped to provide feedback that is both constructive and aligned with pedagogical goals (Jiang & Yu, 2021; Suci et al., 2021). Emerging technologies like AWE tools also present both opportunities and challenges for teacher feedback. While tools such as Grammarly can

provide immediate feedback on surface-level errors, they cannot replace the nuanced understanding that human feedback offers, particularly concerning higher-order writing skills like coherence and argumentation (Steiss et al., 2024). This gap indicates a need for blended approaches that integrate both teacher feedback and technologies.

2.2 Peer Assessments in EFL Writing

Peer assessments have gained much attention as an alternative or complementary approach to teacher feedback. It offers the opportunity for students to engage in the assessment process actively (Azizi & Namaziandost, 2023; James et al., 2018; Spiller et al., 2012). In peer assessments, students evaluate each other's work based on given criteria, which not only helps them understand the assessment criteria better but also encourages critical thinking and reflection on their writing (Jin et al., 2024). Research indicates that peer assessments can lead to significant improvements in writing performance since students have more chances to obtain diverse perspectives on their work (Naraghizadeh et al., 2005; Rezai et al., 2024). Additionally, the process of providing feedback to peers can improve students' understanding of writing and foster a more collaborative learning environment (Judy Shih, 2021; Memari Hanjani, 2016; Shuguang & Qiufang, 2018). Moreover, peer assessments can be particularly useful in large classes, where it is difficult for teachers to provide individual feedback to all students. By engaging in peer assessments, students can receive more frequent feedback, which can accelerate their writing development. However, to maximize its effectiveness, peer assessments should be carefully integrated into the instructional design, with clear guidelines and support to ensure that the feedback provided is both constructive and reliable.

The aforementioned studies reveal that peer assessment is effective for its several benefits. However, the effectiveness of peer assessments is influenced by several factors, including the students' proficiency levels and their ability to provide constructive feedback. Without proper training, students may struggle to identify and articulate feedback that is both specific and actionable (Cheong et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2024). This can result in superficial or overly critical comments that do not contribute to meaningful revisions. Moreover, the reliability of peer feedback can be a concern, as students may have varying interpretations of the assessment criteria, leading to inconsistent evaluations. To address these challenges, some studies have suggested incorporating peer assessment training into the curriculum, where students are taught how to give and receive feedback effectively (Chang & Lin, 2020).

2.3 Self-Assessments and Writing Development

Self-assessments have become an increasingly popular method in writing assessments, particularly in EFL contexts where developing learner autonomy is a key instructional goal (Oussou et al., 2024). It involves students evaluating their writing based on established criteria, which can help them become more aware of their strengths and areas for improvement (E. C. K. Cheng, 2011). This reflective practice encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and engage more thoroughly in the writing process. Studies have found that the implementation of self-assessment can improve students' writing performance significantly, particularly when students are provided with clear rubrics and guidelines that help them assess their work accurately (Alek et al., 2020; Ratminingsih et al., 2018; Teng & Wang, 2023; Yan, 2022).

The success of self-assessments, however, is closely linked to the students' ability to objectively evaluate their own work. This can be challenging, especially for beginner learners who may lack the metacognitive skills needed to accurately identify errors and areas for improvement (Manzano, 2022; W. Wei et al., 2024). Additionally, students may struggle with self-assessment if they are not confident in their understanding of the assessment criteria or if they have limited experience with self-directed learning. To help overcome these challenges, it is important to provide students with adequate training in self-assessment techniques and continuous support as they develop these skills. Another limitation is that self-assessments might need to be paired with external feedback to give a more thorough evaluation of students' writing abilities. While self-assessments can help highlight areas for improvement, they may miss certain issues that a trained teacher or peer would notice. As a result, many educators recommend a mixed approach that combines self-assessment with feedback from teachers or peers. This strategy not only enhances students' growth as independent learners but also ensures they receive the necessary guidance to achieve their writing objectives.

2.4 AWE Systems

The boom of technology in education has led to the development of AWE systems, which have become increasingly implemented in EFL writing assessments. AWE tools, such as Grammarly, Pigai, and Criterion, provide immediate feedback on various aspects of writing, including grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. These systems are particularly valued for their efficiency, as they allow students to receive feedback instantaneously and revise their work accordingly (Steiss et al., 2024). The features of AWE systems also make them an attractive option for large-scale assessments, where providing individualized feedback may be impractical (Barrot, 2024).

Regarding the promising benefits of AWE systems, it has several limitations, particularly when it comes to assessing higher-order writing skills. While AWE tools are effective at identifying surface-level errors, they often struggle to evaluate more complex aspects of writing, such as coherence, argumentation, and creativity (Wilson & Roscoe, 2020). This limitation has emerged in an ongoing debate about the role of AWE in writing assessments, with some argue that these systems should be used as supplementary tools rather than replacements for human feedback (Steiss et al., 2024). Additionally, there are concerns about the over-reliance on AWE systems, as students may become too focused on correcting minor errors at the expense of developing their overall writing abilities.

Another important factor to consider is how AWE systems may affect students' writing development. While these tools can enhance basic writing skills, there is a concern that they might lack the in-depth feedback necessary for meaningful revisions (Fan, 2023; Geng & Razali, 2022). To solve these problems, some educators suggest a blended approach that combines AWE with traditional feedback methods. This strategy enables students to enjoy quick and consistent feedback from AWE while also receiving the detailed, context-aware insights that only a human evaluator can offer. By merging these approaches, educators can develop a more thorough and effective writing assessment systems that support the students' writing development.

2.5 AI in Writing Assessments

The integration of AI into writing assessments has made significant changes in how educators approach feedback and evaluation. AI-driven tools are capable of analyzing large volumes of student writing and providing detailed feedback on a range of aspects, from grammar and syntax to content structure and argumentation (Asfa & Rezvani, 2023; Galuh & Romadhoan, 2024). These tools have the potential to update writing assessments by offering personalized feedback that adapts to students' needs, thus supporting differentiated instructions. For instance, AI can identify patterns in a student's writing over time, allowing for more targeted interventions that address specific areas of difficulty.

However, the use of AI in writing assessments also raises important ethical and practical concerns. One of the primary concerns is data privacy, as AI systems often require access to large datasets of student writing to function effectively (Farazouli et al., 2024). There are concerns that AI may reinforce biases found in its training data, leading to unfair evaluations of student work. Additionally, while AI can provide feedback on technical aspects of writing, it may struggle with more subjective elements, such as evaluating the creativity or originality of the students' work. These limitations highlight the need for ongoing research into how AI can be used responsibly and effectively in writing assessments.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of AI in writing assessments are significant, particularly in terms of enhancing the efficiency of feedback. AI tools can provide immediate feedback to large numbers of students, making them a valuable resource in contexts where teacher feedback is limited (Galuh & Romadhoan, 2024). Moreover, the use of AI in assessments can free up educators' time, allowing them to focus on more complex aspects of teaching and learning. As the technology continues to evolve, it will be important for educators and researchers to explore how AI can be integrated into writing assessments in ways that complement traditional methods and support student learning.

3. Method

This study utilizes a meta-synthetic approach to conduct a comprehensive review of writing assessments in EFL contexts. The meta-synthesis method is intended to integrate findings from diverse studies, providing a comprehensive understanding of the trends, practices, and challenges embedded with writing assessments in EFL contexts. The research method is organized as follows:

3.1 Data Collection

The study employs a systematic review of existing literature on writing assessments within EFL contexts, with a specific focus on international reputable journal articles. Fifty studies about writing assessment practices involving teacher feedback, self-assessment, peer-assessment, blended or collaborative assessment, AWE, and AI in EFL writing contexts as previously described from reputable journals indexed by Scopus, ERIC, Crossref, Google Scholar, DOAJ, Copernicus, and other indexing databases between 2018 and 2024 were selected as the data to review in this study.

A number of research, as the data of this study, have investigated the effect of diverse writing assessment practices through teacher feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment, blended or collaborative assessment, AWE, and AI over students' writing performance in L2 contexts published in internationally reputable journals indexed by Scopus, ERIC, Crossref, Google Scholar, DOAJ, Copernicus, and other indexing databases between 2018 and 2024. This study involved fifty papers to be analyzed for this meta-synthesis study: teacher feedback as a positive practice contributes significantly to better writing performance of the students since the clarity and the modes of feedback bring the writing dimensions to provide knowledge diversity and low anxiety (X. Cheng & Zhang, 2021; Darmanto et al., 2023; Fitriyah et al., 2023; Jamalinesari et al., 2015; Kazemi et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2021; Mafulah & Cahyono, 2023; Mohammadi et al., 2023; Runnels & O'dwyer, 2020; Saeed et al., 2022); peer feedback as a complimentary aid to teacher feedback contributes positively to better writing performance (Abri et al., 2021; Ali Saeed, 2022; Cao et al., 2022; Hanh & Tinh, 2022; Iswandari & Jiang, 2020; Rezai & Bahnasse, 2022; Suherman, 2018; Thi Van Pham, 2022; Q. Xu & Yu, 2018; Z. Xu et al., 2023; Yu, 2019); self-assessment as a tool for writing development, improving students' attitude in writing, and developing their self-confidence and self-efficacy as well as gaining positive perceptions about writing (Al-Ahmad et al., 2023; Dhanarattigannon & Thienpermpool, 2022; Hanh & Tinh, 2022; Phuong et al., 2024; Takarroucht, 2022; Zhang & Zhang, 2022); the use of AWE as a complementary aid to human intelligence is beneficial to improve writing in EFL contexts (Ajabshir & Ebadi, 2023; Aldosemani et al., 2023; Benali, 2021; Miranty & Widiati, 2021; Ngo et al., 2024; Tambunan et al., 2022; P. Wei et al., 2023); AI writing tools positively enhanced the quality of students' writing in EFL context (Al Mahmud, 2023; Baskara, 2023; Faiz et al., 2023; Fitria, 2021; Ginting et al., 2023; Hwang & Nurtantyana, 2022; Marzuki et al., 2023; Selim, 2024); and collaborative or blended assessment improved writing performance of the learners (Afzali & Parsa, 2021; Anđelković, 2022; Babaii & Adeh, 2019; Bozorgian et al., 2024; Ghafoori et al., 2021; Khamboonruang, 2023; Mohammadi et al., 2023; Pu, 2023).

The data selection was conducted to ensure the relevance and quality of the literature reviewed. The studies address writing assessments in EFL contexts which specifically examine the effectiveness of various assessment methods, such as teacher feedback, self-assessment, peer assessment, blended or collaborative assessment, AWE, and AI in EFL writing contexts. Regarding the relevance and applicability of the findings, only studies published in English between 2018 and 2024 were included. This approach ensures a thorough examination of contemporary research while also considering significant contributions from earlier years within the specified timeframe.

Table 1

Inclusion Criteria and Research Focus for Systematic Review of Writing Assessments in EFL Contexts (2018-2024)

Criteria	Details
Focus	Writing assessments in EFL contexts
Types of Publications	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, dissertations
Publication Years	2018-2024
Databases Used	Scopus, ERIC, Crossref, Google Scholar, DOAJ, Copernicus, and other indexing databases
Keywords Used	"EFL writing assessments," "peer assessments," "teacher feedback," "automated writing evaluation," "self-assessments"
Inclusion Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Studies specifically focused on writing assessments in EFL contexts 2. Research examining the effectiveness of various assessments methods (e.g., teacher feedback, peer assessments, automated evaluation) 3. Articles providing empirical data or comprehensive literature reviews on writing assessments practices 4. Studies published in English between 2018 and 2024

3.2 Data Analysis

In the data analysis, the selected studies were examined through a thematic synthesis approach, conducted in three stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each stage plays a critical role in systematically organizing and interpreting data from the selected studies to generate meaningful insights. In the first stage, coding, relevant data from each study is closely examined and categorized. This step involves identifying and tagging information pertinent to the research questions, organizing it based on the type of assessment method (such as peer or automated assessments), the context in which the assessment was applied (e.g., classroom or online settings), and the reported outcomes (like improvements in writing skills or feedback quality). This structured categorization of data is essential as it lays the groundwork for identifying larger patterns within the studies reviewed, allowing for a clear, organized database that will facilitate deeper analysis in subsequent stages. The second stage is theme development. It involves grouping similar codes into broader themes that represent overarching concepts emerging from the data. For instance, codes associated with various feedback types and their perceived effectiveness are combined into themes such as “effectiveness of peer feedback,” “impact of automated writing evaluation systems,” and “role of self-assessments in improving writing skills.” By clustering related findings into themes, this stage provides a high-level view of the research landscape, enabling a clearer understanding of patterns and commonalities within the data. Finally, the synthesis stage brings the themes together to draw comprehensive conclusions about the research topic. Here, the themes developed earlier are analyzed as a whole to identify common trends, research gaps, or significant insights that recur across studies. This stage allows for a holistic interpretation, highlighting what the research collectively suggests about writing assessments within EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. Through synthesis, the analysis highlights established trends, unresolved questions, and potential directions for future studies, providing a cohesive overview of the current state of writing assessments. Together, these three stages form a systematic approach to thematic synthesis, allowing for a structured and insightful examination of research on assessment practices in writing.

Table 2

Thematic Synthesis Process for Analyzing Writing Assessments in EFL Contexts.

Stage	Description	Examples
Coding	Relevant data from each study are categorized based on assessments method, context, and outcomes.	Types of assessments: Peer feedback, Automated writing evaluation, Self-assessments.
Theme Development	Codes are grouped into broader themes capturing trends and challenges in writing assessments.	Themes: Effectiveness of peer feedback, Impact of automated systems, Role of self-assessments.
Synthesis	Themes are synthesized to draw conclusions about writing assessments in EFL contexts, identifying trends and gaps.	Conclusion: Research gaps, areas needing further study, overall trends in writing assessments.

3.3 Quality Assessments

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, a quality assessment of the included studies is conducted. This involves evaluating each study based on criteria such as the clarity of research questions, the appropriateness of the methodology, the validity of data analysis, and the relevance of findings to the study’s objectives (Higgins et al., 2019). Studies that do not meet the minimum quality standards are excluded from the final synthesis.

3.4 Synthesis of Findings

The synthesized findings are presented in a narrative format, supported by Tables and Figures that summarize the key themes identified in the literature. The synthesis includes a comparison of different assessment methods, their effectiveness in various educational contexts, and their impact on EFL learners' writing development (Han & Sari, 2024; Jin et al., 2024). By employing this structured research method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of writing assessments in EFL contexts, offering valuable insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers. The detailed synthesis and comparison of writing assessments in EFL contexts are presented in the following table.

Table 3
Comparison of Writing Assessments Methods in EFL Contexts

Aspect	Assessments Method	Effectiveness	Impact on EFL Learners	Contextual Suitability	Key Insights
Teacher Feedback	Traditional	High, particularly for personalized guidance	Improves accuracy, fluency, and content organization	Best in small, personalized settings	Requires significant time investment; quality varies between teachers; best for addressing individual needs
Peer Assessments	Collaborative	Effective when students are well-trained	Enhances critical thinking, reflection, and collaboration	Suitable for large classes with peer interaction opportunities	Needs training for students to provide constructive feedback; fosters collaborative learning
Automated Writing Evaluation (AWE)	Technology-based	Highly effective for immediate feedback on mechanics	Improves grammar and punctuation but limited on higher-order skills	Large-scale assessments where timely feedback is crucial	Requires more depth in feedback on creativity and coherence
Self-Assessments	Reflective	Effective when coupled with clear rubrics and guidelines	Promotes learner autonomy and self-regulation	Ideal for fostering independent learning and self-awareness	Requires more supplemented with teacher/peer feedback for students as they may struggle without guidance
Blended Approaches	Combined	Combines strengths of multiple methods	Comprehensive development of writing skills	Suitable across diverse educational settings	Balances immediacy of AWE with depth of teacher/peer feedback; requires careful integration

The table serves as a comprehensive tool that not only compares different assessment methods but also provides a nuanced understanding of their implications in real-world educational settings. This format makes complex information more accessible and actionable, aiding in the selection of the most effective and contextually appropriate writing assessment strategies in EFL classrooms.

4. Results

The meta-synthetic analysis of writing assessments in EFL contexts yielded several key findings that highlight the diversity of assessments practices, their effectiveness, and the emerging trends and challenges in the field. The results are categorized into six major themes: the effectiveness of teacher feedback, the impact of peer assessments, the role of self-assessments, the utility of AWE systems, the integration of AI in writing assessments, and the potential of blended assessments approaches.

4.1 Effectiveness of Teacher Feedback

The analysis highlights that teacher feedback is a crucial element of writing assessments in EFL contexts. The reviewed studies consistently showed that such feedback leads to improvements in students' writing, especially regarding linguistic accuracy, organization, and content development. Students noted that personalized feedback helped them identify their strengths and weaknesses, resulting in more focused revisions and improved writing quality. However, the effectiveness of this feedback largely depends on its quality; specific, timely feedback aligned with instructional goals is more beneficial than vague or general comments.

Despite its advantages, the analysis also pointed out several challenges related to teacher feedback. The most pressing issue is the significant time commitment required to provide detailed feedback, which can be discouraging for teachers, especially in larger classes. Furthermore, differences

in teachers' assessment literacy and feedback methods can create inconsistencies in the feedback students receive. To address these challenges, the findings suggest ongoing professional development for teachers to improve their feedback techniques, as well as the use of feedback tools like rubrics and templates to make the process more efficient without sacrificing quality.

4.2 Impact of Peer Assessments

The results indicate that peer assessments are valuable tools in EFL writing instructions, with the potential to complement or even enhance traditional teacher feedback. The studies reviewed showed that peer assessments can lead to significant improvements in students' writing performance, particularly when students are provided with clear guidelines and training on how to give and receive feedback. Peer assessments were found to be particularly effective in promoting student engagement and fostering a sense of responsibility, as students take an active role in the assessment process. Moreover, the diversity of perspectives offered through peer feedback can help students identify issues in their writing that they might not have noticed on their own.

However, the analysis also identified several challenges associated with peer assessments. One of the primary challenges is the variability in the quality of feedback provided by peers, which can be influenced by students' proficiency levels and their familiarity with the assessment criteria (Rezai et al., 2024). Without proper training, students may struggle to provide constructive feedback, leading to superficial or unhelpful comments. Additionally, some students expressed concerns about the reliability of peer feedback, particularly when peers have different levels of understanding of the writing task. To mitigate these challenges, the results suggest the importance of incorporating peer assessment training into the curriculum and providing students with structured opportunities to practice and refine their feedback skills.

4.3 Role of Self-Assessments

Self-assessments emerged as a powerful tool to foster learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness in EFL writing (Huda et al., 2020). The studies reviewed indicated that self-assessments can lead to significant improvements in writing performance, particularly when students are supported with clear rubrics and guidelines. Self-assessments encourage students to take ownership of their learning, as they actively engage in evaluating their own work and identifying areas for improvement. This process not only helps students develop a deeper understanding of writing conventions but also enhances their ability to self-regulate their learning and make more informed decisions about their writing revisions.

The analysis also highlighted some limitations of self-assessments. One of the main challenges is that students, particularly those with lower proficiency levels, may struggle with accurately evaluating their own work (Kalykbayeva et al., 2021; W. Wei et al., 2024). This can result in either overly lenient or overly harsh self-assessments, which may not effectively guide students' revisions. Additionally, the success of self-assessments depends on students' confidence in their ability to assess their work and their understanding of the assessment criteria (Ali et al., 2023). To address these challenges, the results suggest the need for providing students with adequate training in self-assessment techniques and for integrating self-assessments with other forms of feedback, such as peer and teacher assessments, to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of students' writing.

4.4 AWE Systems

The analysis of AWE systems found that these tools are increasingly being used in EFL contexts due to their ability to provide immediate and consistent feedback on writing mechanics. The studies reviewed found that AWE systems, such as Grammarly and Pigai, are effective in helping students improve their grammar, punctuation, and spelling, which are essential components of writing proficiency. The immediacy of AWE feedback allows students to make real-time revisions, which can accelerate the learning process and lead to more polished final drafts. However, the results also highlighted the limitations of AWE systems, particularly in their ability to evaluate higher-order writing skills. While AWE tools are proficient at identifying surface-level errors, they often struggle with assessing more complex aspects of writing, such as coherence, argumentation, and creativity. This limitation suggests that AWE systems should be used as supplementary tools rather than as replacements for human feedback. The results also pointed to concerns about students' over-reliance on AWE tools, which could lead to a focus on correcting minor errors at the expense of developing more substantive writing skills. To maximize the benefits of AWE systems, the results recommend integrating them with traditional feedback methods, allowing students to benefit from both the efficiency of automated

feedback and the depth of human evaluation.

The following diagram visually represents the interconnected elements essential for evaluating and developing writing skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. It highlights six key themes: Teacher Feedback, Self-Assessments, AI in Assessments, AWE (Automated Writing Evaluation) Systems, Peer Assessments, and Blended Approaches. Each of these themes is interlinked, indicating how different forms of assessments and feedback work together to provide a comprehensive evaluation framework in EFL writing. The arrows show the flow of influence and interaction among these themes, emphasizing the importance of integrating various assessments methods to enhance writing skills and learner engagement.

Figure 1
Key Themes in Writing Assessments in EFL Contexts



This title reflects the interconnected nature of the key themes depicted in the diagram, emphasizing how different assessments methods are linked and contribute to writing assessments in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

4.5 Integration of AI in Writing Assessments

The integration of AI in writing assessments is an emerging trend that shows significant promise but also presents challenges. The analysis revealed that AI-driven tools can provide detailed and personalized feedback on a wide range of writing aspects, from grammar and syntax to content organization and argumentation (Laupichler et al., 2023; Sumakul & Hamied, 2023). These tools have the potential to revolutionize writing assessments by offering adaptive feedback that meets individual learners' needs, thereby supporting differentiated instruction. Moreover, AI tools can analyze large datasets of student writing, allowing for more comprehensive and data-driven insights into students' writing progress and challenges (Syahnaz & Fithriani, 2023).

Despite these advantages, the results also highlighted several concerns regarding the use of AI in writing assessments. One major concern is data privacy, as AI systems require access to vast amounts of student writing data to function effectively (Pande et al., 2024). There are also ethical considerations related to the potential biases in AI-generated feedback, which could result in unfair assessments of student work. Additionally, while AI can provide feedback on technical aspects of writing, its ability to evaluate more subjective elements, such as creativity and originality, remains limited (Zhai & Wibowo, 2023). The results suggest that while AI tools can be valuable in writing assessments, they should be used with caution and in conjunction with human oversight to ensure that feedback is fair, accurate, and supportive of student learning.

4.6 Potential of Blended Assessments Approaches

The results of the meta-synthesis indicate that blended assessments approaches, which combine traditional and technology-driven methods, offer a comprehensive solution to the challenges of writing assessments in EFL contexts. Blended approaches allow educators to leverage the strengths of various assessments methods, such as the immediacy of AWE systems, the depth of teacher feedback, the collaborative nature of peer assessments, and the autonomy fostered by self-assessments. The studies reviewed demonstrated that blended assessments approaches can address both lower-order concerns, such as grammar and punctuation, and higher-order skills, such as coherence and argumentation.

Blended approaches were also found to be effective in reducing the workload on teachers, as they can distribute the assessments responsibilities across different methods and tools. For instance, while AWE systems handle routine error correction, teachers can focus on providing feedback on more complex writing issues. Peer and self-assessments further enhance the learning process by encouraging students to engage critically with their own and others' writing (Chang & Lin, 2020). However, the success of blended assessments approaches depends on careful planning and coordination to ensure that the different methods complement each other and that students understand how to use the feedback they receive effectively.

Overall, the results of this meta-synthesis underscore the importance of adopting a flexible and context-sensitive approach to writing assessments in EFL contexts. By integrating multiple assessments methods, educators can create a more supportive and effective learning environment that meets the diverse needs of EFL learners.

Table 3

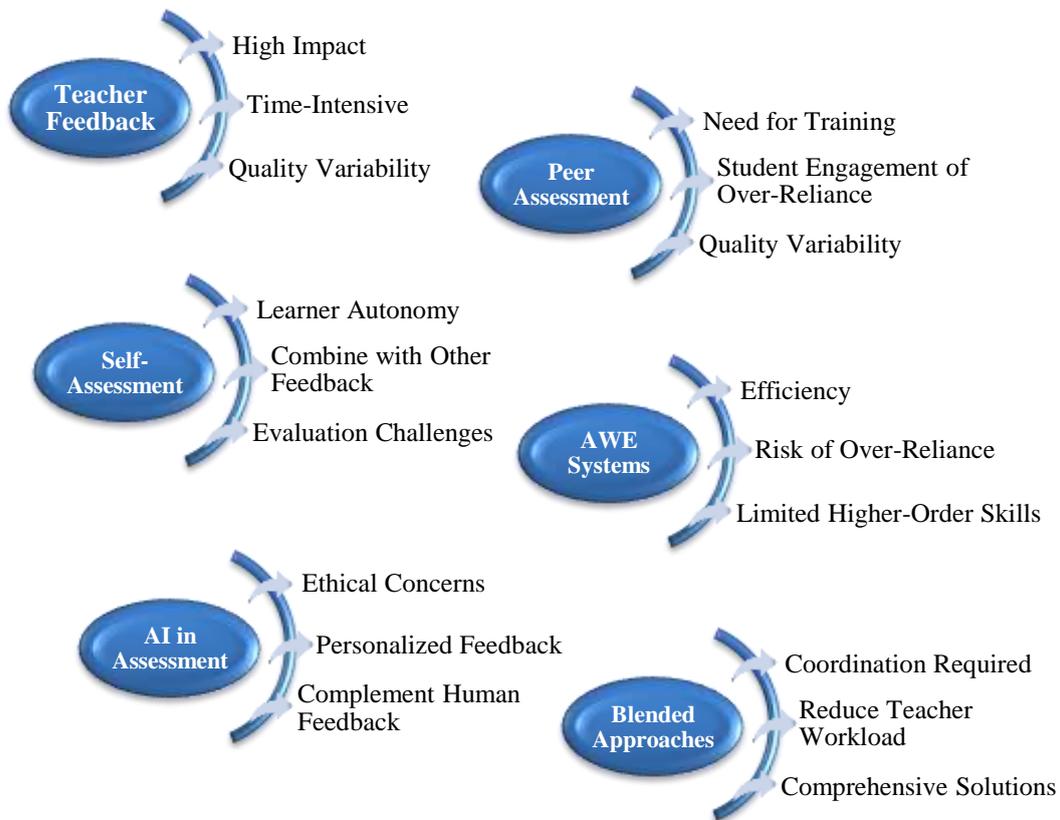
Detailed Summary of Key Findings, Challenges, and Recommendations in EFL Writing Assessments

Theme	Key Findings	Challenges	Recommendations
Teacher Feedback	High Impact on Writing Performance: linked to significant improvements in linguistic accuracy, organization, and content; helps students understand strengths and weaknesses.	Variability in Feedback Quality: inconsistencies due to differences in teachers' assessments literacy, time-intensive process, time-consuming, especially in large classes.	Enhances teacher assessments literacy through professional development and uses feedback templates and rubrics to streamline the process.
Peer Assessments	Enhance Student Engagement: foster active participation, critical thinking, and reflective skills; improve writing performance with diverse perspectives.	Challenges in Feedback Quality: inconsistent feedback quality due to varying proficiency levels; need for structured training; lack of training leads to superficial feedback.	Incorporate peer assessments training into the curriculum and provide structured opportunities for practice and feedback refinement.
Self-Assessments	Promote Learner Autonomy: encourage students to take control of their learning and develop metacognitive awareness; lead to targeted revisions and improved writing.	Challenges with Accurate Self-Evaluation: students may struggle with accurate self-assessments, particularly those with lower proficiency; combining with other feedback methods: self-assessments needs to be complemented by other feedback forms for comprehensive evaluation.	Provide training in self-assessments techniques and combines self-assessments with teacher or peer feedback for a more comprehensive evaluation.
AWE Systems	Efficiency in Error Correction: effective in identifying and correcting surface-level errors such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling; provide immediate feedback.	Limitations in Assessing Higher-Order Skills: limited in evaluating coherence, argumentation, and creativity; risk of over-reliance; over-focus on minor errors can neglect substantive writing development.	Use AWE systems as supplementary tools alongside human feedback and integrate AWE with traditional methods for a comprehensive assessments approach.

AI in Writing Assessments	Personalized and Adaptive Feedback: AI tools offer detailed, personalized feedback, supporting differentiated instruction; provide data-driven insights into writing progress.	Ethical and Practical Concerns: data privacy issues and potential biases in AI-generated feedback; complementing human feedback; limited ability to evaluate subjective elements like creativity.	Use AI tools with caution and human oversight and ensure fair and accurate feedback by complementing AI assessments with human evaluation.
Blended Assessments Approaches	Comprehensive Assessments Solutions: combine strengths of various methods for a holistic evaluation of writing skills; address both lower-order and higher-order skills.	Reducing Teacher Workload: distribute assessment responsibilities, reducing teacher workload; importance of coordination and training; require careful planning to ensure methods complement each other.	Adopt a flexible, context-sensitive approach and provide clear guidance to students on how to effectively use blended feedback.

This table organizes the detailed research findings by theme, outlining the key findings, challenges, and recommendations associated with each aspect of writing assessments in EFL contexts.

Figure 2
Interconnected Themes and Challenges in EFL Writing Assessments



This figure effectively highlights the connections between various themes and their related challenges within the context of EFL writing assessments.

5. Discussion

The findings from this meta-synthetic study not only support previous research on EFL writing assessments but also provide new insights that can shape future practices and research. In the discussion below, it will be shown the exploration of how these findings connect to earlier studies and build on them.

Research has long emphasized the importance of teacher feedback in EFL contexts, especially for enhancing linguistic accuracy and overall writing quality. Our current findings confirm this idea, showing that personalized and detailed feedback is crucial for students' learning progress. However, we also highlight the challenges teachers face in delivering high-quality feedback in large classes, where it needs much more time and energy. Previous research has consistently highlighted the importance of teacher feedback in EFL contexts, particularly for its role in improving linguistic accuracy and overall writing quality (Carless & Winstone, 2023; Gan et al., 2021; Jiang & Yu, 2021). The current findings also support these conclusions, demonstrating that personalized and detailed feedback remains crucial for student development. However, this study also adds to the existing literature by emphasizing the problems associated with delivering high-quality feedback in large classes, where time and resources are limited. This finding resonates with the research conducted by Ritonga et al. (2022), which called for enhanced teacher training to ensure consistent and effective feedback. The suggestion to use standardized rubrics and templates to streamline feedback processes builds on previous recommendations, offering practical strategies to address these challenges.

The role of peer assessments in promoting student engagement and collaborative learning has been well-documented in prior studies (Jin et al., 2024). The current study confirms these benefits, showing that peer assessments can significantly enhance writing performance when students are adequately trained (Rezai et al., 2024). However, it also highlights the problems of variability in feedback quality, which also became a concern in previous research (Cheong et al., 2023). This study contributes to the literature by underscoring the need for structured peer assessment training, which has been suggested in earlier studies but remains under-implemented in many educational contexts (Meletiadou, 2021). By advocating for peer assessments as the complement to teacher feedback, this study supports the integrated use of multiple feedback sources, a concept that aligns with the findings of (Steiss et al., 2024).

Self-assessments have been recognized as a valuable tool for developing learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness (W. Wei et al., 2024). The current findings are in line with these earlier conclusions, emphasizing the importance of clear rubrics and guidelines in supporting effective self-assessments. However, this study also identifies the challenges students face in accurately evaluating their work, particularly those with lower proficiency levels, which has been a highly discussed theme in the current literature (W. Wei et al., 2024). By advocating for the combination of self-assessments with other feedback methods, this study aligns with earlier research by W. Wei et al., (2024) which suggested that multiple feedback sources provide a more comprehensive evaluation, enhancing the overall effectiveness of writing instruction.

The use of AWE systems has been widely researched, with studies acknowledging their efficiency in correcting surface-level errors while also noting their limitations in addressing higher-order writing skills (Wilson & Roscoe, 2020). The current study supports these findings, confirming that AWE systems are effective tools for improving technical aspects of writing but should not be relied upon exclusively. This aligns with the work of Steiss et al. (2024) who warned against over-reliance on AWE systems at the expense of developing substantive writing skills. The recommendation to integrate AWE with traditional feedback methods echoes earlier suggestions by Barrot (2024) reinforcing the need for a balanced approach that combines the strengths of both automated and human feedback.

One significant contribution of this study is the exploration of technology-enhanced assessments beyond AWE systems. While previous research has primarily focused on AWE's capabilities, this study investigates the broader role of digital tools in facilitating writing assessments. For instance, the integration of collaborative platforms and online peer review systems can create more interactive and engaging assessment experiences peer (Chang & Lin, 2020; Rezai et al., 2024). By examining how these tools can complement traditional assessment methods, this research provides educators with new avenues to enhance students' engagement and promote collaborative learning. The findings suggest that leveraging technology thoughtfully can lead to improved writing outcomes and a more dynamic learning environment.

Another innovative aspect of this study is its attention to the professional development of teachers in the context of writing assessments. While many studies acknowledge the importance of

teacher training (Isnawati, 2023), this research goes further by proposing a framework for ongoing professional development tailored specifically for EFL writing instructions. This framework emphasizes not just initial training but also continuous learning opportunities that align with evolving educational practices. By highlighting the need for workshops, peer collaboration, and reflective practices, this study underscores the idea that effective writing assessment is a shared responsibility among educators. This fresh perspective can inspire institutions to invest in comprehensive professional development programs, ultimately leading to more effective and responsive assessment strategies.

Furthermore, this research introduces a critical discussion on inclusivity and accessibility in writing assessments. This study highlights the need for writing assessments that are accessible to all learners, particularly those with diverse learning needs (Memari Hanjani, 2016; Yu & Hu, 2017). By examining existing literature on inclusive assessment practices, the study offers practical recommendations for creating assessments that accommodate various learning styles and abilities. This focus on inclusivity not only enriches the current discourse but also ensures that writing assessments are equitable and beneficial for every student, paving the way for more diverse and inclusive educational practices. In conclusion, this meta-synthetic study not only supports and builds upon existing research but also introduces novel insights that have the potential to transform EFL writing assessments. By addressing technology integration, professional development, the interplay between assessment types, and inclusivity, the findings provide a comprehensive framework for educators and policymakers. This framework encourages ongoing reflection and adaptation of assessment practices to meet the dynamic needs of learners, ultimately fostering a more effective and equitable language learning environment.

5.1 AI in Writing Assessments: Potential and Ethical Considerations

The integration of AI in writing assessments is a relatively new area of research, with early studies exploring its potential to provide personalized and adaptive feedback (Galuh & Romadhoan, 2024). The current findings confirm these initial observations, highlighting the benefits of AI-driven tools in supporting differentiated instruction. However, this study also raises ethical concerns related to data privacy and bias, issues that have been increasingly discussed in the literature (Farazouli et al., 2024). By emphasizing the need for cautious and transparent implementation of AI in writing assessments, this study aligns with earlier calls for more research into the ethical implications of AI in education.

5.2 Blended Assessments Approaches: Toward a Comprehensive Evaluation

Blended assessment approaches, which combine multiple methods to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of writing skills, have been proposed in earlier studies as a way to address the limitations of individual assessment methods. The current findings validate this approach, demonstrating that blended assessments can effectively address both lower-order and higher-order writing skills while reducing the workload on teachers. This aligns with the work of (Chau, 2005; He & Mei, 2020), who highlighted the benefits of distributing assessment responsibilities across different methods. The emphasis on careful coordination and planning for the successful implementation of blended assessments reflects, underscoring the need for a well-structured approach to ensure that different assessment methods complement each other effectively.

5.3 Implications for Practice and Future Research

The findings of this study reinforce the importance of adopting several methods for writing assessments, integrating teacher feedback, peer assessments, self-assessments, AWE systems, and AI tools to obtain the maximum benefits from each method. This approach aligns with the evolving understanding of effective writing assessment practices in EFL contexts, as documented in the literature. Future research should focus on further integrating AI and AWE systems, paying special attention to their long-term effects on student learning and the associated ethical considerations. There is also a need for more studies on effective training programs for both teachers and students to improve the quality of peer and self-assessment. As writing assessment practices continue to evolve, ongoing research will be vital in identifying best practices and ensuring that assessment methods align with the diverse needs of EFL learners.

6. Conclusion

This meta-synthetic study provides a comprehensive analysis of writing assessments in EFL contexts, highlighting the various methods employed, their effectiveness, and the challenges they

present. The findings highlight the important roles of teacher feedback in enhancing linguistic accuracy and overall writing quality, emphasizing the importance of delivering this feedback consistently and efficiently. Peer assessments are recognized as effective for encouraging student engagement and collaborative learning, although their success depends on adequate training and clear guidelines. Self-assessments are identified as a crucial approach for promoting learner autonomy, but they necessitate strong support systems to facilitate accurate self-evaluation. AWE systems are recognized for their efficiency in addressing surface-level writing issues, yet their limitations in evaluating higher-order skills suggest they should complement, rather than replace, traditional feedback methods. The integration of AI in writing assessments offers personalized feedback and support differentiated instruction, but it also raises ethical concerns that must be carefully managed. Finally, blended assessment approaches, which combine multiple assessment methods, are identified as a comprehensive solution that can address both lower-order and higher-order writing skills while reducing the workload on teachers. This study concludes that a mixed-method approach to writing assessments, which enhances the strengths of various tools and methods, offers the most effective means of supporting EFL learners' writing development. As the field evolves, continued research and thoughtful implementation of these methods will be crucial to address the varied needs of learners and to manage the ethical challenges presented by new technologies. The findings of this study offer a strong foundation for educators and researchers to enhance their approaches to writing assessments, ensuring they are both effective and fair across different educational settings.

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