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Exploring language teachers' assessment identity: a comparative review of teacher beliefs on L2 writing assessment in China and Iran

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Abstract

This review paper explores how language teachers in China and Iran understand and carry out the assessment of second language (L2) writing. It focuses on their beliefs, values, and assessment identities, shaped by cultural and institutional factors. The study reviews a total of six articles published between 2019 and 2024 and applies Borg's (2003) teacher cognition framework and Pajares' (1992) belief-behaviour theory to examine how teacher beliefs influence assessment practices and professional identity. These theories help explain the gap between what teachers value and what they implement in classrooms. The findings show that while many teachers in both countries believe in formative assessment, they often rely on summative methods due to high-stakes exams, large class sizes, and fixed curricula. In China, exam systems challenge teachers' belief in innovative teaching, while in Iran, limited training and strong cultural expectations also affect practice. The review highlights that teacher beliefs are complex and shaped by both professional goals and local contexts. It suggests that better training, policy support, and resources are needed to align teacher beliefs with actual assessment practices.

1. Introduction

Assessment identity refers to the beliefs, values, and self-perceptions teachers have about their role as assessors. It includes their understanding of assessment methods, emotional involvement in the process, and professional responsibility to support student learning. Moreover, this identity is shaped by various factors such as professional training, personal and cultural experiences as well as the policies and expectations of schools or institutions. Over time, teachers' assessment identities evolve as they gain experience and adjust to their personal beliefs and external factors (Gan & Lam, 2023). Ultimately, a strong assessment identity empowers teachers to make smart and fair decisions that directly impact the learning outcomes. Therefore, understanding the development of this identity is crucial for designing effective professional development programs.

Among the key influences on assessment identity, teachers' beliefs play a significant role in shaping their assessment identity, particularly in the context of second language (L2 hereafter) writing. Here, teachers' beliefs refer to the deeply held understandings, values and assumptions that influence how they interpret, plan and carry out instructional and assessment practices in the classroom. These beliefs also guide their perception of their assessment role and their selection of evaluation methods. For instance, teachers who view assessment as a tool to support learning, known as Assessment for Learning (AfL hereafter), are more likely to use formative approaches to offer feedback that guides students toward improvement. Conversely, those who emphasize institutional requirements may prioritize Assessment of Learning (AoL hereafter), which often involves summative tests that limit creativity and critical thinking in L2 writing (Zheng & Xu, 2023). Hence, these beliefs not only affect classroom practices but also influence how students perceive their abilities and progress. When teachers' beliefs about assessment support their teaching methods, writing lessons can become more structured and encouraging.

In L2 writing, assessments often aim to balance linguistic accuracy, creativity and communicative effectiveness. However, in exam-focused systems such as those in China and Iran, teachers' beliefs are frequently shaped by rigid formats aligned with AoL practices. As a result, this focus on accuracy may overshadow the originality and reduce student engagement. Furthermore, these systemic pressures can create internal conflicts within teachers' assessment identities, especially when they value AfL but are required to implement standardized evaluations (Babaii et al., 2020). As a result, this tension often causes a mismatch between instructional goals and assessment practices.

1.1. A Contextual Overview

On the one hand, in China, the education system is highly centralized and the Ministry of Education manages all levels of schooling. English as a Foreign Language (EFL hereafter) plays an important role in the curriculum, especially in middle school, high school and university education. The National English Curriculum Standards provide general guidelines for teaching and assessing EFL writing in schools. However, cities like Shanghai also have their own curriculum guides, which include more detailed writing performance standards (Wang et al., 2020). These national and local guidelines aim to promote consistency and quality in EFL writing instruction across different regions. In theory, they are designed to ensure that students develop communicative competence and critical thinking through writing. They also outline expectations for integrating modern pedagogical approaches, such as process writing and formative assessment (Zhang et al., 2022). However, despite these ambitions, the actual implementation of the curriculum often falls short in daily classroom practice.

Even with these guidelines, there is a clear gap between the official curriculum and its classroom application. Factors like teachers' beliefs, teaching materials, and the exam-focused culture in China contribute to this difference (Wang et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). High-stakes exams like the Zhongkao and Gaokao heavily influence how teachers teach and assess writing. This often shifts the focus from building well-rounded writing skills to preparing students for exams (Wang et al., 2020; Liu, 2024). To address this issue, more attention is being given to professional development for teachers, especially in improving their skills in assessing writing. Regular training and the use of formative assessment strategies

are being suggested to better align classroom practices with curriculum goals (Liu, 2024). Some educators are also trying to combine process-based approaches with traditional teaching methods to help students develop stronger writing skills in a more balanced way (Zhang et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the education system of Iran is highly centralized. The Ministry of Education manages primary and secondary schools, while the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology oversees universities and other higher education institutions. Within this system, there is a strong emphasis on teaching EFL, particularly in enhancing students' writing skills. Research into writing assessment literacy (WAL hereafter) among Iranian EFL teachers reveals a recurring challenge. Although many teachers express positive attitudes toward writing instruction, their classroom practices often do not reflect these beliefs. For example, Bozorgian et al. (2024) found that despite teachers' favorable views, less than 3% of class time was dedicated to writing activities, showing a significant disconnect between belief and practice. This suggests that systemic issues, such as rigid curricula or lack of institutional support, may also limit teachers' ability to implement their instructional intentions.

This disconnect is closely tied to teachers' limited training in writing assessment, which in turn influences their reliance on traditional, summative assessment methods. Teachers' beliefs are pivotal in shaping their assessment strategies, but without proper training, they struggle to implement more effective, formative approaches. Research by Soltanpour and Valizadeh (2019) indicates that a majority of Iranian EFL teachers had not received adequate instruction in writing assessment techniques, leading to the underuse of formative assessment tools. These findings point to an urgent need for improved teacher education programs that emphasize writing assessment literacy, aiming to align classroom practices more closely with teachers' instructional goals and beliefs. Ensuring such programs could empower teachers to bridge the gap between their professional beliefs and the realities of classroom instruction.

1.2. Purpose and Scope

This study seeks to examine how language teachers in China and Iran perceive their roles in assessing L2 writing, with a particular focus on their beliefs, practices and the impact of cultural and institutional factors. By comparing these perspectives, the research investigates how both personal and external influences shape teachers' assessment identities across different educational contexts. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the improvement of teacher education and promote a deeper cross-cultural understanding of L2 writing assessment, directly addressing how beliefs and contexts interact as outlined in the research questions.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What are the beliefs of language teachers in China and Iran about L2 writing assessment?
2. How do cultural and institutional contexts influence these beliefs?

That being said, this study is significant as it examines an area that has not been explored extensively: how language teachers' assessment identities are influenced by their differing beliefs across cultures, especially in the context of L2 writing. Most research to date has focused on individual countries, such as China or Iran, without comparing how broader cultural, institutional, and systemic factors influence teachers' beliefs. By comparing China and Iran, two exam-driven systems with strong central control but distinct cultural backgrounds, this study demonstrates how local contexts shape teachers' assessment identities. The findings will support teacher education by highlighting the tensions between AfL and AoL, as well as the limitations that teachers face within their institutions. This can help policymakers develop more effective and culturally sensitive training programs. Overall, the comparative approach fosters a more profound understanding between cultures and promotes fairer, more effective writing assessment practices across various educational settings.

2. Method

This study follows a systematic literature review to explore teacher beliefs and assessment identity related to L2 writing. The review was based on research papers selected from ERIC and Scopus, focusing on peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024 to ensure the inclusion of high-quality, up-to-date, and academically rigorous sources that are widely recognized for their credibility and relevance in the field of education. To do so, keywords were used such as "L2 writing assessment" and "teacher beliefs." Studies were included if they (1) examined assessment identity and teacher beliefs in China or Iran, (2) provided empirical data, and (3) linked beliefs to L2 writing. Non-English publications were excluded due to translation constraints. Ultimately, six studies met these criteria, highlighting a significant research gap in the area of L2 writing assessment in these national contexts.

Two researchers independently coded the studies using a thematic analysis approach, achieving 85% inter-coder agreement. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion. The analysis identified recurring themes such as assessment purposes, teacher autonomy and systemic constraints, with special attention to how institutional and cultural contexts shaped belief-practice alignment. This process ensured a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing teachers' assessment beliefs and practices.

The study mainly uses Borg's (2003) teacher cognition framework, which links beliefs to professional identity, and Pajares' (1992) theory, which explains how beliefs shape behavior in assessment. However, these models do not fully address the impact of institutional power and socio-political contexts. To fill this gap, the study also involves critical discourse analysis to explore how institutional forces, such as national exam policies, influence teachers' assessment decisions. Furthermore, the concept of neoliberal subjectivity (Artino, 2012) is used to show how teacher identities adapt under systemic pressure. By combining these theoretical lenses, the research addresses gaps in earlier models and offers a more comprehensive understanding of how beliefs and contextual factors shape L2 writing assessment. This multi-theoretical approach also highlights the importance of viewing teachers as active agents navigating complex educational systems.

3. Results

The findings of this study are organized to highlight key insights from the reviewed literature. Table 1 provides a simple summary of the main ideas, theories, and findings from the reviewed studies. It allows for an easy comparison of key points across different sources.

Table 1. Summary of Key Studies on Teachers' Beliefs About L2 Writing in China and Iran

Context	Author	Objective	Methodology	Theories	Key Findings
China	Wang et. al. (2020)	To investigate Chinese university EFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding classroom writing assessment and identify potential discrepancies between them.	A sequential explanatory mixed-method design was followed by a survey of 136 Chinese university EFL writing teachers, followed by interviews with 10 participants. Data were analyzed using SPSS for quantitative and thematic coding for qualitative insights.	The study explores formative (AfL) and summative (AoL) assessment theories, emphasizing AfL's five strategies (Black & Wiliam, 2009) and its connection to student autonomy via metacognition. It also examines the interplay of teachers' beliefs, practices, and contexts, drawing on Borg (2003), Phipps & Borg (2009), and Fulmer et al. (2015).	Teachers value Assessment for Learning (AfL) for its benefits, like deeper learning and autonomy, but face challenges such as systemic constraints, time pressures, and misalignment between beliefs and practices, necessitating targeted training, institutional support, and reforms to integrate AfL strategies effectively into teaching environments.

Zhang et. al (2022)	To investigate EFL teachers' attitudes toward and self-efficacy beliefs for implementing self-assessment of writing in tertiary education settings in China.	This qualitative study, based on constructivist theory, involved five female EFL writing teachers from two universities in Northern China. Semi-structured Mandarin interviews were thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's method with validation through member checking.	The study followed constructivist theory and focused on understanding how teachers construct their attitudes, self-efficacy beliefs, and practices of self-assessment of writing based on their experiences and sociocultural context.	While teachers recognize the benefits of self-assessment in fostering student accountability and reflection, challenges such as exam-driven systems, limited teacher training, and student inexperience hinder its implementation, highlighting the need for professional development, structured rubrics, and curriculum adjustments to promote effective use of self-assessment.
Liu (2024)	To explore an EFL teacher's beliefs and practices regarding formative writing assessment in a public secondary school, focusing on how it promotes students' L2 writing engagement and outcomes.	This single case study focuses on "Nelly," a Grade 7 teacher in a key public secondary school in mainland China. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, voice memos, artifacts, and documents, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's reflective thematic analysis, guided by Borg's (2015) Language Teacher Cognition framework.	The study is based on Borg's Language Teacher Cognition framework (2015), which examines how teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and context influence their classroom practices, particularly in formative writing assessment.	Teacher Nelly effectively implemented formative writing assessment in an exam-driven culture, improving student confidence through scaffolding and feedback, but faced challenges like limited English proficiency, workload, and gaps in L2 writing pedagogy.
Soltanpour and Valizadeh (2019)	To examine Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about writing assessment literacy (WAL), their training needs, and how their academic majors (TEFL vs. Non-TEFL) influence these beliefs and needs.	This survey studied 146 Iranian EFL teachers, split into TEFL and non-TEFL groups by degree. A questionnaire on WAL beliefs and training needs was used, with statistical analyses identifying key differences.	The study builds on the concept of Writing Assessment Literacy (WAL) and explores how academic backgrounds (TEFL vs. Non-TEFL) shape teachers' beliefs and self-perceived training requirements in writing assessment.	TEFL teachers were significantly better trained than non-TEFL teachers, highlighting the need for accessible WAL training, integration of modern assessment methods, technology use, and reforms in teacher recruitment, supervision, and in-service programs.
Iran				
Ataie-Tabar et. al. (2019)	To explore the socio-cultural conception of writing assessment literacy among Iranian EFL teachers and students and assess whether teachers' writing assessment skills align with socio-cultural constructs.	This mixed-methods study involved 105 Iranian EFL students for the quantitative phase and three EFL teachers for the qualitative phase. Data were collected through student questionnaires and teacher interviews, analyzed using a framework based on five key writing assessment principles from Lee's and Coombs's sociocultural models, with findings integrated to evaluate alignment with sociocultural constructs.	The study applies a socio-cultural theoretical framework to assess how cultural and contextual factors shape writing assessment literacy among teachers and students.	In the Iranian EFL context, writing assessment literacy (AL) is valued but hindered by time constraints, curriculum rigidity, and limited training, with recommendations focusing on collaborative goal-setting, process writing, balanced feedback, self-/peer-assessment, formative feedback, and institutional support.

| Sohrabi et. al (2022) | To investigate Iranian EFL writing teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices regarding writing assessment and fill the gap in the literature on a countrywide level. | The study surveyed 118 experienced Iranian EFL writing teachers using the WAL questionnaire (Crusan et al., 2016). Data were analyzed with SPSS (Version 22.0) to explore teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and practices. | Grounded in assessment literacy theory and the interrelation of teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Richardson, 1995; Crusan et al., 2016), the study highlights the importance of understanding teachers' beliefs in shaping assessment and teaching practices. | While most teachers value writing assessment and receive some training, challenges like limited practical training, inconsistent rubric use, lack of formative feedback, and inadequate technology integration highlight the need for improved, experiential training and contextualized assessment tools. |

Note. This table summarizes selected studies focusing on L2 writing assessment beliefs among teachers in China and Iran.

3.1. Context of China

a. Teacher Beliefs on Writing Assessment Practices

Chinese EFL teachers generally support AfL methods because they promote student autonomy and critical thinking. However, their preference for AoL is mainly influenced by cultural and institutional factors. For instance, Wang et al. (2020) found that although teachers value AfL strategies, such as setting clear learning goals and promoting independent learning, these approaches are seldom put into practice. Many teachers feel limited by rigid exam-based systems that focus more on memorization than on true understanding. In addition, pressure from school administration and parents makes them rely even more on AoL. This shows that even when teachers believe in better ways to help students' learning, they often cannot implement these methods because the education system pushes them to prepare students mainly for exams.

Similarly, Liu (2024) noted that although teachers used scaffolding techniques and promoted student independence, they found it difficult to apply these strategies effectively because of the strong emphasis on exams and limited time. As a result, they often had to skip formative activities to ensure students were ready for standardized tests. Consequently, while teachers may support AfL in theory, their actual classroom practices focus on AoL. This disconnect between beliefs and actions shows how challenging it is to balance ideal teaching approaches with real-world limitations.

b. Challenges in Implementing Innovative Assessments

Implementing innovative assessments, such as self-assessment, is difficult in Chinese EFL classrooms. Although Zhang et al. (2022) found that teachers had favorable opinions of self-assessment, they mostly used it as an additional tool rather than a main evaluation method. This is because many teachers questioned whether students had the ability and maturity to assess themselves accurately. Additionally, the focus on achieving concrete test outcomes also led teachers to hesitate when considering alternative assessment techniques. A key factor behind this hesitation is limited teacher confidence, which derives from inadequate training and a lack of assessment knowledge. Since many teachers had little expertise in assessment literacy, they found it difficult to create effective self-assessment tasks. There were also concerns that using such methods might not meet the expectations of school leaders and parents.

Similarly, Liu (2024) observed that low student proficiency and insufficient teacher preparation made student-led feedback methods difficult to apply. In many cases, students did not have standard language skills to participate meaningfully in self- or peer-assessment. Furthermore, teachers felt that experimenting with new assessment methods was risky in China's high-pressure education system, where exam results are crucial. These challenges suggest that targeted teacher training programs are necessary to help educators develop the skills and confidence needed to use innovative assessments effectively, especially in exam-driven educational environments.

c. Institutional and Cultural Constraints

In China, cultural and institutional factors play a major role in shaping teachers' assessment methods. As Wang et al. (2020) noted, exam-focused policies tend to favor AoL, restricting opportunities for formative feedback and student-centered approaches. Since exam success is considered essential for future career and life prospects, both teachers and students concentrate heavily on test preparation, which leads to experimental or student-led assessments being seen as unnecessary disruptions rather than useful tools. On top of this, when classes are too large and syllabi are overloaded, using methods like self-assessment becomes very difficult to implement effectively (Zhang et al., 2022). Additionally, teachers struggle with practical issues, such as providing personalized feedback in large classes, which pushes them toward more efficient summative assessments.

Liu's (2024) study found that the emphasis on major exams leads teachers to concentrate more on correcting mistakes instead of using learner-centered methods. They worry that poor test results will increase reliance on traditional evaluation methods. Because of this, new assessment techniques are often delayed until after important exams or may not be used at all. To overcome these challenges, reforms like simplifying the curriculum, offering institutional support, and including AfL principles in national policies are necessary. Ultimately, addressing these issues requires a systemic shift to balance exam preparation with meaningful learning experiences.

3.2. Context of Iran

a. Teacher Beliefs on Writing Assessment Practices

Iranian EFL teachers, especially those with TEFL training, typically prefer modern assessment methods like scoring rubrics, portfolios and self-evaluations (Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2019). Research shows a striking difference in training, while 90% of TEFL-certified teachers had learned about WAL, only 51.2% of untrained teachers received similar instruction. However, there appears to be a significant implementation gap, as Sohrabi et al. (2022) discovered, although most teachers acknowledged the value of WAL and process-focused assessments, merely 15% developed their own rubrics in practice. This inconsistency between teachers' knowledge and classroom application often comes from practical constraints like time limitations.

Furthermore, studies show that even when teachers appreciate process-based evaluation systems, inflexible curriculum requirements frequently push them back toward traditional product-based methods (Ataie-Tabar et al., 2019). These results highlight the constant challenges educators experience when trying to match their assessment principles with actual classroom realities. Although many teachers acknowledge that modern methods can promote student participation and learning, institutional pressures and limited resources often prevent them from continuing to use traditional, exam-centered approaches.

b. Challenges in Implementing Innovative Assessments

Multiple obstacles in the Iranian educational system limit the implementation of modern assessment methods, including time constraints, inadequate resources and insufficient teacher training (Ataie-Tabar et al., 2019). Although technology could potentially simplify assessments, a study by Sohrabi et al. (2022) found that many educators lack the digital skills required to use it effectively. This technological skill gap creates another barrier to adopting innovative approaches like digital portfolios and online self-evaluations. As a result, traditional assessment practices continue to dominate classrooms, slowing progress toward a more learner-centered evaluation approach.

Moreover, teachers without TEFL qualifications often have limited knowledge of self- and peer-assessment techniques, causing very limited classroom application (Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2019). These non-specialist educators typically prefer traditional assessment formats because they connect better with their training and experience. To address these issues, comprehensive professional development programs are essential because such training would help to build teachers' competence and confidence

in using alternative assessment methods, particularly self-assessment and peer-review systems, which could significantly improve classroom evaluation practices.

c. Institutional and Cultural Constraints

Assessment practices are also significantly influenced by both institutional structures and cultural expectations. Research by Soltanpour and Valizadeh (2019) reveals that private language institutes tend to prioritize general English skills over pedagogical training, resulting in many teachers being inadequately trained to utilize contemporary assessment approaches. This emphasis on language proficiency rather than teaching skills may unintentionally limit teachers' assessment of literacy development. Moreover, as Ataie-Tabar et al. (2019) found, rigid supervision systems and overly theoretical teacher training programs further hinder effective assessment practices. The constant pressure from supervisory evaluations often discourages teachers from experimenting with innovative assessment techniques.

Additionally, cultural traditions in education heavily favor summative testing over formative approaches, such as portfolio assessments or peer feedback (Sohrabi et al., 2022). The strong cultural emphasis on final exams as the primary measure of achievement leaves little room for regular formative evaluation. To address these challenges, we must reform teacher training, recruitment and oversight systems, while also changing attitudes to appreciate formative assessment. Such changes could facilitate a transition from exam-focused evaluation to a more balanced approach that prioritizes continuous learning and student growth.

4. Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the beliefs of language teachers in China and Iran about L2 writing assessment?

Language teachers in China and Iran have complex and sometimes conflicting beliefs about how to assess L2 writing. In China, many teachers support the idea of AfL, which focuses on helping students become more independent, think critically and improve gradually (Wang et al., 2020; Liu, 2024). These beliefs match global trends that favor student-centered learning. However, in practice, these ideas are often hard to follow because schools and education systems focus more on AoL, especially through big exams like the Gaokao. As a result, teachers often use more traditional, exam-focused assessments, not because they reject AfL, but because they must meet system demands. In some areas like Shanghai, teachers receive training and support that helps them to use AfL more effectively (Wang, 2021). But in less developed regions, large class sizes and a lack of resources make it difficult to apply these ideas.

In Iran, teachers show similar tensions. Teachers with training in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), especially in cities, are more likely to use modern writing assessment methods like rubrics, peer feedback and writing portfolios (Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2019; Sohrabi et al., 2022). These teachers are influenced by global education trends and want to follow international standards. However, teachers without TEFL training, particularly in rural or religious schools, often use traditional exams that focus on grammar. Their beliefs come not only from less training but also from cultural values. Islamic traditions emphasize teacher authority and collaborative learning, which can offer a strong foundation for community-based assessment practices, even if they differ from some modern individual-focused approaches."

Overall, both contexts show that teacher beliefs are influenced not just by their professional knowledge but also by their roles within larger cultural values and institutional systems. While testing systems restrict teachers' professional freedom, cultural and historical views of education also shape what they can do in classrooms.

Research Question 2: How do cultural and institutional contexts influence these beliefs?

Cultural and institutional contexts strongly affect how teachers in China and Iran think about L2 writing assessment, even though the reasons behind these beliefs are different in each country. In China, teachers often say they support AfL but in practice, they rely more on AoL, especially for high-stakes

exams like the Gaokao (Zhang et al., 2022; Liu, 2024). These exams are not just academic tools, they are part of the culture, shaped by Confucian ideas about merit and social progress. Many teachers believe that standardized tests are fair and necessary for giving everyone equal chances. However, in places like Shanghai, local education policies give teachers more freedom to use AfL strategies. This shows that supportive institutions can help to change beliefs by giving teachers room to act.

In Iran, national rules, limited resources and tight control over the curriculum reduce teacher freedom, pushing them to use traditional exams (Ataie-Tabar et al., 2019). Still, cultural values also play a major role. In public schools, exams are seen as fair and serious, especially by parents and school leaders. Private schools, however, may mix modern methods like rubrics with traditional ones to meet both global standards and local expectations. Faith-based schools go further, seeing writing as a way to build moral values. These schools use assessment not just to test knowledge but to shape character and social responsibility. Moreover, in urban centers, access to international training programs and online resources allows some teachers to adopt more flexible, learner-centered assessment practices. However, this often leads to differences between urban and rural teachers, with rural teachers sometimes having fewer opportunities or resources to apply alternative assessment methods confidently.

In both countries, teacher beliefs do not come from one source. Instead, they are shaped by global trends, national systems, and local culture. This makes teachers' beliefs a mix of different influences rather than traditional or modern.

Overall Synthesis

Language teachers in China and Iran strongly believe in the value of innovative writing assessment methods, mainly Assessment for Learning. They view AfL as a helpful tool for building student autonomy, critical thinking, and writing skills. In China, many teachers support AfL because it matches the idea of student-centered learning. However, their actual classroom practices often follow AoL, which focuses on exams like the Gaokao (Wang et al., 2020; Liu, 2024). These exams have great importance in society, affecting students' futures and opportunities. As a result, teachers often use traditional assessment methods not because they reject AfL, but because they believe that following the exam system is necessary. Their belief in AoL is a practical response to institutional pressure rather than a lack of interest in innovation.

Teachers' beliefs in China also depend on where they work. In cities like Shanghai, education reforms support AfL by offering teacher training and encouraging formative assessment methods, such as student portfolios and peer feedback (Wang, 2021). Teachers in these regions are more confident using modern strategies because they feel supported. In contrast, teachers in less-resourced areas face difficulties such as large classes, fixed curricula, and limited support. These challenges make it hard to fully apply AfL, even when teachers believe in its value. This shows that teachers' beliefs vary across the country and are shaped by local policies and resources.

In Iran, TEFL-trained teachers, especially in urban schools, support global principles of writing assessment like using rubrics and writing portfolios (Soltanpour & Valizadeh, 2019; Sohrabi et al., 2022). International teaching methods influence these teachers and want to help students become better writers. On the other hand, many non-TEFL teachers in rural or religious schools focus more on grammar and teacher-led correction. Their assessment style is shaped by Islamic values, which highlight moral education, respect for authority, and shared learning. These cultural beliefs lead them to see assessment not only as measuring skills but also as guiding students' character and community values. Urban-rural divides also influence access to modern training, creating gaps in teachers' confidence and use of new methods.

Overall, teachers in both countries try to balance new ideas with local expectations. They do not simply copy Western models but instead mix AfL with traditional approaches to fit their unique school environments. For example, some Iranian teachers combine peer feedback with grammar tests, while Chinese teachers slowly introduce AfL in exam-focused systems. These actions show that teachers are thoughtful and creative, working within their limits to improve assessment. To support them, policies

should recognize their role as decision-makers and offer tools that match both global goals and local values.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, this study highlights how teachers' beliefs about L2 writing assessment in China and Iran are shaped and often limited by institutional demands and cultural traditions. Many teachers genuinely value formative approaches, such as AfL, to understand their potential for improving student writing and promoting independent learning. However, these beliefs frequently remain unrealized in practice due to exam-driven systems, limited professional development and contextual constraints. Bridging the gap between belief and practice requires policies that not only promote AfL but also empower teachers through targeted training and culturally sensitive support. When teachers are given the tools and freedom to act on their beliefs, they can become key agents of change in advancing more meaningful and effective L2 writing assessment.

However, this study has some limitations as it mainly uses existing research and does not deeply explore how teacher beliefs differ across regions and institutions in China and Iran. Future research should focus on context-specific, qualitative case studies to understand how teachers' beliefs are formed and how they influence assessment in real classrooms. For example, differences between urban and rural schools or public and private institutions may affect not only resources but also what teachers believe is possible or valuable. It is also important to include students' views to see how teachers' beliefs about formative assessment match students' experiences. Using mixed-method research, such as interviews, classroom observations and policy analysis, can give a better picture of how beliefs and practices interact. Future studies could also look at how digital tools shape teachers' assessment beliefs. Finally, research should guide policymakers in understanding how national reforms affect teachers' daily decisions and belief systems in practice.

WY is also pursuing a Master's degree in Education (TESL) at the same university. He works as English teachers and is dedicated to researching effective methods in TESL. His goal is to improve how English is taught and learned, aiming to make language education more impactful and accessible for students.

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