



# Exploring Self-assessment Literacy and Its Impact on Writing Performance: A Case Study of EFL Students

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**ABSTRACT**

This case study investigates the self-assessment literacy (SAL) of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and its potential influence on their writing performance. The study focuses on six participants, divided into two groups: three with high levels of writing performance and three with low levels. This study exploited an interview protocol guided by Guo et al.'s (2021) SAL model to reveal students' literacy in self-assessment, self-assessment checklist adapted from Nimehchisalem (2014), and documentation of students writing performance to collect the data. The study examined whether there is a difference in SAL between the two performance groups and whether SAL impacted their respective writing performances. The findings descriptively showed that the students with high and low writing performance mostly had perceived similar concept of self-assessment comprehension compared to self-assessment implementation, self-assessment

	<p>interpretation and critical engagement with self-assessment. High-performing students engage more in self-assessment, especially in application, interpretation, and critical engagement. Low-performing writers, in contrast, demonstrate some ability in interpretation but lack application and critical engagement. In addition, self-assessment comprehension is not strongly associated with either group. This suggests that critical engagement and application skills may contribute to the students cognitive and metacognitive growth for their writing performance. These findings may inform writing teachers in designing more targeted interventions to enhance both SAL and self-assessment practice to foster improved writing skills among EFL learners.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> EFL students, self-assessment literacy (SAL), writing performance</p>
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## Introduction

Self-assessment in English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) has recently become a focus among scholars (Andrade, 2019; Cheong et al., 2023; Chung et al., 2021; Hopfenbeck, 2023). It has also been mainly discussed in writing-focused studies and its effect on writing performance (Fathi et al., 2019; Khamboonruang, 2023). Most of the studies have investigated the effectiveness of self-assessment on students' writing performance. However, the main role before applying self-assessment is the students' readiness and their literacy toward it. The students must possess good literacy on the self-assessment process to maximize the advantages of self-assessment. This understanding entails the way in how to conduct self-assessments, recognizing the most appropriate self-assessment methods for oneself, and effectively addressing challenges that arise during the self-assessment process (Yan & Brown, 2017).

The ability to comprehend and possess self-assessment, well known as self-assessment literacy (SAL), is such a crucial part among EFL writing students since writing skills need much effort, both cognitive (linguistics, lexical knowledge, content knowledge, and genre) and metacognitive (motivation, self-regulation, autonomy) abilities during the writing process. SAL, encompassing the ability to evaluate one's own skills and performance accurately, holds significant importance in the EFL writing context (Yan, 2022). Hay and Penney (2013) developed a framework to measure assessment literacy which consists of assessment comprehension, assessment application, assessment interpretation and critical engagement with assessment. This theoretical model is of greater relevance to understanding student SAL. A literate self-assessment student has the capability to comprehend the self-

assessment process, apply it effectively, interpret the assessment results, and critically evaluate the implications and limitations of the assessment (Guo et al., 2021). However, among the huge research on assessment literacy, the focus is on teachers' assessment literacy (Anam & Putri, 2021; Coombe et al., 2020; Fitriyah et al., 2022). It is scarce to find studies focusing on the students' literacy of writing self-assessment. Within the realm of EFL writing instruction, understanding students' capacity for self-assessment becomes particularly pertinent, especially concerning their writing performance.

It is assumed that students might have different SAL since they also have different writing abilities. Fathi et al. (2019) found that students who were taught using self-assessment have better writing and self-regulation abilities. However, the data revealed that the participants in the peer-assessment group exhibited superior writing self-regulation compared to those in the self-assessment group. This demonstrates that students who have low writing performance are not ready to conduct self-assessment. Zhang and Zhang (2022) found that self-assessment practice could effectively improve students' writing performance as well as their rating accuracy. This study contributes to research on self-assessment in the EFL writing domain as a basis for further deliberation on self-assessment in higher education. Self-assessment is undeniably beneficial for enhancing writing skills and fostering the ability to govern one's own learning. However, most of the research conducted in that area employs a quantitative methodology and neglects to consider student literacy in self-assessment and its influence on the different writing abilities.

Few studies exploring students' SAL have been found (Guo et al., 2021; Gladovic et al., 2023). Guo et al. (2021) demonstrated that Chinese students are frequently regarded as literate in self-assessment. However, there are varying degrees of knowledge and skills that have been observed, indicating that Year Three undergraduates possess a higher level of SAL compared to Year One and Two students. Students acquire SAL through a combination of independent learning and external teaching. Additionally, Gladovic's et al. (2023) study, which may not specifically examine SAL, indicated that learners often practice evaluative judgement during qualitative self-assessment even when such pedagogical activity was not specifically designed for this purpose. This finding indirectly tells us that the students are self-assessment literate. The focus of these two studies has been on students' SAL. However, research on students' SAL seen from the students' level of writing performance has received less attention. Hence, by using the SAL framework proposed by Guo et al. (2021) to explore the multifaceted dimensions of SAL, this study delves deeper into the examination of self-assessment by employing a case study methodology to explore the phenomena.

As part of an intervention research project on Assessment as Learning (AaL) and through a comprehensive examination of self-assessment practices, this research aims to uncover insights into the students' SAL within the domain of writing performance. By employing a case study design, we navigated EFL students' SAL, drawing upon the experiences of EFL learners engaged in the process of evaluating their writing performance. To further understand students' SAL, we conducted a case study on Indonesian EFL undergraduates by answering three research questions:

1. How do EFL students with high and low writing performance perceive the concept of SAL?
2. How does SAL differ between EFL students with high and low writing performance?
3. How does SAL affect the writing performance of EFL students with high and low writing performance?

## **Review of Related Literatures**

### **Self-assessment Literacy in EFL Writing Context**

In EFL writing context, Lee (2017) defines self-assessment as the act of critically evaluating and appraising one's own work, development, and occasionally, errors. This assessment has been promoted as a valuable self-regulated learning strategy (Gladovic et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2023) that can promote students learning achievement (Yan & Carless, 2022). Research has demonstrated that students who possess strong writing self-assessment skills tend to achieve high levels of academic success (Alkhowarizmi & Hamdani, 2022; Zhang & Zhang, 2022). This ability can be called as self-assessment literacy (SAL). However, some students possess such aptitude due to several characteristics, particularly their capacity for self-reflection during the writing process (Yan et al., 2023). Therefore, writing course requires a unique skill of students' ability to do self-assessment to evaluate the writing.

Students employ self-assessment as a means of generating feedback for themselves prior to official assessment from the teachers. This practice is advocated as a good type of sustainable assessment (Andrade, 2019; Gladovic et al., 2023). Self-assessment is a process where learners independently and cyclically evaluate their own work, without relying heavily on teachers for help. More precisely, students have the task of gathering and contemplating information on their knowledge, performance, and achievements during the learning process (Andrade, 2019). Prior to the official evaluation, students first discover and assess several techniques to enhancing different elements of learning. They then use rubrics to improve their work accordingly (Chung et al., 2021; Zhao & Zhao, 2023). In this case, this practice might differ among

students who have different writing ability. Wu et al. (2021) found that students with high writing ability have better practicing self-assessment since they are aware of their mistakes. Another study also found that implementing self-assessment techniques significantly improved students' writing performance (Fathi & Shirazizadeh, 2019).

While many studies highlight the benefits of self-assessment, some research indicates that its effectiveness can vary significantly among students. For instance, a study noted that although self-assessment methods could enhance student independence and awareness, some students still inaccurately assessed their own performance initially, which limited the overall impact on their writing skills (Fahimi & Rahimi, 2015). Another investigation (Khodadady & Khodabakhshzade, 2012) suggested that its impact may not be immediate or universally applicable across all learners. This presents an intriguing inquiry into whether students with weak writing skills concurrently exhibit inadequate SAL.

There is a considerable amount of research dedicated to assessment literacy, however, there is a lack of studies specifically examining students' SAL in writing classes. Assessing students' level of SAL and evaluative judgement are essential in a writing class (Fischer et al., 2024; Yan & Carless, 2022). This literacy leads teachers to provide appropriate assessment process to the students. Therefore, teachers have the authority to choose whether the teaching and assessment procedures could be suitable based on the students' degree of SAL. The neglect of students' SAL might result in the inefficiency of evaluation during the writing process (Carless & Winstone, 2023).

In exploring students' SAL, it is intriguing to cite SAL framework proposed by Guo et al. (2021) as was inspired by Hay and Penney (2013) a comprehensive model of assessment literacy. The framework consists of four inter-related elements, which is recommended to be applicable to explore students SAL in writing. They are self-assessment comprehension, self-assessment application, self-assessment interpretation, and critical engagement with self-assessment. Thus, this study adopted the assessment literacy model as the theoretical framework to conceptualize students' SAL. The self-assessment comprehension refers to the understanding that students have about self-assessment, including its purpose, relevance, and appropriateness for their learning. The self-assessment application refers to the understanding to evaluate students' writing based on the criteria, seek feedback, and make self-reflection to assess their performance. The self-assessment interpretation refers to the students understanding of how-to self-monitor their progress after receiving feedback from self-, peer or from teachers. The last, critical engagement with self-assessment refers to students' reflective practice. It allows students to critically analyze their writing processes and outcomes, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. It

also includes the ability to seek feedback. By knowing learners' SAL, teachers not only provide reflective activities, peer feedback, and teacher guidance but also empower learners to become more self-directed and autonomous in their language learning journey.

### **The Students Writing Performance and SAL**

Students writing performance in this study is described by using the argumentative essay criteria. The students' performance also reflected to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) framework as the learning objectives presented in the Academic writing syllabus refers to this framework (Zhao & Zhao, 2023). The CEFR is a widely used framework that defines language performance levels across six bands: A1, A2 (Basic), B1, B2 (Independent), and C1, C2 (Proficient). These levels describe language skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. When assessing students' writing performance, CEFR has a useful benchmark to gauge students' abilities more precisely. In this study, the students are considered as having intermediate level of writing since they have to write short to longer essay. Thus, the level is categorized into B1 (intermediate) and B2 (upper intermediate). Level B1 means that students can write coherent paragraphs on familiar topics, such as personal experiences or opinions, use a range of sentence structures but may still make errors in complex sentences and can write informal reports, and descriptions with some organization. Level B2 means that students can produce clear, detailed texts including academic and professional topics, use a good range of vocabulary and grammar, though occasional errors still occur, and can structure essays, reports, and arguments logically with supporting evidence. In this study, due to cultural factors and where CEFR is not massively used, the student's writing performance was measured by using an argumentative essay scoring rubric. However, their writing abilities can be categorized as B1 level or B1 for some extent.

The scoring guide used in this study was adapted from the generic structure of an argumentative essay (Nimehchisalem & Mukundan, 2011). This scoring profile was an analytic-type scale that had been considered as a reliable instrument to measure argumentative compositions. In this scoring guide, there were five components of argumentative essay and writing quality. Those are introduction and thesis statement, content including supporting detail and evidence, counter argument or contrasting idea, organization and coherence, and finally, mechanics including structure, punctuation, and spelling. Each component has same percentage; 20%. In this study, those five components had range scores of 1 up to 20, with the total score being 100.

All in all, the rubric indicating that the lowest score is 1 and the highest score is 20 for each element.

In relation with SAL, students' literacy and practices might greatly contribute to their writing development, particularly in fostering metacognition, self-regulation, and autonomy (Panadero et al., 2016). Performing self-assessment effectively improves students' writing skills, especially in content development and paragraph organization. It also helps students plan, monitor, and evaluate their writing because teacher's guidance and rubric (Supiani et al., 2023). However, other study indicates that low-performance students struggle with self-assessment due to lack of confidence or understanding of assessment criteria (Lee, 2017). Thus, the criteria on the students' writing performance should be presented clearly in order to truly reflect their writing ability.

## Method

Within a project of intervention study about the effectiveness of AaL on the students' writing ability (Fitriyah et al., 2022), the researchers made an analytical interview with the students regarding their SAL and had documents analysis to deeply analyze their SAL practice. During the intervention, a fact revealed that some students tend to have respectable ability in using self-assessment, while others show inability to assess themselves. Thus, seeing the phenomenon, case study is effective to capture how the difference of the literacy between the groups influences their writing performance or vice versa. A real-life and contemporary case can be explored in a qualitative design through detailed data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Participants

Six participants were recruited from a cohort of EFL students enrolled in one of the Islamic universities in East Java, Indonesia. These six participants in this study were split into two groups—high and low writing performance. Out of the thirty students in total in an Academic Writing course, only six were chosen depending on their writing performance: three with the best marks and three with the lowest marks. This collection was chosen to guarantee significant qualitative insights and to clearly show the difference between competent and struggling students. Furthermore, the decision to classify the lower group as "low" rather than "intermediate" was based on their writing performance relative to the class. While proficiency levels in broader contexts may be categorized into high, intermediate, and low, in this specific study, the students in the lower group consistently exhibited significant difficulties in writing components such as organization,

coherence, and grammatical accuracy. Their writing performance was notably weaker compared to their peers. The primary aim is to examine whether there is a difference in SAL between the two groups and to explore the impact on their respective writing performances. The detailed information of the participants is listed in the following table.

**Table 1**

*Participant's Information*

Group	Pseudonym	Gender	Semester	Writing performance score
High writing performance	H1	Male	4 <sup>th</sup> semester (Second year)	92
	H2	Male		90
	H3	Female		94
Low writing performance	L1	Female		60
	L2	Female		68
	L3	Male		64

Participants were selected based on predetermined criteria reflecting their level of writing performance before and after the course was completed. The scores presented in Table 1 represented the students score at the end of the semester. Out of 100 total score, the scores reflected the students' ability in writing an argumentative essay. The students were divided into two groups depending on their writing results at the end of the writing course. Conversely, the impact of SAL is evident in the writing process undertaken during the semester. There are three writing activities, each accompanied by a self-assessment process utilizing a checklist. This study utilized a second writing task as an example to examine the impact of SAL on students' writing performance. Finally, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process, with pseudonyms used to protect participants' identities.

## Instruments

Participants engaged in semi-structured microanalytical interviews to elicit their self-assessment processes and perceptions regarding their writing performance. The interview guideline referring to SAL framework (Guo et al., 2021) is shown in Appendix. These interviews provided a platform for participants to reflect on their SAL and identify areas of strength and



weakness in their writing. In addition to microanalytical interview, the data was also taken from students' self-assessment checklist adopted from Nimehchisalem (2014). Furthermore, document analysis was conducted to examine the alignment between students' self-assessment checklists and their actual writing performance, assessing whether their written work reflected the criteria they had evaluated. Lastly, participants completed a writing test designed to assess their performance in written English, specifically within the argumentative writing genre. Argumentative essay assessment criteria were provided to measure students' writing performance. As mentioned earlier, this writing task functioned as a post-test in the intervention study, which was part of the main research project under the Assessment as Learning (AaL) framework. The written submissions, along with the self-assessment checklists, served as key documents in the study.

## Data Collection

Each participant underwent a microanalytical interview conducted by the first researcher. This interview as the main data source allows for deep exploration of participants' thoughts, experiences, and perspectives that might not be captured through surveys or tests. Besides, it let the participants express themselves freely, which is useful for exploring students' SAL. Researchers can also ask follow-up questions and clarify ambiguous responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interviews were done face-to-face after the writing class finished and the answers were being written down by the interviewer (first researcher) with participants' consent to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

In addition to the interviews, document analysis of student self-assessment was conducted. The students fulfilled self-assessment checklist in pre-writing, during writing and post writing stages. The students' self-assessment checklist was used as the basis to reveal the difference of self-assessment between students who had low and high writing performance. Following the interviews, participants were provided with writing test tailored to their performance level at the end of the Academic writing course.

## Data Analysis

The data from the interview were manually analyzed by using thematic content analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, we transcribed the data from the source and repeatedly read the responses, coded them by identifying key ideas that corresponded to participants' self-assessment practices and perceptions of writing performance and grouped these codes based on common classifications of emerging themes, counted them, analyzed them,

and finally drew the conclusions. Furthermore, document analysis was done to examine students' revised drafts during the writing process and self-assessment checklist, triangulated findings from interviews, and provided tangible evidence of changes in writing (Bowen, 2009). The results of self-assessment checklists were used to see the consistency of the interview and the students' self-assessment practice. The writing tests were assessed against argumentative essay criteria to evaluate participants' writing performance objectively. The score was used to group the students into high and low writing performance.

## Findings

### How EFL Students with High and Low Writing Performance Perceive the Concept of SAL

Guo et al. (2021) SAL model is used to reveal students' literacy in self-assessment.

#### *Self-Assessment Comprehension*

The self-assessment comprehension refers to the understanding that students have about self-assessment, including its purpose, relevance, and appropriateness for their learning. From the interview, students' conception of self-assessment in writing shows similarities. Five of the six participants explicitly identified the important self-assessment tasks, for example, criterion selection, self-directed feedback seeking, and self-reflection. Only one student did not provide any details or procedures for evaluating their own behavior. From all the participants, only H1 and H3 have highly determined self-assessment. They always bring four to five articles to the class. They used the articles to support their argument. Taking H3's statement as an example of self-assessment understanding:

H1: I assess myself whether I have achieved the goal or not. Self-assessment is very useful for me to nurture my self-awareness about my achievements and shortcomings in terms of education. It encourages me to continuously improve my weaknesses and keeps me learning in my study journey.

H3: I am not completely clear about the idea of self-assessment, I could see where I went wrong since the lecturer kept reminding me to set objectives, provide models, and criteria.

In addition, H2 does not show a better understanding of self-assessment, yet he has unique learning and self-assessment skills, and his ideas on writing are genuine and easy to understand. He mentioned:

H2: I like peer feedback; I learn from them and suddenly get ideas from friends' writing. I use what my friends tell me that makes sense. If not, I often ask the teacher to fix my mistakes.  
H2: Even though I don't get the idea of self-evaluation, I do know that I need to be able to see my mistakes and fix them in the future.

The statements show that H1 and H3 have good understanding of self-assessment in writing. Although H2 stated he did not understand self-assessment, in fact he knows how to improve his writing based on the feedback he received. Meanwhile, the students who had low writing performance have a similar understanding of self-assessment comprehension as the students with high writing scores. For example, L1 mentioned that she did not know the concept of self-assessment, but she knows that she should write and improve her writing based on the criteria of the text. L3 also pointed out that she always refers to the dictionary during the writing process as a kind of self-assessment. They mentioned:

L1: I did not know the concept of self-assessment, but I know that I should write and improve my writing based on the criteria.

L3: I want to improve my writing, yet I know it is difficult. I always open the dictionary during writing process to find appropriate vocabulary.

From the above statements, all participants typically have understood the importance of self-assessment and the purpose behind conducting self-assessment as part of their daily learning process. However, some lower writing performance students do not explicitly grasp the concept but apply self-assessment strategies, such as referring to criteria or using dictionaries.

### ***Self-Assessment Application***

Self-assessment application refers to the understanding that the students' can evaluate their writing based on the standard. It means the assessment should refer to assessment criteria. The following are students' statements regarded their self-assessment application:

H1: The hardest thing when writing is connecting ideas and duration. I need a lot of time to write instead of the classroom writing process. During writing, I rarely ask friends for help; however, I know I need feedback; that's why I print articles I read. That is how I do self-assessment. Can my reading support my writing, or is my reading actually not suitable for me to use?

From the statement above, H1 realized that he used a text as a model and as guidance to write his ideas. According to him, this is good to help him write in a well-organized way. Here he could be said to have good self-assessment application. In another chance, H3 asserted that she has conducted a self-assessment application by doing her task carefully and referring her work to writing criteria many times. She also acknowledged that receiving feedback has significantly improved her writing skills. She mentioned:

H3: Actually, I hope I don't find any mistakes so I don't have to revise them because before submitting the assignment, I really researched my work. However, when I received feedback, I felt like I gained additional knowledge so that my work could be maximized.

On the other hand, low-achieving students show relatively different ideas and practices of self-assessment application. For example, L1 and L2 had the same case; they thought that they had referred to the writing criteria, yet they were not sure the quality of their writing. The good thing is that L2 realized that she needs to keep learning. Here are their statements:

L1: I knew I had to be able to criticize yet I could not decide how to correct the mistakes. That's why I also ask my friends. I ask questions to my friends for many new words before writing.

L2: There were times when I thought I had done everything that was asked based on the standards, but my writing was still bad. When I thought about it, it seemed like my writing skills were not very good. I need to keep learning too.

L3: I, sometimes, forget to see the argumentative writing criteria when I write.

Unlike L1 and L2, L3 frequently mentioned that he forgot to see writing criteria due to focus on the ideas and content of the writing.

The findings show that both groups are relatively various in the self-assessment application. While all of the high achieving students realized the importance of writing criteria and models to construct good writing, the low achieving students also think that writing criteria is crucial, yet they cannot apply it well. H3 values feedback for improvement, while H1 uses reading materials as a reference. Low achievers acknowledge the importance of writing criteria but struggle to apply them effectively, often relying on peers for guidance.

### ***Self-Assessment Interpretation***

Self-assessment interpretation refers to the students understanding of how-to self-monitor their progress after receiving feedback from themselves, their peer or from teachers. The findings show a difference between high achievers and low achievers. High achieving students show that they could eliminate input to revise their writing. They do not automatically use the input they received, especially input from their friends. H2 and H3 mentioned:

H2: Friends may be confusing at times, and I question myself a lot, therefore I trust my teacher a lot more. The student who asks questions the most frequently also makes less mistakes than the rest.

H3: I always look for more word references from my readings as I know that I still make mistakes on vocabulary. I was initially unable of self-evaluation and never felt like utilizing self-feedback. However, I believe myself than my friends. I never utilize any comments from friends since, to be honest, I find it hard to grasp.

In another chance, H3 mentioned that she liked to receive direct corrective feedback, but if she only received one direct corrective feedback comment, she could use the feedback to revise similar mistakes throughout her writing. Therefore, it can be said that students received all types of feedback the teachers provided.

H3: Teacher comments and written corrections teach me; if I encounter the same error, I try to refer to the first corrected one to repair my own.

It is different from the students with low performance of writing who truly needed direct corrective feedback. The following are statements from L1 and L2:

L1: I like to receive correction feedback. I think, we do not need to guess any longer the mistakes' part and directly be able to revise them.

L2: I will revise my writing after my teacher checked on it. I am not confident with my self-correction.

A form of self-assessment interpretation is an effort to understand teacher's feedback. L3 mentioned:

L3: I can understand teacher's corrective feedback well. Nevertheless, I still frequently need to ask some things that I could not understand from her feedback.

Students who have low writing performance not only liked to receive corrective feedback but they are also happy to apply all the feedback they received both from peers or from teachers.

High achievers critically evaluate feedback, selectively incorporating it into revisions. They prefer teacher feedback over peer suggestions. In contrast, low achievers rely heavily on direct corrective feedback, feeling uncertain about self-correction.

### ***Critical Engagement with Self-Assessment***

Critical engagement with self-assessment refers to the students' reflective practice. It allows students to critically analyze their writing processes and outcomes, identifying strengths and areas for improvement. It also includes the ability to seek feedback.

The disparity in SAL within the group lies in their capacity to actively seek feedback. The high achieving students had great confidence in seeking clarification, providing feedback, and seeking more books to enhance their writing and rewriting. Meanwhile, the low achieving students depend only on the feedback provided by their teachers and peers during the required peer-assessment. L2, for example, mentioned that she knew she had to be able to criticize yet she could not decide how to correct the mistakes. She mentioned:

L2: At first, the only way I could learn was if the teacher gave me comments. My self-evaluation stops and doesn't grow when I fix myself; it's like I know I'm wrong but don't know what's right.

High achievers actively seek feedback, resources, and opportunities for improvement. In contrast, low achievers tend to depend on external feedback rather than independently refining their writing. They recognize errors but struggle to determine appropriate corrections. In conclusion, both groups recognize the value of self-assessment, but high achievers engage more critically and independently, while low achievers require more structured guidance to effectively apply self-assessment strategies.

### **Differences in SAL and Practice between EFL Students with High and Low Writing Performance**

In addition to microanalytical interview on the SAL, the results of the self-assessment checklist indicated that both groups of students possess a high perceived level of SAL. High self-assessed learners demonstrate a correlation between their self-assessed literacy skills and their writing competency. However, the self-perception of high SAL among lower

performance learners did not align with their actual writing performance. The following table shows students' self-assessment checklist indicating their self-assessment practice. The assessment checklist consists of some parts, the first point is Before writing, the second Whilst writing, and the last is After writing, and it has three indicators, Done, Pending, and Not applicable. Each part has some components representing students writing process. The process that has been done should be ticked in the Done column, likewise, if it has not been done yet, students would check Pending, and so on. Table 2 shows H3's checklist compared to L1's checklist.

**Table 2***Students' Self-Assessment Checklist Reflecting Self-Assessment Practice*

Student	Self-assessment checklist	Result																																																																
H3	<p><b>Before Writing</b></p> <table> <tr> <th>Item</th><th>Done</th><th>Pending</th><th>Not applicable</th></tr> <tr> <td>1. Review related texts.</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr> <tr> <td>2. List a few arguments related to the topic.</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>3. Keep only the strong arguments that you can write to support.</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>4. List a few counter-arguments.</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr> <tr> <td>5. Keep only the counter-arguments that you can refute.</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>6. Consider how different people from different backgrounds would argue for or against this topic.</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>7. Based on these items, plan the content of your paragraphs.</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr> </table>	Item	Done	Pending	Not applicable	1. Review related texts.			✓	2. List a few arguments related to the topic.	✓			3. Keep only the strong arguments that you can write to support.	✓			4. List a few counter-arguments.			✓	5. Keep only the counter-arguments that you can refute.	✓			6. Consider how different people from different backgrounds would argue for or against this topic.		✓		7. Based on these items, plan the content of your paragraphs.			✓	In the pre-writing phase of draft 1, H3 has not reviewed some articles to support her writing.																																
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7. Based on these items, plan the content of your paragraphs.			✓																																																															
	<p><b>While Writing</b></p> <table> <tr> <th>Item</th><th>Done</th><th>Pending</th><th>Not applicable</th></tr> <tr> <td>1. Draft the body paragraphs first. You do not have to start with the introduction.</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr> <tr> <td>2. Write following your plan.</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>3. Avoid plagiarism. Acknowledging the source if you are quoting.</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>4. Every idea should be related to the topic.</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>5. Present the content effectively.</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>5.1. Make a claim.</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>5.2. Provide strong evidence to support every claim.</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>5.3. Elaborate on the link between your claim and evidence if you anticipate it may not be clear for your reader.</td><td></td><td>✓</td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>5.4. Back up the link between the claim and evidence if you anticipate it may be questioned by the reader.</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr> <tr> <td>5.5. Anticipate rebuttals and provide proof for rejecting them.</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr> <tr> <td>5.6. Use qualifiers (e.g., certainly) to show the strength of arguments.</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr> <tr> <td>6. Organize your ideas.</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>6.1. Present your arguments and counter-arguments in the body paragraphs.</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>6.2. At the beginning of the first paragraph, write a general statement about the topic.</td><td>✓</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr> <td>6.3. In the first paragraph, clearly state your position in the argument. Alternatively, you may state your purpose of writing this paper.</td><td></td><td></td><td>✓</td></tr> </table>	Item	Done	Pending	Not applicable	1. Draft the body paragraphs first. You do not have to start with the introduction.			✓	2. Write following your plan.		✓		3. Avoid plagiarism. Acknowledging the source if you are quoting.	✓			4. Every idea should be related to the topic.	✓			5. Present the content effectively.				5.1. Make a claim.		✓		5.2. Provide strong evidence to support every claim.		✓		5.3. Elaborate on the link between your claim and evidence if you anticipate it may not be clear for your reader.		✓		5.4. Back up the link between the claim and evidence if you anticipate it may be questioned by the reader.			✓	5.5. Anticipate rebuttals and provide proof for rejecting them.			✓	5.6. Use qualifiers (e.g., certainly) to show the strength of arguments.			✓	6. Organize your ideas.				6.1. Present your arguments and counter-arguments in the body paragraphs.	✓			6.2. At the beginning of the first paragraph, write a general statement about the topic.	✓			6.3. In the first paragraph, clearly state your position in the argument. Alternatively, you may state your purpose of writing this paper.			✓	During writing of draft 1, she pays attention to unity and logical flow and is not sure to have done good writing as evidenced by many check signs put in 'pending' and 'not applicable'.
Item	Done	Pending	Not applicable																																																															
1. Draft the body paragraphs first. You do not have to start with the introduction.			✓																																																															
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6.3. In the first paragraph, clearly state your position in the argument. Alternatively, you may state your purpose of writing this paper.			✓																																																															

After Writing			
Item	Done	Pending	Not applicable
1. Fulfill the task.			
1.1. Consider the word limit.			✓
1.2. Remove the irrelevant ideas.	✓		
1.3. Respond to all parts of the task.			✓
2. Present the content effectively.			✓
3. Check the organization of your paper.			✓
4. Check your use of vocabulary.	✓		
4.1. Using technical words is good but you should avoid using words that you do not know how to use.	✓		Not applicable
4.2. Avoid repetition by using synonyms and antonyms.		✓	
4.3. Avoid incorrect forms.			✓
4.4. Make sure the right words come together.	✓		
4.5. It is good to use idioms, but some readers do not like clichés.	✓		
5. Check your style.			
5.1. Keep your style formal.		✓	
5.2. Keep it clear.		✓	
5.3. Make it engaging.		✓	
6. Check your grammar.			
6.1. Use verbs correctly.			✓
6.2. Avoid fragments.			✓
6.3. Use nouns correctly.			✓
6.4. Use adjectives and adverbs correctly.			✓
6.5. Use articles correctly.			✓
6.7. Use prepositions correctly.			✓
6.8. Avoid faulty comparisons.			✓
6.9. Take care of parallel structures.			✓
6.10. Use complex structures correctly.			✓
7. Focus on mechanics.			
7.1. Check your spelling.			✓
7.2. Capitalize words like names.			✓
7.3. Use punctuation marks correctly.		✓	
8. Request a peer to review your final draft and give you feedback.			✓
9. Proofread the paper considering items 1-7.			✓

In the post-writing stage, H3 is sure to respond to all parts of the task and vocabulary choices, but she seems not sure with the organization, mechanism (grammar and punctuation) as evidenced by the checks mostly in 'Not applicable' column

**L1**

Before Writing			
Item	Done	Pending	Not applicable
1. Review related texts.	✓		
2. List a few arguments related to the topic.	✓		
3. Keep only the strong arguments that you can write to support.	✓		
4. List a few counter-arguments.		✓	
5. Keep only the counter-arguments that you can refute.		✓	
6. Consider how different people from different backgrounds would argue for or against this topic.		✓	
7. Based on these items, plan the content of your paragraphs.	✓		

On the other hand, L1, who has lower writing performance shows confident enough in pre-writing stage. She is sure to have a good preparation from reading articles and outlining.



**While Writing**

Item	Done	Pending	Not applicable
1. Draft the body paragraphs first. You do not have to start with the introduction.			✓
2. Write following your plan.	✓		
3. Avoid plagiarism. Acknowledging the source if you are quoting.	✓		
4. Every idea should be related to the topic.	✓		
5. Present the content effectively.			
5.1. Make a claim.	✓		
5.2. Provide strong evidence to support every claim.	✓		
5.3. Elaborate on the link between your claim and evidence if you anticipate it may not be clear for your reader.	✓		
5.4. Back up the link between the claim and evidence if you anticipate it may be questioned by the reader.	✓		
5.5. Anticipate rebuttals and provide proof for rejecting them.	✓		
5.6. Use qualifiers (e.g., certainly) to show the strength of arguments.	✓		
6. Organize your ideas.			
6.1. Present your arguments and counter-arguments in the body paragraphs.	✓		
6.2. At the beginning of the first paragraph, write a general statement about the topic.	✓		
6.3. In the first paragraph, clearly state your position in the argument. Alternatively, you may state your purpose of writing this paper.	✓		

During the writing stage, she also was sure to have done all the necessary tasks as evidenced the checks are in the 'Done' column. However, her work does not show the same result.

**After Writing**

Item	Done	Pending	Not applicable
1. Fulfill the task.	✓		
1.1. Consider the word limit.	✓		
1.2. Remove the irrelevant ideas.		✓	
1.3. Respond to all parts of the task.	✓		
2. Present the content effectively.	✓		
3. Check the organization of your paper.	✓		
4. Check your use of vocabulary.			
4.1. Using technical words is good but you should avoid using words that you do not know how to use.	✓		
4.2. Avoid repetition by using synonyms and antonyms.	✓		
4.3. Avoid incorrect forms.	✓		
4.4. Make sure the right words come together.		✓	
4.5. It is good to use idioms, but some readers do not like clichés.			
5. Check your style.	✓		
5.1. Keep your style formal.	✓		
5.2. Keep it clear.	✓		
5.3. Make it engaging.	✓		
6. Check your grammar.	✓		
6.1. Use verbs correctly.	✓		
6.2. Avoid fragments.	✓		
6.3. Use nouns correctly.	✓		
6.4. Use adjectives and adverbs correctly.	✓		
6.5. Use articles correctly.	✓		
6.7. Use prepositions correctly.	✓		
6.8. Avoid faulty comparisons.	✓		
6.9. Take care of parallel structures.	✓		
6.10. Use complex structures correctly.			
7. Focus on mechanics.	✓		
7.1. Check your spelling.	✓		
7.2. Capitalize words like names.	✓		
7.3. Use punctuation marks correctly.		✓	
8. Request a peer to review your final draft and give you feedback.	✓		
9. Proofread the paper considering items 1-7.	✓		

In the post-writing stage of draft 1, she seems very sure with organization, mechanism (grammar and punctuation), and all aspects of the writing task.

Table 2 shows the self-assessment checklists that were filled out by the students in second writing task. Some interesting points reveal in the table. For example, H3 who had good writing performance checked many points in the 'Pending' and 'Not applicable' column. In fact, her writing was good.

It seems that she is not confident enough. In contrast, L1 who has lower writing ability gave many check marks in the 'Done' column which means she believed that she has gone through the process. In fact, her writing has not fully met the argumentative criteria.

Table 2 portrays that the self-assessment practices of students with high writing performance and low writing performance. Due to the limited space, not all evidences from the participants are presented here. However, their checklist patterns show similarity. Comparing these two groups, several key differences emerge. For example, in pre-writing phase, high performance students spend more time and effort in creating detailed outlines and setting clear goals. During writing, they consistently monitor their writing for coherence, logical flow, and counter argument while low performance students often neglect these aspects. In the post-writing phase, both groups show similar practices i.e., checking the word number, pending checking the final grammar structure, and revise the draft based on feedback they received.

These findings reveal that both groups have similar self-assessment practice, however, the result of their works have significant differences. It is likely that the low performance group have superficial self-assessment checklist. This highlights the importance of structured self-assessment practices in enhancing writing performance. They might think that they have done the process, in fact they have not. This finding implies a need of regular monitoring on the students' self-assessment practice during the writing process to maintain coherence and to help students develop better SAL and, consequently, improve their writing performance. Finally, this study shows that students who engage in thorough self-assessment practices tend to have higher writing performance. The result of interviews and self-assessment checklist indicate that both groups possess a solid comprehension of self-assessment application. However, they lack a thorough knowledge of the concepts of self-assessment and critical engagement self-assessment. This finding lead to reveal differences of SAL between EFL students with high and low writing performance

**Table 3**

*The Differences in SAL between EFL Students with High and Low Writing Performance*

Self-assessment components	High writing performance	Low writing performance
Comprehension	-	-
Application	√	√
Interpretation	√	√
Critical engagement with self-assessment	√	-

Table 3 displays that high-performing students engage more in self-assessment, especially in application, interpretation, and critical engagement. Low-performing writers demonstrate some ability in interpretation but lack application and critical engagement. In addition, self-assessment comprehension is not strongly associated with either group. This suggests that critical engagement and application skills may contribute to better writing performance, while a lack of these skills may hinder writing ability. This table suggests that critical engagement with self-assessment and application are key distinguishing factors between high- and low-performing writers.

### **SAL Impact on the Writing Performance of EFL Students with High and Low Writing Performance**

The students writing quality in this study is affected by their understanding of self-assessment in writing, as evidenced by self-assessment checklists and document analysis. Students with high writing performance are affected by their capacity for self-assessment. The assessment process via the checklist facilitates learning; for instance, prior to their initial writing, there was no discernible enhancement in their ability to formulate a thesis statement. However, upon addressing the second topic, they demonstrated an improved capacity for thesis statement construction. Conversely, the group exhibiting lower writing performance did not experience significant advancement in their thesis statement writing, particularly in the areas of idea development and the organization of supporting arguments. There is an enhancement in both groups, however, the high group exhibited more improvement than the low group, particularly in detailing aspects such as theses, organizational structure, and content.

While this study primarily explored students' SAL, qualitative analysis of interviews and writing revisions revealed insights into how SAL may have influenced their writing. This study did not focus on direct causal effects, but rather highlights how students engaged with self-assessment and whether it contributed to their writing development. The findings reveal some key points of the effects of SAL and practices.

### ***Increased Awareness of Writing Strengths and Weaknesses***

Students demonstrated varying degrees of awareness about their writing quality through self-assessment. Many reported that engaging in self-assessment allowed them to identify specific weaknesses, such as unclear thesis statements, underdeveloped arguments, or frequent grammatical errors. H3 reflected:

"Before doing self-assessment, I just wrote whatever came to mind. But after checking my writing using the checklist, I realized my ideas were not connected well."

This suggests that SAL encouraged students to critically evaluate their writing and lead to more deliberate revisions.

### ***Improvements in Revision***

Document analysis of students' drafts and revised versions indicated that some students made meaningful improvements after engaging in self-assessment. Changes included reorganizing paragraphs for better coherence, adjusting word choice for clarity, and correcting grammatical errors. However, the depth of revisions varied. Some students made surface-level corrections, such as fixing punctuation, while others attempted more substantial structural revisions. For example, H2 initially struggled with paragraph unity but, after self-assessment, he reordered his arguments and added transition sentences. This demonstrates that SAL has supported students in making informed revisions, though the extent of its impact differed among individuals.

### ***Challenges in Applying Self-Assessment***

Despite recognizing areas for improvement, not all students in low achieving students were able to translate self-assessment insights into effective revisions. Some struggled with applying feedback to their writing, indicating that SAL alone was not always sufficient for immediate improvement. L1 noted:

"I knew my argument was weak, but I didn't know how to fix it."

L1's writing shows no significant improvement between draft 1, before using the self-assessment checklist, and draft 2, after using the checklist. This highlights the need for additional guidance in helping students bridge the gap between identifying issues and implementing effective revisions.

### ***Indirect Effects: Metacognitive Awareness and Writing Confidence***

Beyond immediate improvements in writing, SAL appeared to foster greater metacognitive awareness. High-achieving students reported feeling

more in control of their writing process and more confident in evaluating their own work. H2 stated:

"At first, I didn't trust my own judgment. But after practicing self-assessment, I started to see my mistakes more clearly."

Although this shift in awareness does not guarantee improved writing quality in the short term, it may contribute to long-term writing development by encouraging a habit of critical reflection.

The qualitative data suggest that SAL have given considerable effect on students' writing. While some students demonstrated improved revision practices and greater writing awareness, others faced difficulties in applying SAL effectively. The findings emphasize that self-assessment alone may not lead to immediate improvements in writing quality but can serve as a valuable tool for fostering critical thinking and metacognitive growth.

## Discussion

The findings of the study reach a critical and complex issue regarding the interplay between writing competence and SAL. This study reveals that there is an interdependence of writing competence and their SAL. The first possibility is that students have different learning experience in writing and exposure in feedback. High-performing students likely have more experience and exposure to quality writing and feedback. This repeated exposure could enhance their understanding and ability to self-assess effectively. It is likely that the students with high writing competence have good metacognitive skills. They often have better-developed metacognitive skills. They understand what good writing looks like and can apply this knowledge to self-assessment. This is in line with a study by Rosdiana et al. (2023) who mention that metacognitive awareness, particularly in the context of writing, involves understanding what constitutes good writing and being able to apply this knowledge to self-assessment. This includes recognizing the importance of planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's writing process, as well as being able to identify and adjust areas that need improvement (Chung et al., 2021).

The second condition is that students' SAL can be the main factor on the student's writing competence. The students who are literate of self-assessment have likely to make reflection on their performance and thus contribute to improvement in writing. They can critically evaluate their work and identify areas for improvement, leading to better writing over time. This idea is supported by research that highlights the importance of self-assessment in enhancing writing abilities (Chung et al., 2021; Fathi et al., 2019; Zhang & Zhang, 2022). Chung et al. (2021) mention that self-assessment

helps students set realistic goals and strategies for their writing, contributing to gradual improvements in their writing skills. It notes that students who engage in self-assessment tend to develop autonomy in identifying areas for improvement and are more likely to recognize and correct mistakes in their writing (Gladovic et al., 2023). This increased awareness and ability to reflect on their performance can significantly contribute to the improvement of their writing competence (Mazloomi & Khabiri, 2018).

On the other hand, the findings show that students with lower writing competence might not fully grasp the concept and purpose of self-assessment in writing, even if they can go through the motions of using a self-assessment checklist (Nimehchisalem, 2014). Their responses during interviews indicate a lack of deep understanding. Yan (2022) asserted that providing clear explanations of the purpose and benefits of self-assessment can help students with lower writing competence grasp the concept better. This can involve discussing how self-assessment helps them identify areas of improvement, develop a growth mindset, and enhance their writing skills (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

In addition, lower competence students might feel pressured to appear knowledgeable, leading them to pretend they understand self-assessment when they actually do not. This could result in superficial self-assessments that do not contribute to real improvement (Yan et al., 2023). They are often aware of the expectations placed on them by their teachers or their peers. This awareness can lead to performance anxiety, especially in low competence students who feel they must meet these expectations to avoid negative judgments. As a result, they may pretend to understand self-assessment concepts to avoid embarrassment or criticism. Research suggests that students, regardless of their competence, tend to overestimate their abilities and performance. This phenomenon is known as the "above-average effect" observed in various domains, including academia (Austin & Gregory, 2007). Such overestimation can lead lower competence students to inaccurately assess their knowledge and skills related to self-assessment.

When students pretend to understand self-assessment, they often engage with the process only at a surface level. They might mechanically complete checklists or rating scales without truly reflecting on their work or the criteria being assessed. This leads to superficial engagement with the assessment itself. These students miss the critical reflective component of self-assessment. This is presented by the findings, that low performing students did not show critical engagement with self-assessment (Table 2). They might check off items on a checklist based on what they think the teacher wants to see rather than an honest evaluation of their writing (Brown et al., 2015). Since the students are not genuinely reflecting on their writing,

they fail to identify specific areas for improvement. This lack of critical insight prevents them from making meaningful progress in their writing skills.

Without genuine self-reflection, students may continue to make the same mistakes without realizing they need to change their approach. This cannot be a customary behaviour for them, as it will adversely affect their development. Research indicates that superficial self-assessment can lead to persistent errors in writing, as students may not engage in genuine reflection necessary for improvement. A study found that students who do not accurately assess their writing skills continue to make the same mistakes, indicating a disconnect between perceived and actual competencies (Alkhowarizmi & Hamdani, 2022). Finally, the study indicates that SAL is perceived differently among students with varying writing competencies. High-performing students can effectively learn SAL; meanwhile, low-performing students believe they comprehend SAL, however they fail to derive significant benefits from its components and activities.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In recent years, there has been extensive research on language assessment literacy among teachers. However, little is known about what defines a self-assessment-literate student, especially when dealing with differences in writing performance. As part of the assessment as learning intervention study, this research explores the students' perceptions of self-assessment concepts, their level, and the development of SAL among Indonesian undergraduates with a small-scale case study. By adopting Guo et al. (2021) SAL framework, it is found that from the four components of the SAL framework, not all students have self-assessment comprehension. The students understood the self-assessment application, self-assessment interpretation, and critical engagement with self-assessment to varying degrees. The findings also reveal that students' writing performance interplays with their SAL. It is revealed that high-performance students are also considered self-assessment-literate students. Meanwhile, students with low levels of writing performance demonstrate significant differences in SAL and practice, as evidenced by their self-assessment checklist. Despite the significance of SAL, it is crucial to remember that this study is exploratory and restricted to the Indonesian higher education context, utilizing a small sample. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data and written artifacts may introduce biases in the analysis. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the complexities of SAL among EFL students and offers implications for educational practice and future research endeavors. Further research is suggested to verify the findings of the current study with larger samples in different educational settings. A study focusing

on the intervention of SAL is also suggested. For example, integrating AaL principles into writing instruction. This might involve designing activities that prompt students to reflect on their writing processes, set goals, and self-assess their progress. They should offer scaffolded opportunities for students to practice self-assessment, starting with guided examples and gradually moving towards more independent assessments. It may reveal whether targeted interventions to improve SAL can also enhance writing competence.

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## Appendix

Interview Protocol adapted from Guo et al. (2021)

### 1. Self-assessment comprehension

What do you think self-assessment in writing is?

How much knowledge and skill do you think you have to conduct self-assessment?

What are the benefits of self-assessing for your writing process?

### 2. Self-assessment application

How do you usually conduct self-assessment in your writing process? What are the steps?

### 3. Self-assessment interpretation

How do you use self-assessment to improve your writing?

How do you refine your self-assessment for better self-assessment in the future?

### 4. Critical engagement with self-assessment

What are the disadvantages of self-assessment in your writing learning?

What are the difficulties you have met during the process of self-assessment in this writing course?