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The influence of humanistic education on tertiary English teachers' writing assessment practices: a systematic review

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Past decades have witnessed a growing emphasis on aligning assessment practices with humanistic education to foster student-centered learning in EFL writing instruction. However, existing research remains largely focused on traditional summative assessments, often neglecting the potential of formative approaches to enhance linguistic proficiency and learners' holistic development. The literature review is necessary as it addresses the growing need to align formative assessment with humanistic education principles in EFL writing instruction. It explores the transformation of assessment practices among tertiary English writing instructions through the integration of humanistic principles. Focusing on studies from 2014 to 2024, the review highlights a shift from traditional summative evaluation to formative, learner-centered approaches, such as dynamic assessment and self-assessment, which enhance writing proficiency, self-regulation, and emotional wellbeing. Despite these benefits, challenges persist in reducing reliance on summative assessments and in bolstering teacher training. This review adopts a humanistic education framework to offer a distinct perspective beyond conventional formative assessment literature. By synthesizing empirical studies on tertiary EFL writing assessment, it emphasizes how teachers conceptualize and apply principles such as empathy, learner autonomy, and growth-oriented feedback. Unlike previous reviews centered on assessment methods or teacher cognition, this study reframes assessment as an inherently emotional, relational, and developmental practice, calling for frameworks that support holistic student growth.

KEYWORDS

humanistic assessment, formative assessment, tertiary EFL writing, teacher perceptions, assessment practices

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Assessment perceptions refer to how teachers and students understand the purpose, value, and role of assessment in education, shaping whether it is viewed primarily as a tool for judgment or as a means for feedback and learning enhancement (Ferretti et al., 2021; Monteiro et al., 2021). Assessment practices, in turn, encompass various techniques such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and teacher-led evaluations (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

Over time, assessment approaches have evolved alongside shift in educational philosophy. Conventional assessment methods, typically centered on summative evaluations such as examinations and grades, have faced criticism for prioritizing outcomes

above the learning process (Gipps, 2011). Conversely, modern methodologies, guided by constructivist and humanistic educational ideas, prioritize ongoing feedback, and learner-centered practices designed to facilitate student progress (Brown, 2005). Recent research indicate an increasing acknowledgment of the necessity to align assessment with learner-centered pedagogy, as it improves student motivation and engagement (Febriani, 2024; Giraldo Baena, 2021).

While prior reviews on EFL writing assessment have largely emphasized formative assessment strategies, teacher assessment literacy, and feedback mechanisms (Estaji, 2024; Magaly, 2020), they often overlook the humanistic dimensions of assessment, such as empathy, emotional wellbeing, and the teacher-student relationship. Unlike formative assessment, which primarily focuses in monitoring learning process, humanistic assessment integrates affective and philosophical values, encouraging teachers to view students as whole person and support their personal growth (Almutawa and Alfahid, 2024; Rogers, 1969). Recent studies increasingly call for assessment practices that not only inform instruction but also foster learner autonomy, motivation, and emotional engagement (Cao et al., 2025; Estaji, 2024).

The emergence of humanistic pedagogy in language instruction has led to a critical reexamination of conventional assessment practices. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic accuracy, humanistic approaches values learners' self-awareness, intrinsic motivation, and critical thinking (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Consequently, there has been a growing shift toward alternative assessment methods, like peer review, and self-evaluation, which better align with student-centered values (Brown, 2004). This paradigm shift has reshaped English instructors' perceptions and implementations of assessment, promoting more responsive and empathetic learning environments.

1.2 Overview of humanistic education

Humanistic education is a teaching method rooted in humanistic psychology, focusing on the holistic development of individuals and the realization of personal potential. The fundamental tenets of humanistic education encompass addressing the individual needs of each student, encouraging autonomous learning, and cultivating supportive teacher-student interactions. These principles are rooted in the work of theorists such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, who advocated for an educational environment that prioritizes personal growth, emotional wellbeing, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1969).

A fundamental principle of humanistic education is the acknowledgment of each student's individuality and the conviction that learning must be customized to align with their personal interests, strengths, and emotional requirements. This student-centered methodology urges educators to cultivate a learning atmosphere in which students feel secure, valued, and inspired to participate in educational endeavors that correspond with their own aspirations and interests (del Carmen Salazar, 2013). In this approach, the teacher is perceived not as a mere transmission of knowledge, but as a facilitator who directs students' exploration and fosters their emotional and intellectual growth.

Moreover, humanistic education emphasizes the significance of the teacher-student interaction. It underscores the establishment of an emotionally supportive classroom atmosphere, whereby educators provide empathy, comprehension, and motivation. This supportive relationship is believed to cultivate an environment where students can investigate and articulate their emotions, engage in risk-taking within their learning, and enhance their self-confidence (Rogers, 1969). It is indicated that students who view their teachers as compassionate and sympathetic are more inclined to participate in profound learning and demonstrate enhanced academic performance (Cornelius-White, 2007).

Humanistic education advocates for self-directed learning, urging students to assume responsibility for their own educational journeys. This corresponds with the concept of cultivating intrinsic motivation, when students are driven by their personal interests and internal aspirations rather than external incentives or pressures (Deci and Ryan, 2000). The teacher's role is to facilitate and cultivate the student's autonomy, assisting them in acquiring the skills and confidence necessary for independent study.

1.3 Research motivation and objectives

Assessment in education is crucial, significantly influencing instructional methodologies and student learning results. Traditional assessment systems, frequently inflexible and centered on summative evaluations like standardized tests, have faced significant criticism for overlooking the intricacies of student learning and inadequately reflecting the depth of individual student growth (Kiptiony, 2024). Conversely, humanistic education, prioritizing individualized learning, emotional growth, and student independence, presents a novel viewpoint on the reimagining of assessments to more effectively address the varied requirements of learners (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

This research is motivated by the increasing acknowledgment that assessment procedures must not only evaluate student achievement but also enhance their overall personal development and learning experiences. Humanistic education perceives students as active participants in their learning, contesting conventional assessment models by promoting formative, feedback-driven evaluations that are more aligned with the unique needs and experiences of students (Winarko and Budiwati, 2024). Humanistic education emphasizes relationship dynamics in teaching, aiming to convert evaluation from a simple evaluative mechanism into a supporting, progressive process that facilitates students in realizing their full potential (Benmoussa et al., 2024). This transition is significant as it corresponds with the increasing focus on learner-centered methodologies in modern educational practices.

The principal objective of this research is to investigate the impact of humanistic educational concepts on educators' perceptions of assessment and their corresponding assessment procedures in tertiary English teaching environment. Humanistic education advocates for educators to acknowledge pupils as complete individuals rather than mere passive consumers of information. This viewpoint may transform teachers' perceptions of assessment, prompting them to embrace more adaptable, student-focused methodologies that emphasize continuous

feedback, self-evaluation, and the cultivation of critical thinking abilities (Korostenskiene, 2022). This research seeks to elucidate how humanistic values—such as empathy, respect for student autonomy, and the significance of emotional wellbeing—can convert assessment from a mechanism of judgment to one of support, reflection, and development.

This research seeks to examine the influence of humanistic education on educator's perspectives and practices on assessment in higher education, highlighting a transition from conventional, summative evaluations to more formative, student-centered methodologies. This study examines the impact of humanistic principles, namely student autonomy, emotional wellbeing, and intrinsic motivation, on assessment methods, providing significant insights for promoting whole student development. This review is crucial for its contribution to the ongoing conversation on learner-centered education, valuing the necessity for assessments that evaluate performance while simultaneously fostering personal growth and critical thinking. This research underscores the transformative potential of humanistic assessment when education institutions acknowledge the constraints of strict evaluation paradigms, providing practical recommendations for incorporating these principles into teaching methods and future research avenues.

1.4 Research questions

The key research issue driving this systematic review is: **In what ways does humanistic education affect teachers' perspectives of assessment and their assessment methodologies?** This inquiry examines the convergence of humanistic educational principles and assessment, focusing on how the humanistic approach, which prioritizes personal growth, student-centered learning, and holistic development, influences educators' perceptions regarding assessment and shapes their evaluative practices.

The examination of this subject is especially pertinent given the increasing transition toward learner-centered education, where students are regarded as active participants in their educational journey rather than passive users of knowledge (Oyelana et al., 2022). As assessment procedures evolve, comprehending the influence of humanistic education on educators' conceptions of assessment is essential. Humanistic education promotes a pedagogical and evaluative framework that prioritizes student autonomy, self-directed learning, and emotional wellbeing, hence contesting the conventional, frequently inflexible assessment methods typically utilized in educational institutions (Fan, 2025). Consequently, a fundamental part of this research is to comprehend how these core concepts of humanistic education influence teachers' views toward assessment, promoting more formative and developmental approaches instead of exclusively emphasizing summative measurements.

Furthermore, an essential secondary inquiry emerges: **How do humanistic principles manifest in teachers' assessment practices?** Humanistic education underscores the significance of cultivating supportive teacher-student connections and establishing an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, which directly influences evaluation methodologies. Teachers who adhere to these principles are more inclined to adopt evaluations

that promote student reflection, self-evaluation, and feedback mechanisms prioritizing personal growth rather than solely performance indicators (Yue et al., 2023). This question seeks to explore whether and how humanistic principles are reflected in the practical implementation of assessments, including the incorporation of ongoing feedback, peer evaluation, and collaborative learning possibilities.

This project will investigate the wider effects of humanistic assessment approaches on student outcomes. **How do humanistic assessment approaches influence student outcomes?** Humanistic education boosts academic performance while fostering intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and social-emotional development in students (Kumari, 2024). Consequently, a fundamental aspect of this research is to evaluate how modifications in assessment processes, shaped by humanistic concepts, affect both teachers' pedagogical methods and the overall learning experience of students.

Through investigating these questions, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how humanistic education reshapes the landscape of assessment, guiding teachers toward more reflective, supportive, and student-centered assessment practices that align with the broader goals of fostering holistic student development.

1.5 Structure of the paper

This paper investigates the impact of humanistic education on teachers' perceptions and practices of assessment in higher education, with a focus on how humanistic principles reshape assessment methods. The introduction sets the stage by valuing the need to transition from conventional summative assessments, which primarily measure performance, to more formative, student-centered approaches that support personalized learning, emotional development, and holistic growth. The literature review offers a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of assessment practices, exploring the shift from traditional evaluation methods to contemporary, learner-focused strategies. It highlights how humanistic education, with its emphasis on student autonomy, self-directed learning, and fostering intrinsic motivation, influences both the perceptions and the practical strategies teachers employ in assessing students. The research methodology outlines the systematic review process used to explore the relationship between humanistic education and assessment, detailing how relevant studies were selected and analyzed. In the findings and discussion section, the paper examines how humanistic education shapes teachers' attitudes toward assessment, promoting formative approaches like continuous feedback, peer evaluation, and self-assessment. The paper also explores the positive outcomes of these changes, such as enhanced student motivation, emotional wellbeing, and academic performance. The conclusion summarizes key findings, offering practical recommendations for integrating humanistic principles into assessment practices and suggesting areas for future research. Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights into how humanistic education can transform assessment from a mere evaluative tool into a means of fostering student development and growth.

1.6 Scope and limitations of the review

Although this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of humanistic assessment in tertiary-level EFL writing instruction, its scope is subject to certain limitations that emerged during the screening process. Notably, the final selection of 13 studies, despite being methodologically robust, exhibits a geographic concentration in East and Southeast Asia, particularly in countries like China, and Thailand. This regional focus reflects both the availability of empirical research in these contexts and the database inclusion criteria (Scopus and ERIC), which prioritized peer-viewed studies in English with relevance to tertiary EFL writing.

As a result, the cultural, institutional, and pedagogical diversity of EFL higher education worldwide is only partially represented. The review may therefore underrepresent perspectives from regions such as Europe, Latin America, or the Middle East, where humanistic or learner-centered assessment practices may differ in form or implementation. Additionally, differences in institutional policy, teacher training systems, and student expectations across cultures may affect how humanistic assessment is interpreted and enacted.

While the included studies offer valuable insights into the pedagogical trends within the Asian EFL context, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings globally. Future reviews should strive to integrate a more geographically and culturally diverse corpus of studies to ensure broader representativeness and applicability.

1.7 Theoretical framework

Although several reviewed studies demonstrate elements commonly associated with socio-cognitive theories, such as self-regulated learning, formative feedback, and learner strategy development, this review intentionally adopts a humanistic theoretical orientation as its core analytical lens. The central aim is to explore how English writing assessment practices in higher education reflect key humanistic principles, including learner autonomy, emotional wellbeing, personal growth, and intrinsic motivation. While socio-cognitive theories offer valuable insights, particularly in understanding cognitive processes and behavioral outcomes, they are not explicitly applied in this review as theoretical anchors. Instead, when studies exhibit overlapping concepts that align with both paradigms, for example, in promoting student agency or reflective practices, they are interpreted through the humanistic lens. This distinction is crucial to avoid theoretical conflation and to maintain conceptual clarity. By foregrounding humanistic theory, this review seeks to emphasize the affective and developmental dimensions of assessment often under-represented in more cognitively oriented models.

2 Materials and methods

This literature review adheres to the study technique outlined by Whittemore and Knafl (2005). Their approach delineates five essential stages: (1) problem identification, (2) literature review, (3)

data evaluation, (4) data analysis, and (5) data presentation. The initial stage is detailed in the introduction, while the subsequent three stages are presented in the methods section. The last stage is, due to its significance, detailed in a distinct results section. In relation to this presentation phase, Torracco (2016) distinguishes between data analysis and synthesis. The former is employed to critically deconstruct and assess the numerous facets of a specific subject. The latter is essential for developing new viewpoints. Consequently, in light of the objective of this work, the data analysis will be succeeded by a synthesis as an integral component of the final discussion.

2.1 Search methods

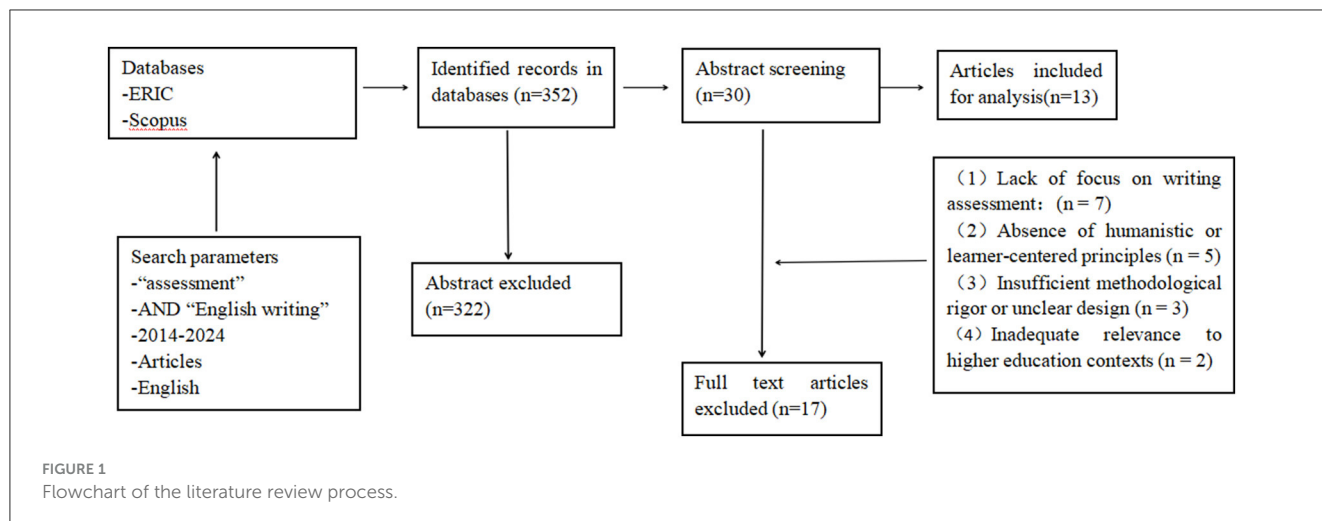
Relevant research articles are collected from two electronic databases: Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), being a discipline-specific database and Scopus. The databases are transdisciplinary and readily available for doing a structured search. Despite being a widely used academic database, Web of Science (WoS) encompasses a broad spectrum of disciplines and offers high-quality literature; however, it contains a limited number of pertinent papers on specific subjects, particularly in specific fields such as humanistic education and English writing assessment. Google Scholar was omitted due to its extensive coverage coupled with its intrinsic restrictions concerning filter possibilities. It does not provide filtering by a certain discipline, such as education.

Prominent humanistic techniques in teaching assessment encompass formative assessments, which prioritize continuous feedback and reflection, enabling students to learn from errors and enhance their performance over time (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Thus, the keywords “assessment” AND “English writing” are employed. The actual search was conducted on February 13, 2025.

2.2 Literature search and selection strategy

The literature review was guided by a systematic search strategy conducted across two principal academic databases: Scopus and ERIC. To ensure relevance to contemporary educational trends, particularly the shift toward learner-centered and humanistic assessment practices, a publication date filter was applied to include studies from 2014 to 2024, and language was restricted to English. The initial Scopus search targeted article titles, abstracts, and keywords, while the ERIC query focused on peer-reviewed topics only. The keywords “assessment” AND “English writing” were first applied, yielding 352 records (130 from ERIC and 222 from Scopus). To refine the search and better align it with the focus on writing pedagogy, additional terms such as “writing evaluation” and “writing instruction” were incorporated, reducing the pool to 30 articles (12 from ERIC, 18 from Scopus).

Further screening was conducted to isolate studies specific to the higher education context, resulting in the selection of 13 relevant studies, while 17 were excluded based on irrelevance to the review's core research questions. Out of the 30 studies that underwent full-text review, 17 articles were excluded based on the following specific reasons:



(1) Lack of focus on writing assessment: ($n = 7$)

These studies addressed general language skills or assessment in other domains (e.g., speaking or reading) without specific focus on writing.

(2) Absence of humanistic or learner-centered principles ($n = 5$)

Although some referred to assessment practices, they did not address values such as learner autonomy, emotional wellbeing, or personal growth, which are central to the theoretical framework of this review.

(3) Insufficient methodological rigor or unclear design ($n = 3$)

These articles lacked clarity in their research design or failed to provide adequate data on participants, instruments, or procedures.

(4) Inadequate relevance to higher education contexts ($n = 2$)

These studies focused on primary or secondary school settings, which fell outside the scope of the current review.

The final 13 full-text articles were reviewed in depth to assess their methodological rigor, alignment with humanistic education principles, and contribution to the understanding of evolving writing assessment practices in tertiary EFL contexts.

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, a set of inclusion criteria was applied. Studies were considered eligible if they were published between 2014 and 2024, written in English, and focused specifically on English writing assessment within tertiary or higher education contexts. Furthermore, only empirical studies, whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods, were included. A key requirement was that the studies explicitly incorporated or discussed humanistic assessment principles, such as learner autonomy, emotional support, critical thinking. Only peer-reviewed articles published in academic journals indexed in Scopus or ERIC were retained.

Conversely, studies were excluded if they focused on primary or secondary education, addressed language testing or standardized assessments without reference to classroom-based practices, or explored skills unrelated to writing. Theoretical papers, editorials, or opinion pieces lacking empirical data were also omitted. Additionally, any studies that did not demonstrate clear relevance

to humanistic assessment frameworks were excluded from the final selection.

Figure 1 presents the flow diagram of the review process, and Table 1 provides an overview of the key characteristics of the included studies.

Although not all studies explicitly stated “humanistic psychology” as their primary theoretical framework, each was selected based on its clear alignment with core principles of humanistic education as articulated by Maslow (1943) and Rogers (1969). These principles include:

- (1) the promotion of learner autonomy,
- (2) the support for emotional wellbeing and intrinsic motivation, and
- (3) an emphasis on personal growth and reflective learning.

To enhance conceptual clarity, Table 1 indicates the theoretical orientation of each included study, specifying whether the humanistic foundations are addressed explicitly or inferred through practice. Notably, several studies rooted in formative assessment and self-regulated learning also draw upon socio-cognitive perspectives. These studies were retained due to their substantial conceptual overlap with humanistic values, particularly in fostering student agency, self-awareness, and motivation.

2.3 Quality assessment summary

All 13 included studies were assessed across four dimensions: methodological clarity, appropriateness of the data collection methods, alignment with humanistic educational principles, and relevance to the review focus. The majority of studies (8 out of 13) were rated as high quality, demonstrating strong methodological rigor and a clear focus on learner-centered, humanistic assessment practices. The remaining studies received a moderate rating, primarily due to limited depth in methodological reporting or a less explicit connection to humanistic principles. Only studies rated as

TABLE 1 Overview of the set of articles ($n = 13$) included for analysis.

No	Authors/year	Methodology/instruments	Participants/setting	Findings & theoretical orientation
1	Xian (2020)	Experimental research quantitative & qualitative methods	44 Chinese L2 English learners	Dynamic assessment (DA) is more effective in promoting learning outcomes. Besides, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is predictive for future learning achievement. Humanistic (ZPD, learner development: confidence & high satisfaction)
2	Rungwaraphong (2021)	Vignettes, participant observations & students' written texts	3 Thai lecturers of English writing and 60 Thai students from three government universities in Thailand	The study identifies barriers to implementing PDI in Thailand, including students' skills and teachers' expertise, and suggests solutions like graphic organizers, formative feedback, and PDI training for teachers. Socio-cognitive (barriers and strategies)
3	Dhanarattigannon and Thienpermpool (2022)	A mixed-methods research questionnaires, self-assessment forms & reflective journals	41 (18 + 23) students in two universities	Students viewed self-assessment as a tool for writing development, improving attitudes, and building self-confidence, helping them become independent learners and enhance their English writing performance. Humanistic (self-assessment, autonomy)
4	Apridayani et al. (2024)	Sequential explanatory research & a quasi-experimental design; writing tasks, teacher assessment rubric, self-assessment form & questionnaire with open-ended questions	62 (31 + 31) first-year English majors	Combined teacher-student assessment in Thai EFL contexts enhances students' writing competence, particularly in personal growth, self-reflection, and critical thinking. Humanistic (personal growth, reflection)
5	Zhao and Zhao (2023)	Participatory approach: training in self-assessment	2 writing instructors & 146 tertiary students	Assessment should not only focus on developing subject knowledge, like writing quality, but also foster skills for future learning, helping learners independently set criteria and conduct self-assessment based on prescribed standards. Humanistic (self-regulation, learner autonomy)
6	Kim (2019)	Quantitative (scores of draft) quantitative (questionnaires, interviews, self-assessment diaries & essay self-assessments)	19 (16 female + 3 male) students	Rubric-based self-evaluation helps students get better at writing, learning techniques, and attitudes. It also helps them become more self-regulated, independent, and motivated in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, with a focus on the need for good training. Humanistic (rubric-based self-evaluation)
7	Alqahtani and Rahman (2024)	Quantitative & qualitative questionnaire & portfolio writing practice	19 EFL teachers 360 EFL students	Writing Corrective Feedback with Formative Assessment in portfolio tasks effectively promotes positive L2 outcomes for EFL students. Socio-cognitive (corrective feedback, portfolios)
8	Chen (2023)	Quantitative (pre-test & post-test & questionnaire) online quizzes, discussion boards, teacher's evaluation of students' writing, students' self-assessments & peer assessments	33 English majors, freshmen	Blended learning, incorporating formative assessment activities like online quizzes, teacher feedback, self-evaluation, and peer review, positively impacted EFL students' writing proficiency by fostering personalized learning, increased engagement, and a supportive, interactive learning environment. Humanistic (engagement, personalized learning)
9	Guo and Xu (2020)	Quantitative design (questionnaire)	362 EFL teachers in China	Formative assessment (FA) isn't used much by Chinese university EFL teachers in writing lessons; most teachers just focus on testing students' skills. Teachers' gender, years of experience, and training in language assessment are some of the main things that affect how often FA is used. Socio-cognitive (teacher beliefs, assessment use)
10	Saliu Abdulahi (2017)	Qualitative study observations & semi-structured interviews	39 first year upper secondary students in Norway	Formative feedback has a lot of potential to help students improve their writing, but most of the time, teachers in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms focus on summative assessments instead. This shows how important it is to use personalized, student-centered feedback strategies, like one-on-one discussions, to get students involved in the process. Humanistic (student-centered feedback)

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

No	Authors/year	Methodology/instruments	Participants/setting	Findings & theoretical orientation
11	Brooks et al. (2021)	Qualitative semi-structured focus group interviews	49 teachers and 30 school leaders	Implementing student-centered feedback processes as part of a professional learning intervention helped students become more self-regulated. This showed that encouraging self-regulation is more important than giving very directive feedback, and helped both teachers and students understand success, track progress, and improve on their own. Humanistic (self-regulation through feedback)
12	Saliu-Abdulahi and Hellekjær (2020)	Quantitative study questionnaire	329 students	Key formative assessment principles for written feedback are not fully implemented, highlighting the need for more classroom time and teacher support to make feedback actionable. Socio-cognitive (feedback conditions, support)
13	Xie and Lei (2019)	Case study (interviews, lesson observations, teaching materials, students' writing & teacher written feedback)	3 teachers (a novice, an experienced, and a veteran teacher)	Teachers mostly focused on the pre-writing and post-writing steps. New teachers corrected more mistakes, more experienced teachers asked for a second draft, and younger teachers avoided negative comments to build relationships with their students. Teachers focused more on improving current tasks than on future performance. Humanistic (teacher-student relationships, motivation)

TABLE 2 Assessment quality.

No	Authors/year	Methodological clarity	Data collection appropriateness	Humanistic focus	Relevance to review	Overall quality rating
1	Xian (2020)	High	High	High	High	High
2	Rungwaraphong (2021)	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	Moderate
3	Dhanarattigannon and Thienpermpool (2022)	High	High	High	High	High
4	Apridayani et al. (2024)	High	High	High	High	High
5	Zhao and Zhao (2023)	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	Moderate
6	Kim (2019)	High	High	High	High	High
7	Alqahtani and Rahman (2024)	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
8	Chen (2023)	High	High	High	High	High
9	Guo and Xu (2020)	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
10	Saliu Abdulahi (2017)	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
11	Brooks et al. (2021)	High	High	High	High	High
12	Saliu-Abdulahi and Hellekjær (2020)	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
13	Xie and Lei (2019)	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	High

moderate or high were retained for synthesis. Table 2 illustrates the assessment quality.

The following sections detail the analytical procedures undertaken in this review.

2.4 Data analysis

To ensure a systematic and rigorous approach to qualitative synthesis, this study employed a two-phase data analysis procedure. First, thematic analysis was applied to identify and interpret key patterns across the selected studies. Then, a structured coding process was conducted using NVivo 14 to categorize and organize the data based on predefined humanistic assessment dimensions.

2.4.1 Thematic analysis process in the study

Thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), provides a flexible yet rigorous approach to examining qualitative data by identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns (i.e., themes) across the dataset. This method is especially suited for exploring implicit meanings, value orientations, and nuanced practices, making it appropriate for this systematic review, which investigates

how humanistic principles shape English writing assessment in higher education.

In this study, thematic analysis was employed to synthesize findings from the 13 selected empirical studies. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, the analysis involved: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading; (2) generation of initial codes relevant to humanistic assessment features (e.g., empathy, learner autonomy, student wellbeing); (3) searching for patterns of meaning across studies; (4) reviewing and refining thematic categories; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing a synthesized report integrating these insights into the broader conceptual framework.

This process was further informed by the work of Alyaqoub et al. (2024), which emphasizes the value of directed content analysis in educational research, particularly when guided by predefined theoretical constructs. In this case, the humanistic education framework (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Rogers, 1969) provided the deductive foundation for interpreting how assessment practices align with values such as personal growth, emotional support, and reflective learning.

By systematically applying thematic analysis, the study was able to distill key themes such as “student-centered writing assessment,” “growth-oriented feedback,” and “teacher perceptions about learner wellbeing,” thereby offering a cohesive interpretation of how humanistic theory informs assessment design and practice in tertiary EFL writing contexts.

2.4.2 Coding process

The study adapted the coding process from Aslam et al. (2023) and Rasool et al. (2023), utilizing NVivo 14 software to facilitate data management and thematic organization. NVivo supported the researchers in performing a deductive coding process, guided by the theoretical lens of humanistic education, to systematically identify, categorize, and synthesize relevant themes from the selected studies (Alyaqoub et al., 2024).

Drawing upon the core principles of humanistic pedagogy—such as learner autonomy, emotional wellbeing, individualized support, and growth-oriented feedback—the researchers developed an initial coding scheme prior to data analysis. Codes were informed by both the theoretical framework (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Rogers, 1969) and the study objectives, and included key categories such as: (1) student-centered assessment on writing development; (2) teachers' perceptions of humanistic assessment; (3) supportive teacher-student interactions; (4) reflective self-evaluation practices; and (5) emotionally responsive feedback.

Each selected study was imported into NVivo 14 for line-by-line coding. The software enabled efficient sorting, comparison, and retrieval of coded segments, allowing researchers to track thematic frequency, contextual variation, and conceptual overlap across studies. Where necessary, open coding was used to capture emergent ideas that expanded or nuanced the original framework. Themes were then iteratively refined through cross-checking and thematic consolidation.

This coding strategy ensured analytic transparency and consistency while also allowing for nuanced interpretation of how humanistic principles were reflected, or underutilized, in actual writing assessment practices across diverse tertiary EFL settings.

3 Results

The key findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Teachers widely acknowledge the benefits of humanistic assessment in promoting student autonomy and learning.
- (2) Concerns about fairness, reliability, and consistency pose significant challenges to the effective implementation of humanistic assessment.
- (3) Teacher experience and training significantly influence assessment practices, with experienced educators favoring process-oriented feedback, while less experienced teachers tend to adopt more corrective, product-focused approaches.

3.1 The impact of student-centered assessment on writing development

Extensive research has affirmed the positive impact of student-centered assessment in promoting student autonomy and improving writing performance in EFL contexts. Rubric-guided self-assessment enables learners to reflect on their current writing level, identify areas for improvement, and develop great self-regulation (Kim, 2019; Zhao and Zhao, 2023). In addition, dynamic assessment, which provides tailored instructional support based on learners' developmental needs, has been shown to foster academic progress, enhance learning motivation, and build confidence through scaffolded feedback within the learner's potential development zone (Xian, 2020). Moreover, in Thai EFL classrooms, collaborative teacher-student evaluation practices have likewise contributed not only to measurable improvements in writing, but also to students' critical thinking and self-awareness (Apridayani et al., 2024).

Despite these benefits, the implementation of student-centered assessment remains constrained by practical challenges. Teachers often face heavy workloads that limit the time available for individualized feedback, while insufficient training in feedback strategies hampers their ability to engage students meaningfully in assessment activities (Guo and Xu, 2020; Saliu Abdulahi, 2017). These issues underscore the need for sustained professional development initiatives aimed at equipping educators with effective feedback techniques and fostering supportive classroom environments that promote learner autonomy and reflective engagement.

3.2 Teachers' perceptions of humanistic assessment

Most teachers hold positive attitudes toward assessment practices that actively involve students, such as self-assessment and peer review. These practices are seen as instrumental in enhancing learners' agency and metacognitive awareness, aligning with pedagogical approaches that emphasize personal growth and student-centered engagement. Rubrics are particularly valued for providing clear evaluative criteria, enabling students to monitor their progress, recognize strengths and weaknesses, and cultivate confidence in their writing abilities (Kim, 2019; Zhao and Zhao,

2023). Similarly, peer feedback is perceived as a collaborative process that facilitates mutual learning, encourages dialogue on writing quality, and promotes classroom interaction (Apridayani et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, integrating these assessment methods into existing systems poses challenges. Summative-oriented evaluation frameworks often limit the feasibility of embedding self- and peer assessments, leading to concerns about consistency and grading fairness (Guo and Xu, 2020). Furthermore, many educators lack the training necessary to guide students in producing constructive feedback or engaging in purposeful reflection (Saliu Abdulahi, 2017). As a result, despite their recognition of the value of participatory assessment, teachers may encounter systemic and pedagogical barriers that hinder full implementation.

3.3 Teachers' practices of humanistic assessment

Educators' use of participatory assessment strategies is closely shaped by their instructional beliefs, feedback practices, and professional experience. A growing number of teachers incorporate rubric-based self-assessment into writing instruction, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning, set personal goals, and reflect on their writing development (Kim, 2019). Peer assessment is also being increasingly adopted as a means of promoting collaboration, communication skills, and deeper understanding of the writing process (Apridayani et al., 2024).

However, practical approaches vary significantly by teaching experience. Novice teachers tend to prioritize corrective feedback focused on surface-level errors, whereas more experienced educators emphasizing multiple drafting, process-oriented learning, and individualized student feedback (Xie and Lei, 2019). Senior instructors are also more likely to require draft resubmissions and encourage reflective dialogue, while less experienced teachers may avoid critical comments in favor of relationship-building and affective support.

Moreover, dynamic assessment has gained attention as a strategy that allows teachers to adjust their evaluation based on students' evolving needs. By identifying students' developmental trajectories, teachers can deliver timely and differentiated guidance to promote sustained learning (Xian, 2020). These assessment practices reflect a shift from performance-oriented evaluation toward holistic, process-oriented approaches that integrate emotional support, feedback literacy, and learner empowerment.

4 Discussion

This study explored how language teachers conceptualize and enact student-centered assessment practices in EFL writing instruction. The findings highlight that when teaching emphasizes learner agency, self-regulation, and emotional support, educators tend to adopt more interactive and developmental forms of assessment. In classrooms where students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, feedback becomes dialogic and reciprocal, and this shift contributes to the evolution of teachers' assessment perceptions. Assessment thus transforms from a static

measurement tool into a dynamic process that nurtures both academic improvement and emotional engagement, reinforcing students' sense of identity and belonging.

4.1 From evaluation to facilitation: evolving teachers' perceptions and assessment practices

Teachers' assessment conceptions are closely tied to their pedagogical orientations. As instructional focus shifts from outcome measurement to student development, teachers increasingly regard assessment as a means of fostering autonomy, rather than simply certifying achievement (Kim, 2019; Zhao and Zhao, 2023). This shift aligns with global education reform trends that emphasize formative, process-oriented learning (Education, 2018). Consequently, many educators adopt practices such as self-assessment, peer feedback, and goal-setting tasks that empower students in metacognitive reflection and learning ownership (Saliu Abdulahi, 2017).

However, practical implementation remains uneven. While some teachers provide structured tools and differentiated strategies to support student reflection, others express concerns about fairness, grading consistency, or feasibility, particularly in large classes or exam-driven contexts (Guo and Xu, 2020). This tension reflects a broader dilemma between conceptual alignment with learner-centered values and the constraints imposed by institutional policies, assessment culture, and teacher preparedness.

4.2 Enacting development-oriented assessment: contextual reflections

The literature consistently supports the pedagogical value of growth-focused assessment strategies. Dynamic assessment, for example, rooted in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), has been shown to significantly enhance writing proficiency, learner confidence, and perceived competence when teachers tailor feedback to students' emergent needs (Xian, 2020). Unlike summative testing, this approach frames learning as a developmental continuum rather than a fixed performance snapshot.

Self-assessment and reflective journaling are also widely cited for their motivational impact. Research has found that when students are involved in evaluating their work, they attain greater self-awareness, goal clarity, and academic motivation (Dhanarattigannon and Thienpermpool, 2022). Importantly, teacher-student co-assessment models that integrate learner voice in the evaluative process promote critical thinking and deeper learner engagement, especially in classrooms that embrace dialogic and collaborative learning models (Apridayani et al., 2024).

Nonetheless, studies differ in how they frame the impact of assessment. Some emphasize performance enhancement through technical feedback mechanisms (Kim, 2019; Zhao and Zhao, 2023), while others highlight affective and identity-related outcomes, such as learner confidence, voice, and wellbeing (Chen, 2023). These variations suggest that assessment efficacy is not monolithic,

but highly contingent on contextual variables, such as educational level, cultural values, institutional norms, and teacher expertise. A deeper understanding of these moderating factors is necessary to inform adaptive, responsive assessment design.

4.3 Assessment as learning: implications for student development

Assessment that incorporates student agency and emotional support has demonstrable effects on learning outcomes. When learners are given opportunities to participate in feedback processes, negotiate criteria, and reflect on their process, they are more likely to take initiative, set realistic goals, and internalize responsibility for learning (Black and Wiliam, 2009). Such practices move assessment beyond its traditional summative function to a formative, identity-shaping role.

The interplay between cognition and affect is particularly salient in language learning. Arnold (1998) emphasized that incorporating affective dimensions into teaching does not compromise academic rigor; rather, it activates deeper levels of motivation and engagement. Similarly, Arifi (2017) demonstrated that affectively attuned instruction foster stronger interpersonal relationships and classroom trust, which in turn supports student risk-taking and sustained academic growth. These findings converge with human development theories that posit emotional safety and relatedness as prerequisites for higher-order learning (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Despite the promise of these approaches, barriers to implementation remain. Systemic constraints such as high-stakes testing, rigid grading systems, and insufficient teacher training can hinder the realization of developmentally aligned assessment (Guo and Xu, 2020; Xie and Lei, 2019). Future research should examine how localized adaptations of supportive, participatory assessment models can be sustained across diverse EFL contexts.

5 Conclusion

This review highlights the significance of humanistic assessment in EFL writing instruction, emphasizing its role in promoting learner autonomy, critical thinking, and self-regulation by addressing students' emotional and developmental needs. Pedagogical strategies such as self-evaluation, peer feedback, and reflective dialogue were found to play pivotal roles in enhancing writing performance and empowering learners within a humanistic assessment framework. However, the practical implementation of such approaches remains constrained by institutional and instructional challenges, including heavy teacher workload, inadequate training in humanistic assessment principles, and limited recognition of its pedagogical value. Embedding student-centered, humanistically informed assessment practices in EFL writing instruction thus requires targeted professional development and broader systemic support.

5.1 Limitations of the study

While this review offers meaningful insights into the integration of humanistic principles into EFL writing assessment, it is subject to several limitations:

- (1) Scope of Theoretical Framework: The review primarily focuses on humanistic education, which may overlook the contributions of other relevant frameworks such as sociocultural or cognitive learning theories.
- (2) Lack of Quantitative Synthesis: The review is predominantly qualitative, with limited inclusion of quantitative data to assess the measurable impact of humanistic assessment practices.
- (3) Contextual Narrowness: Most of the included studies are situated in Asian and EFL contexts, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other educational and cultural settings.
- (4) Study Selection Constraints: The synthesis is based on a limited number of studies ($n = 13$), which may not fully capture the diversity of current practices or regional differences in implementation.
- (5) Temporal Limitations: The review only covers publications from 2014 to 2024, which may exclude earlier foundational studies or the most recent emerging work.

5.2 Implications for future research

To address these limitations and deepen understanding of humanistic assessment in EFL writing, future research is encouraged to pursue the following directions:

- (1) Conduct longitudinal studies to investigate the sustained impact of formative, humanistic assessment on learners' writing development, self-regulation, and emotional wellbeing.
- (2) Explore the integration of digital technologies (e.g., adaptive feedback tools, AI-assisted writing tutors) in supporting formative assessment aligned with humanistic principles.
- (3) Design and evaluate professional development programs that train teachers in implementing humanistic assessment strategies effectively and consistently.
- (4) Examine cultural and contextual factors, particularly in underrepresented non-Western educational settings, to understand how humanistic assessment is interpreted, adapted, and sustained.
- (5) Investigate the emotional dimension of feedback, including how emotionally supportive teacher-student interactions influence learner engagement, motivation, and confidence in writing.
- (6) This review does not systematically apply socio-cognitive theories in its analysis, even though some included studies reflect such orientations. Future research could benefit from comparative theoretical lenses to distinguish the nuanced contributions of both humanistic and socio-cognitive perspectives in EFL writing assessment.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

YS: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.
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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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