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Writing Assessment Technique and Learner Performance: A Study in Instructors' Perceptions

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Writing is an essential skill for EFL learners, and the development of flawless writing proficiency in English is the intended learner outcome of every writing course in an EFL program. Development of flawless writing skills involves perfection in orthography (spelling, punctuation, capitalization), grammaticality and syntax, organization, coherence and unity, relevance and clarity of ideas and presentation, etc. A writing assessment method must be geared to monitor and enhance all these micro-skills. However, the question arises: Is there a potential correlation between writing assessment technique and learner outcomes?

Materials/methods. Qualitative research was conducted at the English Language Institute (ELI) in Saudi Arabia to study the perceptions of writing instructors on the writing assessment techniques used for the health track courses (ELIH 110 and ELIH 120), i.e., quizzes and academic essay writing, to review the assessment technique and its perceived impact on learner outcomes, if any, and to determine whether formative assessment should be given more weightage. The research data were collected from the writing instructors at the university using survey questionnaires and interviews.

Results. The findings show that ELI instructors perceive a correlation between the robustness of writing assessment techniques and learner achievement. However, the participants did not favour giving more weightage to formative assessment in the final grading.

Conclusion. Most of the teachers approved the validity and reliability of the assessment tools.

1. Introduction

Atkinson (2003) calls L2 writing a "post-process" activity "to highlight the rich, multifocal nature of the field" (p. 12) and exhorts researchers to go beyond the traditional views of L2 writing as "drafting, teacher feedback, peer review, editing, grammar correction" (p. 12), etc. However, writing in an EFL learning/teaching scenario remains a process of producing written texts in a language that is not the writer's first language and needs proper development. Development of writing skills in English is significant for EFL learners since a host of other skills, such as reading, presentation, grammar, and conciseness in language use, depend upon excellent writing skills. Moreover, the development of writing skills depends upon several factors. Assessment and right diagnostics of issues with learners' writing skills help develop their writing skills significantly. The complex process of writing involves cognitive challenges as well as good command over vocabulary and syntax, and therefore, assessment of writing is also a complex process (Hamp-Lyons, 2019; Hartwell & Aull, 2023). In foreign language teaching and learning scenarios, it is very important that learners' writing issues are rightly diagnosed and assessed since these learners, such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, have only minimal chances of using foreign language skills in their day-to-day activities and composing some text matters on a regular basis. The writing activities of such learners using the target language are restricted to their activities in the classroom. However, with the increasing demands for writing and composing all kinds of texts in English, particularly with the integration of technology into everyday tasks, EFL learners are faced with the difficult situation of mastering the art of writing in a short time and improving their performance all the time. So, the need of the time is that the instructors monitor learners' progress, quickly identifying their problems, responding to their needs, and regularly evaluating the success/failure of their classroom instructions. Writing assessment is critical in determining the success of all the activities of instructors listed above (Al-Nafjan & Alhawsawi, 2022; Dong et al., 2024) since it is significant that learners' progress in writing skills is assessed in a timely manner so that learning gaps are identified, and feedback is provided. This helps address the gaps and other related issues in their learning through remedial teaching or other such measures (Alharbi & Surur, 2019). However, effective and efficient measurement can be challenging. Undergraduate students who receive secondary education in the vernacular medium face numerous issues in English, particularly in the first year of their study. At King Abdulaziz University (KAU), Saudi Arabia, the English Language Institute (henceforth ELI) is established to cater to the needs of such students. ELI also functions as the governing body that supervises the teaching and assessment of English at KAU-affiliated colleges. ELI assessment system is centralized, and the assessment technique is patterned. Assessment in writing follows formative as well as summative assessment methods. In formative assessment, learners solve two quizzes, whereas, in summative assessment, they solve writing tasks. The teachers use prescribed books, and questions in quizzes, as well as the writing tasks, are extracted from the units taught to learners from the prescribed books. The ELI writing examination rubric is set, and the same is true for the rubric for the grading scale for the final grading of both types of exams.

Since everything is pre-set and predetermined, it leaves little chance for an agency or say in the exam pattern for ELI instructors (Ali et al., 2019; Ariani, 2014), either in determining examination questions for the quizzes or the final writing tasks or in checking and scoring the answers of examinee students. Nevertheless, the researcher informally engaged a few ELI teachers and requested their opinions on the merits and demerits of writing testing methods. The instructors' opinions were that, in general, learners express themselves more freely in writing in the formative quizzes than in the final writing test. In the final test, learners' responses are noticed to be more scripted in nature. The instructors' opinions gave the researcher the idea that their random perceptions should be documented on a larger scale, formally involving more instructors in an empirical study. Moreover, the predominant thought of the researcher was that since teachers also partake in the writing success

of their students, it would be significant to gather their perceptions on the testing methods in writing, and it may shed more light on how reliable and valid the testing methods in use are. The researcher was also interested in knowing instructors' perception of the significance of formative testing in writing, especially the graded quizzes, in assigning grades to learners in the final writing exam.

2. Research Background

An informal information-gathering session with the ELI instructors suggested that there may exist some discrepancies between learners' writing skills and their writing abilities and what they come up with in the final writing assessment. It is possible that, in the opinion of ELI instructors, the present writing assessment pattern needs some revisionist overview to keep up with the changing writing assessment patterns in academia. An analysis of writing assessment helps shape the curriculum design and implement better pedagogy practice and, at the same time, keeps the teachers abreast of the best practices in writing and assessment (O'Neill et al., 2009).

Foreign language writing tests essentially involve testing the basic components of language teaching, such as sentence structure, knowledge of lexis, word-formation rules, and the elements of learners' culture reflected in language. This, in turn, impacts the FL assessment practices and criteria employed. In the opinion of the researcher, the instructors are the better judges of the impacts they feel in the process of following the set patterns and criteria of assessment, and therefore, the present research.

3. Statement of the Problem

The first-year university students learning English (ELIH 110 and ELIH 120) at ELI, as a mandatory requirement for further medical education, appear for two types of writing assessment tasks each semester: quizzes and academic essay writing. Two quizzes along with academic essay writing form formative assessment tasks. Quizzes are comprised of multiple-choice questions, vocabulary items, and essay writing. For the final assessment, which is summative assessment in nature, learners write academic essays. However, the main emphasis for the final grading is on summative assessment. This is a set assessment pattern that has been running for years but is devoid of any agency for the instructors. As times change, learners' needs also change, and so do the assessment patterns. In view of this observation, there is a need for a review of the writing assessment pattern from the perspectives of the instructors involved in the writing assessment program for years. However, a cursory glance at the assessment research studies reveals that, at present, no research has been carried out evaluating the writing assessment techniques concerning their quality, reliability, or validity in the present condition, particularly in Saudi Arabian contexts. A few research studies in writing assessment (e.g., Alshakhi, 2018, 2019; Al-wossabi, 2019; Buchanan et al., 2024; Dockrell & Connelly, 2021; Drid, 2018; Nguyen & Phan, 2020) are also not exclusively focused on instructors' perceptions on the writing assessment tools. Therefore, there is a lacuna in research that needs to be filled.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Writing assessment research in Saudi Arabia

Writing skills are very important for foreign language learners. Testing the writing skills is equally important since the development of learners' writing skills can be monitored only through the right assessment. There is a proviso implied in this statement, that is, it must be the right kind of assessment (Lim, 2019; Moore et al., 2009; Obeid, 2017). This brings us to the need for a regular review, and if necessary, revision, of the assessment instrument in use at foreign language teaching institutions since writing assessment techniques need to keep pace with the changes in the requirements for the present-day technology-dominated writing jobs (Kalfut, 2022; Knoch, 2009). A cursory glance at the research studies in writing conducted in the last decade in Saudi Arabian EFL

teaching contexts shows that the scene in writing assessment research is very dismal. Except for a few studies (such as Alamri & Adawi, 2021; Alotibi & Alshakhi, 2022; Alshakhi, 2018, 2019; Al-wossabi, 2019), there is an absolute dearth of research in this important academic area. Even on a larger scale, that is, in the Arab world in general, evaluation of writing assessment is a neglected area in research. After a thorough review of studies, only a couple of studies (Ahmed, 2018; Alamri & Adawi, 2021; Ali et al., 2019) could be identified that may be categorized as research in EFL writing tests, although testing in EFL writing, in general, has garnered the attention of researchers (Atkinson, 2003; Buchanan et al., 2024; Cheng et al., 2004; Crusan, 2010; Dockrell & Connelly, 2021; Dong et al., 2024; Drid, 2018; Rajab et al., 2016; Shrestha, 2020; Zheng & Yu, 2019). Analysis of writing errors of EFL learners (Alahmadi & Saleem, 2024; Huwari & Al-Khasawneh, 2013; Khaleghi et al., 2024; Shousha et al., 2020; Suastra & Menggo, 2020; Wiggins, 1993) is a popular field of research, and Assessment in general also attracts researchers' attention (e.g., Hamp-Lyons, 2019; Hartwell & Aull, 2023; Hattie & Brown, 2010; Karaman, 2021; O'Neill & Petchko, 2023; Wang et al., 2020). At the same time, research in assessment literacy has been gaining ground slowly (Rad & Alipour, 2024).

Writing assessment evaluation research studies conducted in Saudi Arabia (Alamri & Adawi, 2021; Alotibi & Alshakhi, 2022; Alshakhi, 2018, 2019; Al-wossabi, 2019) come up with findings which endorse the accuracy of the writing assessment instruments presently in use. For example, Alshakhi (2018, 2019) claims that the assessment administrators at ELI are up to date with the latest developments in writing assessments, and they regularly involve instructors in assessment-related reviews and decision-making. In the words of Alshakhi (2018), the Academic Development Team (ADT) at ELI designs the test materials used for writing tests and other tests. Taking a step forward, the team members also discuss the format and structure of the test materials with teachers and test coordinators. According to Alshakhi (2018), the ELI-created test rubric, which is common to all, is very suitable since it helps maintain the dependability of the tests for the whole program. Honesty in testing is also secured through cross-marking between teachers. However, the researcher also feels that there is some rigidity too in the system which causes credibility gap between teachers and coordinators, and it also does not favour contextual-based learning.

As a consequence, Alshakhi recommends that the test rubric should reflect an analytical perspective so that contextual-based learning is encouraged. Al-wossabi (2019), on the other hand, collected data on students' attitudes towards corrective feedback as part of writing assessment practice. The researcher concludes that students showed approval for the use of corrective feedback and that his study participants were "motivated and exhibited patent ability for self-correction" (p. 325). Similarly, Alamri and Adawi's (2021) study is also concerned with gathering the opinions of Saudi EFL teachers regarding the use of writing tests and marking rubrics used in evaluating students' written work and teaching English writing classes. The researchers note that the rubrics have been accurate and helpful in developing learners' writing skills.

4.2. Major studies on continuous testing in writing

Studies on the role of continuous testing in enhancing student learning (such as Karaman, 2021) suggest that continuous testing bears favourable impact on learner achievement. The researcher reports that numerous continuous testing practices in the EFL classrooms, which have appeared late, contribute considerably to student learning. The study by Wang et al. (2020) is very closely similar to the present study. The researchers investigate whether, in non-native English teaching and learning contexts, what university teachers believe about testing writing in classrooms goes well with their self-perceived practices. The researcher obtains favourable results. Buchanan et al. (2024) were interested in dealing with learners' difficulties in the early stage of reading and writing, since, to them, if there is no timely intervention, there is every chance that the difficulties learners face in the early

stages of their writing will continue. Cheng et al. (2004) observe that the role of learner assessment in the education system is very significant.

A handful of studies reviewed here (Coombs & DeLuca, 2022, for example) have taken up extensive review of research studies on "assessment competence, assessment literacy, assessment capability, and assessment identity" (p. 279). Their main concern was to know how these assessment notions have been conceptualized in peer-reviewed research. Some researchers opine that writing assessment needs to be such that it enhances learners' interest in writing. It needs to be such that learners actively seek their own ways to improve their writing skills (Nguyen & Phan, 2020). Thus, we see that learner-centered assessment also attracts researchers' attention. For instance, O'Neill and Petchko (2023) advocate for learner-centered academic writing assessment. The researchers also observe that learner-centered assessment tasks need to be authentic; the learning context is taken into account in the assessment process, and it involves all stakeholders, like instructors, learners, and policymakers. Suastra and Menggo (2020) are also for learner-centered assessment. In the opinion of these researchers, the results obtained from continuous testing commonly do not take into account what is aimed at improving learners' language skills, whereas the purpose of continuous testing should be to inform teaching and to improve learning. Assessment of their performance can help learners to display what they know and what they have internalized, and they can easily digest the information they are presented with in activities concerning teaching and learning of language.

4.3. Assessment literacy

Of late, assessment literacy has caught the fancy of researchers all over the world. Assessment literacy is understood to be instructors' broad understanding of the primary theoretical framework that forms the core of right testing (Stiggins, 1991). This notion is crucial to ensure that the instructors involved in teaching maintain the high standards of their profession. Researchers believe that instructors' assessment literacy is a must for learners' performance enhancement. For instance, Rad and Alipour (2024) opine that assessment literacy, for both teachers of writing and language students, is an essential requirement if teachers wish to see the desired outcomes of their teaching practice. They believe that writing students must be assessment literate to bring a positive change in their knowledge, beliefs, actions, and critical perspective towards testing. It also helps writing instructors understand the purpose of testing well. In fact, Rad and Alipour (2024) seem to endorse the opinions of Hattie and Brown (2010) on the purpose of assessment literacy as they observe that since assessment involves ways to gather information on various academic elements related to learners' performance, it affects instructors' capacities to make judgments and provide feedback to learners positively. Crusan (2010) believes that instructors should be in full command of the assessment process. The researcher's argument may be interpreted that instructors must be assessment literate. It may also be interpreted as policymakers providing more freedom of judgment to instructors since it is instructors who know the capabilities and performance potentials of their students very well.

4.4. Holistic assessment

A few researchers, such as Barkaoui (2010), advocate strongly for what they call "holistic scoring." The researcher says that at the English Language Institute, teachers grade students' papers employing a wholistic perspective in scoring, following a set scoring rubric and a pre-organized error-code. Although the researcher feels that under the given circumstances too, teachers are not in a position to provide any satisfactory explanation to their students as to why they got the grades they got since it is other instructors who are involved in marking the test papers of students, while test coordinators assign the marking tasks to instructors. In this system of cross-grading, the test coordinators facilitate the exchange of papers among instructors.

Thus, to summarize, this brief yet comprehensive review of literature on testing in writing makes it clear that there is hardly any previous studies or literature available on instructors' perceptions on adult EFL learners' writing assessment, either in Saudi Arabia or in the Arab world, or in the writing assessment research scenario in general. Therefore, a comprehensive research study is required to fill the identified research gap.

5. Objectives of the Present Study

The main thrust of this research was a qualitative review of the present ELIH writing assessment tools. Therefore, the researcher's primary intent was to review the assessment tool from the perspective of the instructors involved in writing assessments at the English Language Institute at King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia. The review will take into account the overall quality, dependability, and viability of the instrument in question. The secondary intent of the research was to review the value of the continuous testing process, especially the two quizzes, once again from the perspectives of practicing instructors at ELI, that is, to know whether the grades obtained by learners in the two quizzes (if any) in continuous testing be counted to assign them final marks.

6. Research Questions

The following questions guided this research study:

RQ 1: What are ELI teachers' perceptions concerning the differences between writing assessment tools in use, i.e., quizzes and academic essay writing?

RQ 2: What are teachers' opinions as regards the alignment of writing assessment techniques in use with the stated learner outcomes?

RQ 3: In the opinion of the instructors, should formative assessment bear more value in assigning marks to learners in the final exams?

7. Research Design

The focus of this study is to qualitatively evaluate instructors' perceptions of writing assessment techniques in use in ELI. The purpose of the study is to see what instructors think of the suitability of the writing assessment to enhance learners' performance in writing skills. To achieve the stated objective, ELI instructors' opinions on the format and structure of the writing assessment techniques in use were collected as raw data. The study uses simple statistical analysis methods. For example, for better analysis, the raw data were tabulated. The mean values of the obtained figures were calculated. In this way, the number of teachers expressing positive opinions towards the assessment technique was arrived at. The obtained numbers were once again interpreted as qualitative findings to determine the conclusions of the study from data analysis. Both quantitative and qualitative methods form part of the research design in the study. The analytical statistics were centered around the following points:

(i) the numerical figures obtained from instructors' opinions on whether the writing assessment techniques in use are perfectly aligned with the stated learner outcomes and

(ii) the numerical figures obtained from teachers' opinions on whether continuous testing marks should be taken into consideration to determine learner's final grades in writing skills.

Conclusions were drawn based on the results obtained from the number of teachers agreeing on the features of the most reliable and valid test tool for adult EFL learners' writing skills and the number of teachers agreeing on the potential value of continuous testing marks in determining students' final grading in the writing skill.

8. Research Methodology

The present study employed a mixed-methods research methodology. The numerical figures, such as percentages, means, and calculation data associated with statistical analysis, were analysed employing a quantitative method, whereas the numerical values obtained after statistical operations were interpreted in a qualitative fashion. The research findings were presented in a narrative style. There were also occasions when the two methodologies were mixed for a more precise analysis.

8.1. Research participants

Both male and female teachers from Jeddah and Rabigh centers were requested to take part in the study and contacted for data collection. The questionnaire was sent electronically to 100 ELI instructors and lecturers, whereas on-site interviews were organized with fifteen instructors/lecturers. Ninety (90) participants in total responded with the required information data, and all 90 responses were found valid. The participating ELI instructors/lecturers varied in their length of service and teaching experience at ELI Jeddah/Rabigh, from 4-16 years, in total service experience (7-30 years), and their choice of assessment methods.

Table 1, given below, presents the descriptive statistics related to study participants. The descriptive statistics concerning participants are very significant for data collection because teachers' service experience at ELI and their total service experience were important factors that probably determined their beliefs regarding the writing test and their values. Curriculum and testing methods evolve and replace the old ones, and the more experienced ELI teachers tend to reflect upon the changes they witnessed.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Data Collection Instrument	Participants	Number	Age (Mean)	Length of service at ELI (Mean, years)	Total teaching experience (Mean, years)
Questionnaire	Male	76	46	11.63	19.8
	Female	14	45	11	18
Interview	Male	10	46	12	20
	Female	5	45	11	18

8.2. Instruments of data collection

The following tools were employed to collect the relevant research data:

(i) a survey questionnaire, and

(ii) structured interviews with ELI teachers.

A 5-point Likert scale model was chosen to style the survey questionnaire. There were 14 statements in the questionnaire. Each statement led to five response options to choose from - Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly agree. The purpose of the statements was to prompt the participating teachers to show what they closely agreed with as regards the suitability of the writing skill testing techniques in use at ELI, the overall satisfaction of instructors with the assessment techniques, and the merits of continuous testing in the writing test process. The structured interview contained 16 questions (See Appendix II). The purpose of the interview questions was also to prompt the teachers to further illustrate their agreement/disagreement with the issues related to suitability, or otherwise, of the testing tool to accurately measure students' writing skills, the preference of teachers for any particular testing tool, the nature of the writing tasks, potential issues teachers anticipate in the implementation of the testing tools in class, teachers' belies

on the merits/demerits of continuous testing marks to be taken into account to decide students' final grades as well as the degree of freedom teachers have in choosing the type of tests, and so on.

Cronbach's Alpha test was applied to test the usual issues and reformulate the questionnaire. A pilot test was conducted to check the suitability of interview questions for the occasion, and suggestions for improvement were sought from experienced ELI teachers. A few modifications were made in the final format of the interview questions.

8.3. Conceptual framework

It has been challenging to pinpoint any theoretical framework to support the present research since writing assessment is least affected by theorizations on writing (Behizadeh & Engelhard, 2011). Yet it is widely noticed that prompt-based impromptu essay writing is the most practiced method of writing assessment, particularly in the context of foreign language testing. Nevertheless, testing specialists (e.g., Crusan, 2014; Hamp-Lyons, 2016, 2019) have raised doubts on the merits of extempore composition tests in response to a single writing cue. The present study relies on the view that writing performance measurement needs constant vigil and review with the changing nature of writing and its assessment.

8.4. Plan of action

The survey questionnaire was digitally posted to the participating teachers. They were requested to return the completed form quickly. Similarly, the interview questions were posted to the same group of teachers with a reminder to them of the urgency of returning their responses digitally soon. The questionnaire statements were scored, and the raw scores were put to statistical analysis. Narrative style description was employed to make meaning of the results obtained as numbers and figures. A thematic analysis scheme was adopted to explain the pattern in interview responses. A seamless merger of the two types of interpretations brought out a coherent qualitative analysis of the data.

9. Data Analysis

Prior to a full-scale analysis, a pilot test was carried out with 20 participants to ascertain the suitability of the questionnaire for the intended research. Cronbach's Alpha was also calculated to double-check. The obtained scores are as follows:

$\alpha = (k \,/\, (k-1)) \times (1- \Sigma Var/Var)$

$\alpha = (20 \,/\, (20-1)) \times (1-16.32/37.64)$

$\alpha = .59$

The obtained value of Cronbach's Alpha is .59, which is acceptable as the value is very close to the minimum accepted value of Alpha, i.e., .60.

All the questionnaires were scored, and the figures obtained from them were arranged in a table for further calculations, such as calculating the exact number of teachers who expressed their opinions in favor or against the questionnaire statements.

As regards the interview responses, the following thematic categorization was applied to the received responses: Suitability of assessment components (quizzes and writing test), the time allowed to finish the tests, validity and reliability of the assessment techniques, precision in the testing rating scale, precision in grading rubrics, the potential value of continuous testing in final grading, and any issues examiners may face while conducting tests.

10. Results

10.1. Results obtained from the questionnaire

Participants' responses in favour or against the questionnaire statements are recorded in Table 2, given below. The numbers here display the final figures obtained after the primary calculations were all done. Figure 1 offers a graphic representation of the same. For a graphic representation of the responses to individual statements, see Appendix I. The number of respondents whose choice was "Neutral" needed to be discarded since the choice cannot be taken to mean "Agreement" or "Disagreement."

Table 2. Number of Participants (Percentage figures) in Agreement or Disagreement with the Questionnaire Statements

No.	Statement	Agreement (Strongly agree + Agree) %	Neutral %	Disagreement (Disagree + Strongly disagree) %
1.	In my opinion, academic essay writing is a reliable and valid method of assessment of writing skills.	93.4	6.6	0
2.	In my opinion, the quizzes and academic essay writing meet the criteria to accurately assess the learning outcomes set for the writing skill course.	73.3	20	6.7
3.	In my opinion, quizzes used as writing assessment techniques are reliable and valid methods of assessment of writing skill.	86.7	7	6.3
4.	In my opinion, Quiz 1 and Quiz 2 potentially help learners enhance their performance in the final writing exams.	80	13.3	6.7
5.	Formative assessment in writing skill plays a big role in determining the final grading of the learners.	93.4	0	6.6
6.	Marks obtained by learners in periodic formative assessment should bear more value in determining the final grades of learners.	60	33.3	6.7
7.	The writing assessment techniques in use at ELI meet the requirements to evaluate the learning outcomes in the writing skill course.	86.7	7	6.3
8.	There are no challenges as such in conducting the writing skill assessment through quizzes and academic essay writing tests.	93.4	0	6.6
9.	The length and scope of the two quizzes are sufficient to accurately measure learners' writing skill achievement.	93.4	6.6	0
10.	The time allowed to finish the writing tests is sufficient to finish the test satisfactorily.	93.3	0	6.7
11.	The rating scale used to grade the quizzes accurately measures the writing capabilities of the examinees.	93.4	6.6	0
12.	The information table provided in the test is a helpful tool to guide the examinees to write good academic essays.	86.7	13.3	0
13.	The ELI writing quizzes, and final writing exams task design suits its purpose, especially for the learners these assessment tasks are designed.	86.7	7	6.3
14.	The nature of the ELI writing tasks used for the quizzes and final writing exams reflect the writing skills they are meant to assess.	93.4	6.6	0
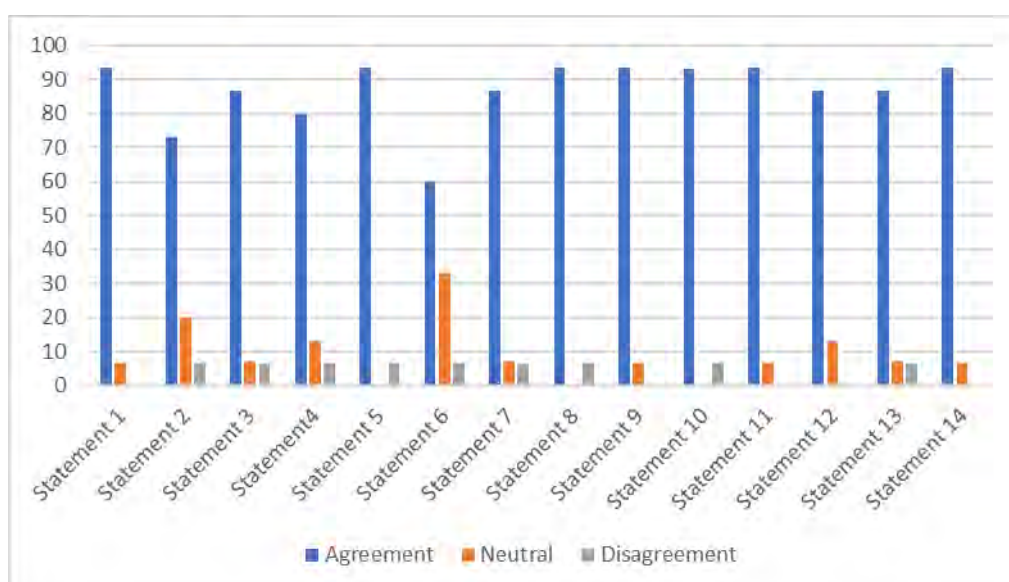
Figure 1. Number of Participants (Percentage figures) in Agreement or Disagreement with the Questionnaire Statements

10.2. The interview

Preliminary analysis of the text obtained from interview responses precipitated into five themes, as follows:

Theme 1: Assessment criteria fulfillment

Theme 2: Assessment reliability

Theme 3: Accuracy of assessment rating scale

Theme 4: Precision in assessment rubric

Theme 5: Role of continuous assessment

Analysis of thematically organized interview responses revealed that, in general, respondents have approved of the ELI assessment techniques. However, some participants offered a few suggestions for further improvement. We shall discuss them below:

In response to question one, several participants (6 out of 15, that is, 40%) opined that though the quizzes and academic essay writing fulfill the criteria to precisely test the learning outcomes, they need a few changes. To quote one participant,

"At the B1 level, we only have our students write essays. We should also include summary and report writing skills, as per the CEFR, to provide variety in learning different writing genres. Instead of focusing on capitalization and punctuation questions at level 110, it might be more effective to include note-taking and summarizing questions. Additionally, students at the B1 level need to learn compensating skills such as circumlocution and paraphrasing, which I believe are currently missing from our ELIH courses."

Some of the participants insisted that there should be a more rigid training and cross-checking procedure for all quizzes, while a few of the participants suggested that there should be different quizzes and exams for different streams, such as medicine and nursing, in the health track. Responding to the question whether the two quizzes enhance learner performance, one participant observed:

"As a matter of fact, the quizzes inadvertently encourage a grade-oriented mindset. Although they do lead to some improvement, more formative assessment is needed to foster real improvement."

Similarly, to the question on the accuracy of the assessment rating scale, the observation of one respondent was that:

"The primary issue is the distribution of raw scores across different categories. For instance, 'Paragraph structure, organization, and content' carries 15 marks, which can unnecessarily inflate a student's score. Secondly, there is no need for a separate score for writing structure elements like the correct use of commas or compound sentences. These should be included in the grammar and vocabulary categories. Thirdly, the distribution of raw scores within each category is inconsistent."

Participants also noted that the parameters for each grade need to be more distinctly defined. Also, the rubric should be rewritten keeping in mind the teaching context and the students' real issues with writing, rather than abstract statements about writing out of context. Some participants observed that rewriting both rubrics in a simplified manner with equal distribution across categories and levels would be better for the graders as well as better for the standardized process. Participants' opinion on continuous testing was that it should contribute to the final grade, but it should not outweigh the summative assessments. Regarding the information table provided in the test to help students write academic essays, participants expressed differing opinions. One responder argued that "...expecting students to address all the content from the table may be too much and should be reconsidered," whereas another participant said,

"This is a tough question. On the one hand, if you ask the students to do research themselves, then they will memorize. If you give them too much in the exam, then they may all write the same. Maybe the information table should be more bullet-pointed and fewer sentences?"

A few participants were in favour of more room for creativity of students in place of the structured information table. For example, it was observed that,

"It's a good idea, but I want to recommend some other ways also, like showing pictures with keywords about the medical process, and students will create paragraphs. Another way is to explain the data using a graph, column, or pie chart."

All the participating teachers said they do conduct formative assessments to monitor student progress. However, they generally avoid assigning marks unless a student specifically requests feedback according to the rating scale. In their opinion, formative assessments can play a significant role in final grading. They motivate students, bring to their attention any unforeseen issues, and often help the students realign their learning strategies to prepare more proactively to face the final tests. Some participants were in favour of teachers taking into consideration the continuous tests marks (if any) to determine students' final grades, as they reflect students' dedication, progress, and consistent improvement over time, complementing the summative assessment. However, they are not in favour of more weightage to formative assessment in measuring learners' writing skills for final test scores. "I think that unless formative assessment is formalized, it cannot be made to carry more weightage," observed one participant. Teachers' opinions on quizzes were that learners' critical thinking skills or their higher knowledge to develop an idea may not be fully reflected in quizzes, limiting their validity for higher-level writing skills.

As regards examiners' challenges in assessment, the general feeling among teachers is that they face no challenges as such. They believe that the rubrics provided by the department mean that there are not many challenges. If there were no rubrics, evaluating students writing would be very challenging. As regards the grading rubrics and the writing prompts given in the writing skill assessment, teachers observed that the grading rubric for the final writing exam is essentially the same as for the quizzes. Ideally, it should be more developmentally challenging to reflect on the new skills that students are acquiring over time. One teacher observed that:

"There is a slight discrepancy between the writing book content and the exam/quiz questions. The writing book teaches the skill in a general way, while the writing exam requires students to apply the skill in the context of healthcare. This can be confusing for students."

Participants' opinion was that it is good that writing prompts are based on topics related to healthcare, and yet students should have multiple options to choose from. As things stand, students have to write on the same topic, which restricts their choice and also becomes very monotonous from the teacher's point of view.

11. Discussion

The results obtained from the analysis of both survey questionnaire and interview sessions indicate a general satisfaction of teachers with the assessment techniques in use in ELI. A brief look at the figures presented above in Table 2 reveals that a very high percentage of ELI teachers have indicated their overall satisfaction with the format and what the writing testing techniques, i.e., quizzes and essay writing, are aimed at testing. For example, 93.4 percent of teachers agree that academic essay writing is a valid writing assessment technique, while 73.3 percent of teachers agree that quizzes and academic essay writing meet the required criteria of assessment. The number of teachers favouring quizzes as a writing assessment technique is 86.7 percent, while 93.4 percent of them say that continuous testing in writing ability is very crucial in learner achievement. Teachers are not in favour of formative assessment marks bearing more value (60%) in final grading. And 93.4 percent of the respondents said the time allowed to finish the writing tests is accurate. 93.3 percent of teachers agree that the rating scale used to grade the quizzes accurately measures learners' writing capabilities, while 93.4 percent of the participating teachers said the format, rubrics, and structure of the ELI test tasks used for the quizzes and final writing exams reflect the writing skills they are meant to assess.

The interview results also show that ELI teachers are largely happy with the present assessment techniques, though a small fraction of the respondents (roughly 40 percent) suggested a few measures for possible improvements in the techniques, such as including summary and report writing skills for the academic writing test, the need for students at the B1 level to learn compensating skills such as circumlocution and paraphrasing, a more rigid training and cross-checking procedure for all quizzes, different quizzes and exams for different streams of study, such as nursing and medicine, rewriting the rubrics in a simplified manner with equal distribution across categories and levels for easier grading and better standardization, the writing test designed to allow room for creativity, and so on.

These research findings corroborate the findings reported in the existing literature reviewed for the research, which endorses the accuracy of the writing assessment instruments presently in use (Alamri & Adawi, 2021; Alotibi & Alshakhi, 2022; Alshakhi, 2018, 2019; Al-wossabi, 2019). Alshakhi (2018, 2019) claims that the assessment administrators at ELI are up to date with the latest developments in writing assessment. The findings of the present research align well with the findings of the research by Alamri and Adawi (2021), who report that the Writing Scoring Rubrics have been accurate and helpful in developing learners' writing skills. Karaman's (2021) research suggested that "formative assessment has a positive effect on student learning" (p. 809), and similar results have been obtained from the present study as well. The findings of the study by Wang et al. (2020), which investigated the potential parallels between Chinese college teachers' ideas on in-class writing tests and their own teaching strategies in EFL contexts, are also supported affirmatively by the ELI instructors participating in the present research.

Thus, the findings from the present study reflect ELI teachers' positive perceptions on the writing assessment techniques in use at ELI. A comparative analysis of the findings of the present study with the findings from previous research studies conducted in different institutional set-ups on the same

topic reveal that the assessment techniques at ELI are up to date as regards the cutting-edge research in assessment.

12. Conclusion

To sum up, we see that the numerical results obtained from questionnaire data analysis are corroborated by teachers' opinions expressed in interview sessions concerning the suitability of writing test techniques ELI commonly uses. Further, in view of the obtained results, the research questions are reviewed as follows:

As regards the first research question, ELI instructors do not perceive any significant difference between quizzes and academic essay writing as writing assessment instruments for the final grading. They see them as complementary to each other. The second question was whether ELI instructors perceive the writing assessment techniques well aligned with the learner outcomes or not. The findings suggest that the ELI teachers do perceive the writing test techniques as aligned with learner outcomes. The third question concerning the significance of continuous testing marks to be taken into account in determining the final grading of learner achievement in English writing is answered negatively, as a majority of instructors are against this proposal.

Thus, since most ELI instructors approve of the suitability of the writing test techniques presently in use, the present writing skill test pattern does not need any revisionist overview. The present pattern is in step with the changing writing assessment patterns in academia. At the same time, there is no recommendation to change the weightage of continuous testing marks to determine students' grades.

13. Limitations of the study

Sufficient care has been taken to conduct the present research as a comprehensive study; however, due to certain constraints of time and resources, there remain a few loopholes in the outcome of the research, which may be taken as its shortcomings. First, the interview sessions were confined to only fifteen participants because, for the researcher, time at hand was short. It was possible that interview sessions with a higher number of teachers would have affected the final results. Next, due to a lack of enough resources, the data collection was limited to only two sources. Therefore, the triangulation analysis technique could not be applied to better understand the results.

14. Suggestion

It is suggested that future researchers working on a similar topic of inquiry can focus on the limitations acknowledged in this research, that is, involving more participants in the interview session. Also, they can collect data from more sources to apply triangulation analysis techniques to understand the obtained results better.

Declarations

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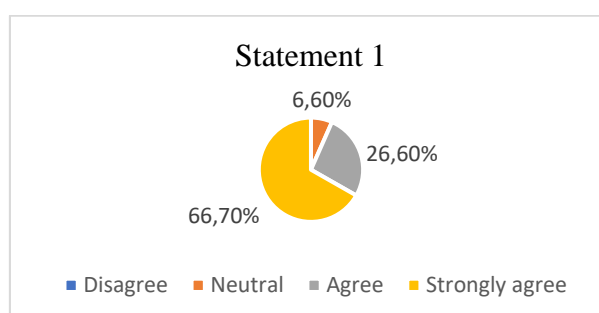Email: amalshaikhi1@kau.edu.sa
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1569-516X

Appendix

Appendix I. Graphic representation of instructors' responses to questionnaire statement variables
     The percentage of instructors responding to the questionnaire statement variables can be graphically represented as follows:
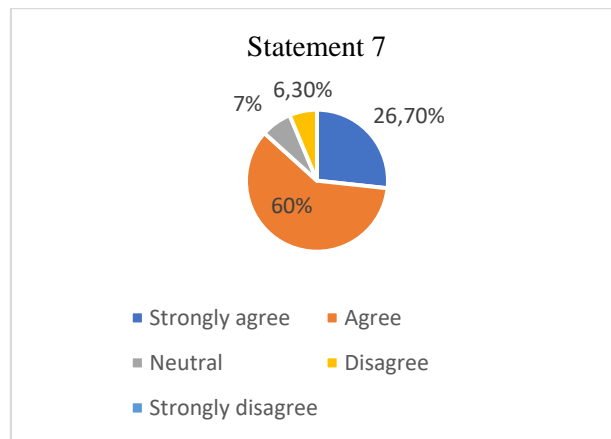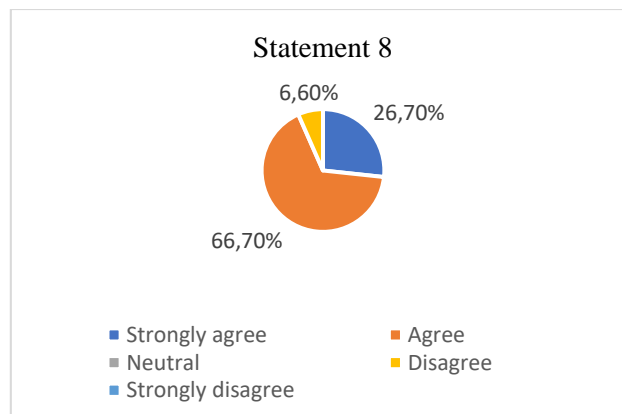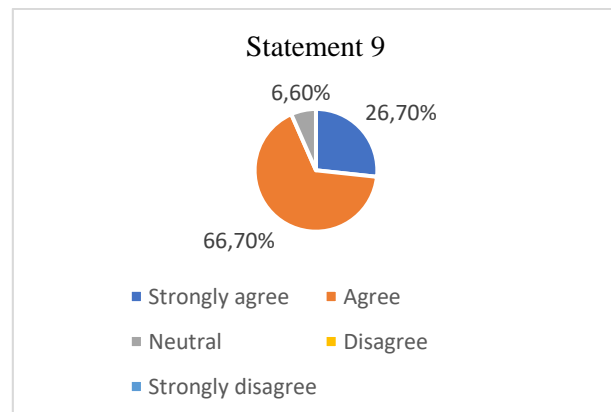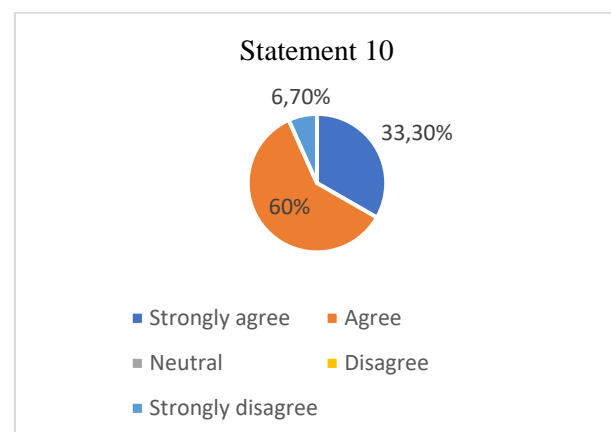

Figure 1. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 1
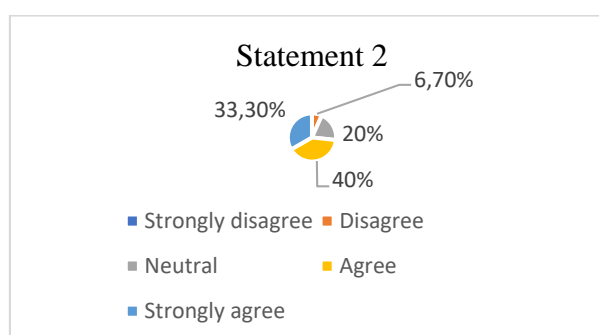
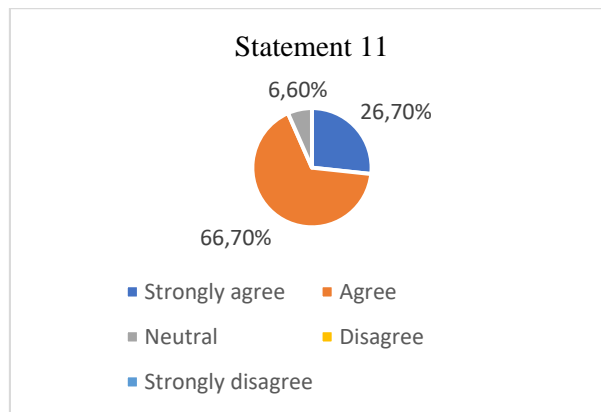**Figure 2.** Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 2
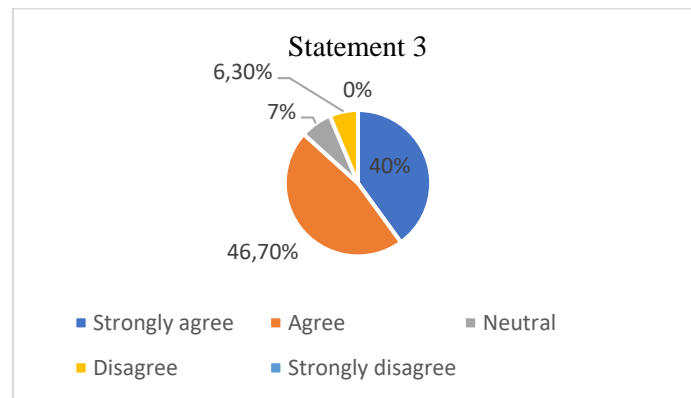
Figure 3. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 3
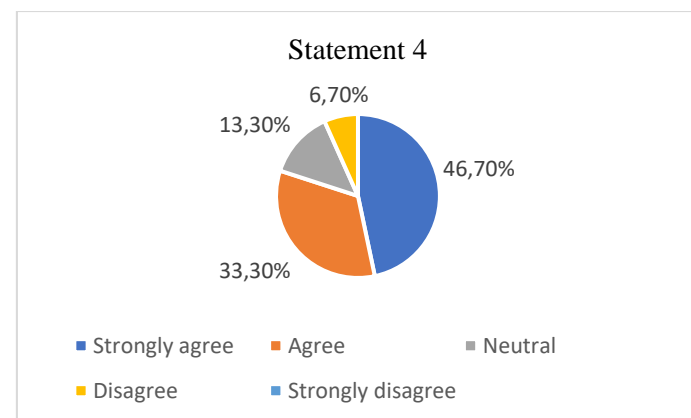
Figure 4. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 4
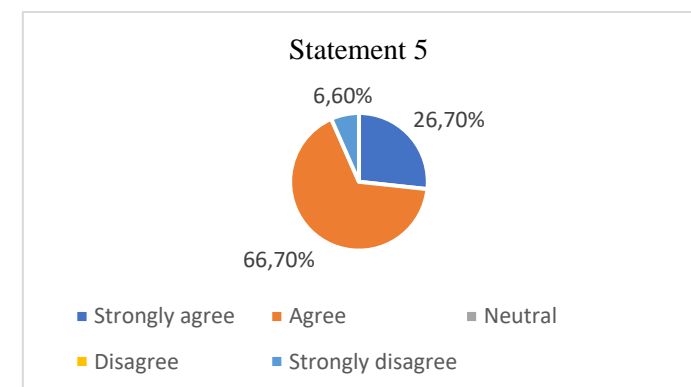
Figure 5. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 5
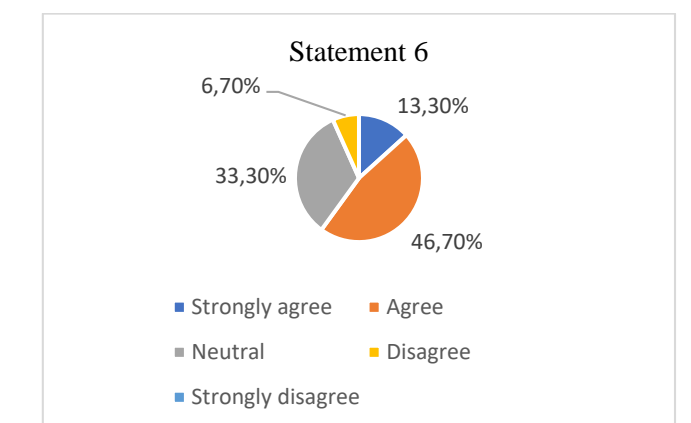
Figure 6. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 6

Figure 7. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 7

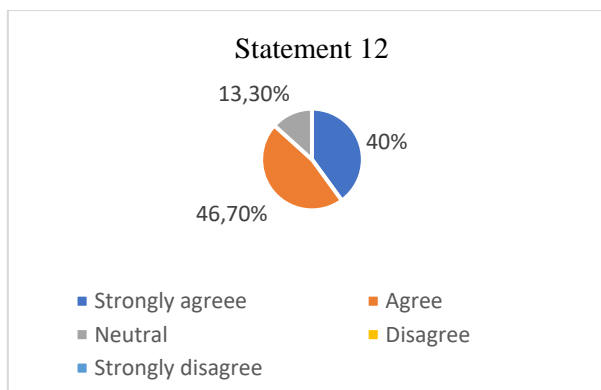Figure 8. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 8

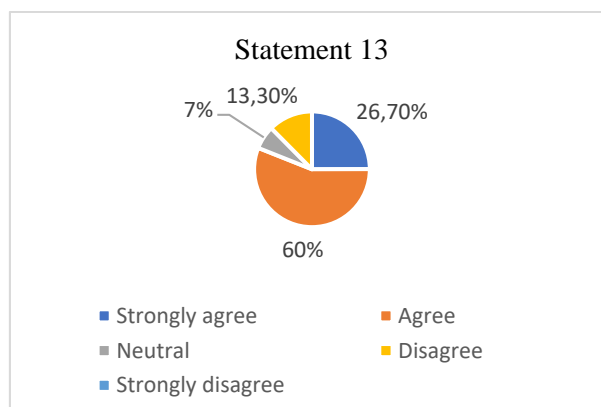Figure 9. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 9

Figure 10. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 10
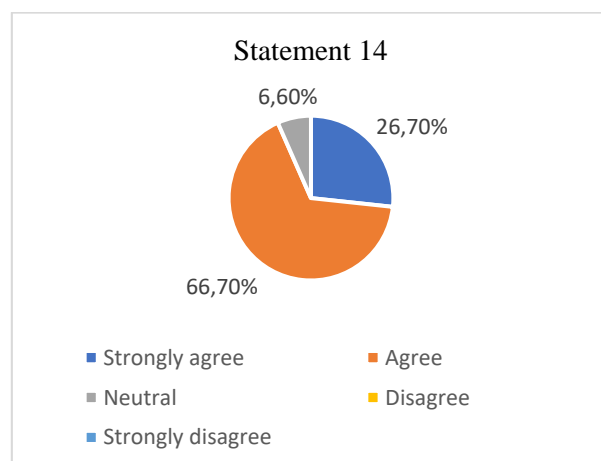
Figure 11. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 11

Figure 12. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 12

Figure 13. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 13

Figure 14. Respondents in agreement/disagreement with questionnaire statement 14

Appendix II. Interview Questions

I would appreciate it if you could express your opinions on the following points concerning the reliability and validity of the ELI writing skill assessment techniques, i.e. the two quizzes and one academic essay. Please feel free to elaborate as much as possible.

1. Please elaborate on whether the quizzes and academic essay writing meet the criteria to accurately assess the learning outcomes set for the writing skill course.

2. In your opinion, do the two quizzes enhance learner performance so that they do better in the final exams?

3. Please comment on the length of the two quizzes and the time allowed to write the test.

4. Please comment on the accuracy of the assessment rating scale in use for the quizzes. and the essay writing tests.

5. What is your perception of the suitability of the length of the academic essay (min 300 words) to accurately measure learners' writing skill?

6. Please comment on the accuracy of the assessment rating scale in use for the essay writing tests (quizzes as well as the final exam).

7. Please comment on the information table provided in the test to help students write academic essay (you may think of the possibility of all the students writing exactly similar essays).

8. Do you conduct formative assessment in writing skill and assign marks to learners?

9. In your opinion, do formative assessment marks of learners also play a role in the summative assessment of writing skill in the final grading?

10. In your opinion, should formative assessment be given more weightage in evaluating the writing skill of learners for final grading?

11. What is your perception of the quizzes being reliable and valid assessment techniques to evaluate learner achievement in writing skill?

12. What is your perception of academic essays being reliable and valid assessment techniques to evaluate learner achievement in writing skill?

13. Are there any challenges you face in conducting and evaluating the writing skill assessment through quizzes and academic essay writing?

14. Please elaborate your opinion on the grading rubrics, and the writing prompts given in the writing skill assessment.

15. Please comment on the writing task design in use in ELI for the quizzes and the final writing exam.

16. In your opinion, how does the nature of the ELI writing tasks reflect the writing skills they are meant to assess? Please elaborate.