

**Reflections upon the Writing Activities in the Third Secondary Year
(3^{ème} AS) ELT Textbook New Prospects**

تأملات الأنشطة الكتابية في كتاب تعليم اللغة الانجليزية للسنة الثالثة ثانوي

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Abstract:

Assessment covers all sorts of activities that teachers engage in to evaluate their pupils' progress and learning needs. Though it is an integral component of teaching in today's globalized world, it is regrettable that many programmes in EFL teaching do not require assessment courses. Thus, several teachers enter the classroom without a thorough grounding in assessment issues. Yet, courses on teaching written expression often devote a limited amount of time to the discussion of assessment. Therefore, it is too complex to choose rating scales and delineate criteria for valid and reliable essay evaluation. In accordance with this thinking, the central focus of this inquiry is to gain a deeper understanding of how to determine an effective and formal method of assessing writing ability, as well as to gain insights of an appropriate rating scale to serve in the teaching-learning assessment process in the writing classroom. On account of this, a case study involving 38 third-year (Bab El Assa High School) pupils was carried out as an attempt to investigate the pedagogical tools for improving our pupils' writing ability through an effective assessing system. Three main

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factors have contributed to the choice of the above-mentioned population mainly timing (4 hours per week), high coefficient attributed to English, and teaching the same population for two consecutive years. In fact, the participants have been assigned to three research instruments (triangulation) so as to bolster the credibility and validity of the research specifically a students' questionnaire, a progressive experimental test based on pupils' writing samples and focus group observations. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses have been used to prove the unreliability of the holistic rating and the efficiency of the analytic scoring. Specifically, the study's problematic statement endeavours the evaluation of 3rd year Literature and Philosophy pupils' writing skill as qualified to be vague and weak. Overall, the present study calls for improving an analytic scoring scheme capable of assessing pieces of writing as effective and as objective as possible to meet future challenges.

KEY WORDS: written expression; assessment; holistic rating; analytic scoring; test

الملخص:

تستند هذه الدراسة التجريبية على أدوات تربوية متمثلة في إجراء تقييم تحليلي كفيلا بتحسين مردود تلاميذ السنة الثالثة آداب وفلسفة في نشاط التعبير الكتابي. على أساس النتائج المتحصل عليها من البيانات التي تم جمعها استنادا إلى الاستبيانات والاختبارات، اعتمد هذا البحث على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي الإحصائي ليس فقط لتقييم ظاهرة التعبير الكتابي عند التلاميذ بل لتشخيص مجالات الإشكالية المطروحة حتى يتسنى للأساتذة توحيد المقاييس في تدريس هذا النشاط وتحسين جودته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعبير الكتابي: الأدوات التربوية ؛ التقييم ؛ الأسلوب الوصفي؛ امتحان.

Introduction

Algeria is aware of the importance of English and its national charter (1976) notes that it is a means to facilitate a constant communication with the world to gain access to modern sciences. The use of English in particular social spheres is linked with political influences, economic opportunity resulting from

the globalization process that is steadily gaining ground worldwide. Thus, English allows individuals to open the linguistic gates to international diplomacy, business negotiations, scientific research, academic conferences and tourism. Furthermore, the use of computer-assisted linguistic devices and other tools such as multimedia and websites have significantly affected the field of English Language Teaching worldwide, and Algeria is no exception.

Algeria has adopted English as a foreign language in its schools and higher educational institutions. The introduction of EFL as a compulsory subject-matter in the overall school curriculum regardless of the streams, adds an important facet to the general learning of pupils. Hence, in our specific context, the linguistic level is our main concern. English education tries to cater for the cultural needs of Algerian learners. It allows them to be aware of the world around them. Most importantly, it prepares the individual as a world citizen. However, the field of teaching English as a foreign language is always a subject to different researches which aim at improving its learning process in general and teaching skills in particular.

Learning to write has for a long time been claimed as a very difficult skill to acquire and dreaded by EFL pupils. Writing has become a burden, and produces shallow, boring output. Our pupils are sorely lacking in practice and stimulus for imagination and creativity. So, our pupils generally fail in acquiring this expertise.

Language testing is an important element in the teaching-learning assessment process in the writing classroom. The purpose of the composition task is significant in deciding which scale is chosen to motivate and guide pupils to learn. It is therefore the teacher's responsibility to find a reliable and valid method of measuring the writing ability of an individual or a group. Two important issues in composition evaluation are choice of an appropriate rating scale and setting up criteria based on the purpose of the assessment. In other words, reliable and valid information from both holistic and analytic scoring instruments can tell us much about our pupils' proficiency levels. Findings; however, show that our pupils would benefit more from analytic measures.

The textbook New Prospects includes four writing activities intended to reflect real-life tasks, such as writing simple reports, brief articles, formal and informal letters. Pupils are asked to write short compositions occasionally. The focus in writing classes is on the form of the written product rather than on how the learner should approach the process of writing. Compositions are corrected in terms of grammatical and punctual errors. In a cloze test or a free-response test; the teacher doesn't make efforts to discover his pupils' weaknesses. As a

result, his evaluation is approached to be broad, invalid and unreliable. Two simple research questions are formulated to guide this study:

1. Can the holistic scoring provide useful diagnostic information about our pupils' writing ability?
2. How can analytic scoring promote our pupils' writing abilities?

The questions guiding this study have structured information about the unreliability of the holistic assessment. Therefore, the present study aims at finding a method that gives exact and reliable feedback to the teachers and the pupils by providing a hypothesis which calls for an analytic scoring scheme capable of assessing pieces of writing as effective and as objective as possible. The researcher hypothesizes that:

1. The inefficiency and unreliability of the holistic scoring adopted by teachers may lead to pupils' weak performance in written expression.
2. The ability to design effective, fair and valid writing assessment through analytic scoring may promote pupils' writing.

To enhance score validity of the above hypotheses, the researcher has used a variety of tools. The study included 38 students from 3rd Year Literature and Philosophy stream in Bab El Assa (Tlemcen) secondary school. The participants have been assigned to a questionnaire, a progressive experimental test based on pupils' writing samples and focus group observations. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses have been used to prove the efficiency of the analytic scoring.

Theoretical Background

1. Introduction

Despite the significant effect of Competency-Based Education on English language teaching in Algeria, pupils' writing ability is still very weak. This is due to a lack of time allotted to writing and the difficulty to teach and assess it.

In assessing the writing ability, it is vital that teachers need to be aware of the potential of the evaluation criteria being adopted. This article focuses on the factors of assessing writing ability. It describes the attributes of grading methods, the two ways for test marking and distinguishes between the two types of scoring instruments, holistic and analytic. These instruments are not only used to indicate the pupils' achievements of the instructional objectives of a

specific study but to measure the extent to which pupils have mastered the specific skills acquired in a formal learning situation as well. Subsequently, pupils either pass or fail the test. In a rather practical way, the degree of success or failure is deemed important to both the pupils and the teacher.

Testers turned to holistic rating aiming at producing reliable results; unfortunately, some educators regard holistic grading as lacking uniform precision since there is a requirement to globally judge pupils' compositions and not designed to diagnose their weaknesses. Indeed, without precise assessment tools, teachers may assess written compositions subjectively and inconsistently. By contrast, analytic grading involves the breaking down of a written composition into components. Each component is assessed separately and then amalgamated with the scores from other components to derive an overall grade. Analytic grading can provide a comprehensive outline of the strengths and weaknesses of pupils' writing performance. Thus, it allows teachers to tailor instruction more closely to the needs of their pupils. The explicitness of analytic scoring guides offers teachers a valuable tool for providing pupils with consistent and direct feedback.

2. Assessing Writing Ability

Assessing writing plays a dominant role in defining pupils' proficiency, diagnosing their strengths and weaknesses, and realizing how much pupils' have achieved. The purposes of assessment are to make inferences about language ability and decisions based on the inferences.

For a long time, writing ability has been tested in the forms of multiple choices and grammar completion. Studies have also shown that writing tests are often highly correlated with concurrent objective tests. Conversely, most EFL professionals these days believe that it is better that students are tested by directly writing a composition on a certain topic.

Assessing writing ability involves three types of factors: test makers, test takers, and test raters. According to Cohen, assessing writing ability *"...has been described as complex interaction among three sets of factors: the knowledge that the test makers has about how to construct the task, the knowledge that the test takers have about how to do the task, and the knowledge that the test raters have about how to assess the task"*.¹

When assessing written language, teachers do not equip their pupils with efficient tools to produce good compositions. They also do not care about the suitable method to achieve this aim. Thus, researchers have been developing several approaches and stating their arguments to defend their choices.

3. Subjective and Objective Tests

In language assessment, we strive to ensure two types of tests: objective and subjective. This classification of subjective and objective tests does not refer to types of tests but to two different ways for test marking:

According to², objective tests known as standardized tests are used for **“multiple-choice, true/false, error-recognition, and other item types where the candidate is required to produce a response which can be marked as either correct or incorrect”**. In other words, test items that can be evaluated objectively have one correct response pattern. An advantage to including selected-response items in objectively scored tests is that the range of possible answers is limited to the options provided by the test writer. So, the test taker cannot supply alternative and acceptable responses. Scorers do not need to exercise judgment in marking responses correct or incorrect. They generally mark a test by following an answer key. In some cases, objective tests are scored by scanning machines and computers. Even though objective tests are problem solving in testing a large group of pupils in a very short period of time, and that these kinds of tests may have face validity: In this context,³ notes that **“the extent to which a test meets the expectations of those involved in its use, e.g. administrators, candidates, and test score users; the acceptability of a test to its stakeholders”**.

Subjective tests have the advantage of measuring language skill naturally, almost the way English is used in real life. However, many teachers are not able to score such tests quickly and consistently. In other words, a subjective test is one in which the scorer has to exert a judgment. These are difficult and time consuming. There is not one possible answer and the teacher has to decide how to score his pupils' abilities. In this respect, we test the communicative aspects of language such as the content, style, organisation of ideas, and paragraphing. The quality of the essay answer can be regarded from two sides: the substance of writing, and language form. The teacher's objectives in constructing an essay-type question are: (1) to measure the pupil's progress toward the instructional objectives of a specific study, and (2) to measure his specific strengths in each component of the essay, i.e., to measure his abilities in grammar, mechanics, organisation of the ideas and style. The pupils' products are evaluated holistically. Such an evaluation is mainly recognised as informal. An informal evaluation is the type of evaluation which is broad and global. Some studies have shown that the evaluation is considered to be subjective whenever it carries some of those characteristics.

4. Rating Scales

The evaluation of writing ability has become increasingly important in recent years because the results of such evaluations are used for a variety of administrative, instructional, and research purposes. One of the first decisions to be made in determining a system for directly assessing writing quality is what type of scoring procedure will be used: should a single score be given to each text, or should the different features of a text be scored separately?

There have been a number of marking procedures used for examining reliability as a whole. These marking procedures include: multiple ratings, peer-marking, blind scoring, double-marking, cross-marking and even computer versus human marking. These marking procedures have a number of merits and advantages. Indeed, they not only shorten the marking time, increase pupils' engagement in learning and improve pupils' high-order skills but they promote intra rater reliability and consistency of scoring as well. Conversely, the marking procedures related to composition marking remain problematic. One of the early written product marking procedures was to develop scales, or sets of answers, to rank pupils' essays from the most elementary to the most sophisticated.

Teachers have adopted different scoring scales to the testing of a composition in search of an objective and reliable assessing procedure. The assessment of written expression, thus, has witnessed the emergence of four different methods: Short-Type Essays, Multiple-Scoring Method, Error-Count Method and the Analytic Scoring Method. These methods differ from one another. The focus of this study will be on holistic and analytic rating scales.

In evaluating any piece of writing either holistically or analytically, teachers have had to address a number of concerns to assign a final score to a writing product. Some of these concerns include the need to attain valid and reliable scores, set relevant tasks, give sufficient writing time, set clear essay prompts, and choose appropriate rhetorical modes.

However, two main related concerns in essay evaluation literature are the appropriateness of the scoring criteria and the standard required. There is no single written standard that can be said to represent the 'ideal' written product in English. Therefore, we cannot easily establish procedures for evaluating EFL writing in terms of adherence. Even narrowing the discussion to a focus on academic writing is fraught with complexity.

4.1 Holistic Scoring Scale

A holistic scale as⁴ notes “*employs a reader’s full impression of a text without trying to reduce her judgment to a set of recognizable skills*”. In other words, it aims to rate the overall proficiency level. In a typical holistic scoring session, each writing sample is read quickly and then judged against a rating scale, or scoring rubric, that outlines the scoring criteria. Holistic scoring rubrics generally consist of 4 to 10 levels. Each level corresponds to a score and a set of descriptors. These descriptors in the rubric can be either general or fairly specific. Holistic scoring is an economical scoring since readers are required to make only one decision for each writing sample. Holistic scores are obtained by comparing individual pupil compositions to model ones, representing good, fair, and poor responses to the assignment. The instructor selects several pupil compositions that exhibit high, average, or low achievement. These models then become the standards by which the instructor and one or more graders evaluate a group of compositions. Each evaluator reads the pupil paper quickly and determines whether it is stronger or weaker than its closest equivalent among model compositions.

⁵claims that “*holistic scoring has the highest construct validity when overall attained writing proficiency is the construct assessed*”. In this vein, holistic scoring emerges from the limitations of the single score, which gives useful ranking information but no details. In other words, holistic scoring cannot provide useful diagnostic information about a pupil’s writing ability.

4.2 Analytic Scoring Scale

According to⁶ an analytic scale “*relies on a rating guide that separates and weights textual components such as content, organization, cohesion, style, vocabulary, grammar and the like a priori so that the rater’s criteria are focused and prioritized before the scoring process begins*”. Instructors who use analytic scoring view writing as a demonstration of many isolated skills that when graded separately and added together will result in an appropriate evaluation of the piece. The approach considers writing to be made up of various features such as creativity, grammar, succinct expression of concepts, and punctuation, each of which is scored separately. An analytic writing score is made up of a sum of the separate scores. It is often a weighted sum developed after multiplying each score by numbers representing the relative importance of the features the instructor wishes to emphasize. In 1974, Diederich developed analytic scoring to rate students' essays in five features: quality and development of ideas, organization, style, wording, and mechanics, which last could be subdivided into grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Being diagnostic in nature, this type of assessment provided teachers with useful information on the strengths and weaknesses of their students' writing. In 1981, Jacobs and her colleagues developed one of the best-known analytic rubrics. In

their rubrics, essays are rated on five different rating dimensions of writing quality, each having a different weight: content (30 points), organization (20 points), vocabulary (20 points), language use (25 points), and mechanics (5 points)⁷. In 1990, Weir developed the Test in English for Educational Purposes (TEEP)⁸. The TEEP framework consists of seven 4-point scales that cover four aspects of communicative effectiveness (relevance and adequacy of content, compositional organization, cohesion, and adequacy of vocabulary for purpose) and three accuracy dimensions (grammar, mechanical accuracy/punctuation, and mechanical accuracy/spelling). In 1991, Hamp-Lyons developed the Michigan Writing Assessment. Its framework contains three 6-point scales: ideas and arguments, rhetorical features, and language control. This study covers five major analytic rating dimensions including development, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. In a sense, this framework is similar to the Jacobs' 1981 five-dimension rating scheme. One noteworthy difference is that the language use dimension is further divided into two sub dimensions of sentence variety / construction and grammar/usage accuracy.⁹

The Practical Part

1. Statement of the problem

Writing is an art and no easy endeavour. In general, the quality of EFL writing has deteriorated among secondary school pupils in literary as well as scientific streams. Many pupils are not adequately prepared to cope with the written expression section. One of the main problems is that they lack the skills to write an academic essay. On this matter, ¹⁰claims that ***“pupils need to develop metacognitive awareness strategies in order to develop their writing”***. If learners can acquire these metacognitive skills through meaningful writing assignments, they will need considerable practice over time to improve their writing abilities and performance.

The present study is concerned with EFL pupils' writing performance at 3rd year secondary level. At this level, the learners are preparing to leave high school for further studies at university. In this vein, ¹¹ notes that ***The Third Secondary Year (3^{ème} AS) is, in effect a very decisive and probationary period for most pupils because of the Baccalaureate. Considering the case of pupils at this level, both the teaching objectives and pedagogical instructions aim at the learners to have more practice in all four skills, yet with extra emphasis on the writing skill because of the Baccalaureate exam. At the end the Third Secondary Year the pupils are expected to move from skill-getting to skill-using.***

Since it is important for the pupils to do well in the writing tasks, it is also important for EFL teachers to assess their pupils' writing efficiently and accurately to ensure that their assessments depict correctly the pupils' performance in writing. EFL teachers' assessment of pupils' writing can greatly influence pupils' attitudes for future learning because learners can be easily confused by unclear, vague or ambiguous responses and can become frustrated with their writing progress and their preparation for their examinations. Alternatively, pupils can be positively motivated if the assessments given to their classroom written work can help predict their actual performance in examinations. Unfortunately, a clear set of universal guidelines does not exist that guarantees such a supportive and positive experience for all pupils. School teachers may be using different ways and methods to assess their pupils' writing tasks, depending on the instructions given by the Ministry of Education.¹²

states that “*writers and raters differed in many notions related to the assessment of writing.*” Apart from that, pupils (writers) and their teachers (raters) differed in their recognition interpretation of salient points in a writing topic.

The present study is also concerned with the scoring procedures used for assessments of writing in Algerian high schools. It proposes two scoring methods. The two scoring methods chosen are the holistic scoring method and the analytic scoring method. A study, which looks into different assessment of writing performance and their score relationship, has been carried out by many researchers. They have used the generalizability theory to estimate the reliability of writing scores derived from holistic and analytical scoring methods. The details of these studies are discussed in Chapter Two. Objective and reliable scoring strategies for performance assessments remain the more basic issues, especially for writing products.

2. Research Objectives

The need for this study arises from a professional desire to better serve our pupils. This study therefore sets out to seek a valid and reliable method for assessing pupils' written expression. Worthy of mention is that for the purpose of this research undertaking, analytic scoring method can design the deficits in writing, proposes remedies and provides guides for evaluating an existing assessment situation.

3. Research Design / Methods / Procedures / Interpretations

To enhance score validity of the hypotheses along with the purposes of

the study, the researcher used a variety of tools. The **participants** contributed greatly in highlighting the problematic of weak performance in writing. To ensure the presence of the population, the researcher prepared a questionnaire about the difficulties his pupils face in written expression. The questionnaire aims at locating the pupils' deficits or needs in the above-mentioned skill. The population (2/3 girls and 1/3 boys) go through a writing composition to be corrected collectively so as to make some reflections. The researcher also tries to devise appropriate **data collection**, and be aware of the capabilities of instruments to provide useful and usable data. In order to find the answers to the two research questions, the researcher collected data from **writing compositions** awarded to his population, the construction of a more **restrictive questionnaire** instrument which was administered to the same population in the form of open-ended questions especially dichotomous questions requiring 'a yes/no response' for the purpose of investigating the problems pupils generally meet in written expression, evaluates their weak writing performance, and suggests solutions to overcome these weaknesses. To find out how much his colleagues know about teaching writing strategies and the problems they have confronted when assessing and scoring pupils' compositions, the researcher has conducted a **questionnaire** to five teachers who have an experience and knowledge in English language teaching and testing where the two scales (holistic / analytic) were assigned to each item where content validity and face validity are investigated. The participants for the current study were **observed** before, during and after the implementation of the analytic assessment. The initial observations demonstrated that many pupils not only had problems with basic writing skills, grammar and spelling, but also with putting their ideas into logical order. Most of their writing lacked transition words or a variety of sentence structures. After diagnosing the pupils' weaknesses, the researcher introduced the test to encourage better writing. The data got from observation confirmed the disappearance of their writing frustrations and therefore their attitudes towards writing have partially changed. It is of paramount importance to encourage pupils perform well in composition writing so as to measure their evolution from one composition to another. What is worth reminding is that pupils have been encouraged to classify their written work in a file to check their improvement. Therefore, **assignments** allow them to recognize their errors and deficit through the teacher's feedback. Such a feedback policy requires the teacher to play a dominant role in responding to student writing, and as a result, opportunities for instructive evaluation.

Before administering the five compositions to pupils, the researcher has explained each step thoroughly, encouraged them to feel free to write without any kind of stress and has focused on tests ratings for the purpose of text quality. The aim of grading is not a text scribbled with red, but a constructive

feedback to the pupil and the teacher. During the period of the research, 3rd year Literature and Philosophy pupils went through five tests: in the **pre-test**, pupils were asked to write a composition about ‘Ancient Civilizations’ to diagnose their level of proficiency in written expression. Whereas each of the three formative **tests**, pupils were exposed to teaching and assessing specific criteria. Formative evaluation was used to contribute the pupils’ writing through provision of information and performance. In other words, in the first formative test, pupils were invited to write their second composition, which was about the second theme ‘Ethics in Business’. They were assessed according to relevance and adequacy of content, compositional organisation and paragraphing. The second formative test, they were evaluated according to coherence and cohesion (style) and adequacy of vocabulary (diction). In the third formative test, the participants were also instructed to write a composition about the theme of ‘Education in the world’ and assess it in terms of grammar and mechanics. The **post-test** was considered as a summative assessment intended to elicit evidence regarding the amount or level of knowledge, expertise or ability.

➤ The interpretation of the teachers' responses confirms that their pupils misuse grammatical and lexical items, paragraphing, organisation of ideas, spelling mistakes and lack of imagination for a real piece of writing. Therefore, their writing ability remains weak. All the teachers confess that unbalanced unit plan in the textbook New Prospects reduces their role in assessing writing. Indeed, it is practically difficult to understand the contents of the writing activities even with the teacher’s help. Teachers assert that they have taught their pupils how to write compositions in their normal classroom instruction. They insist that continuing practice is needed to foster and promote pupils’ writing skill. For Q2 asking about whether the content of the written expression task is related to what they have taught, all of them say ‘yes’. Pupils can benefit from many aspects such as putting knowledge into practice and realizing English is not only a subject for them at school but a language used for communication. All the markers argue that writing skill is crucial for their pupils. However, the results show clearly their pupils’ failure when they have to write a composition. This is due to their pupils’ negative attitudes towards the writing skill and the insufficient time allotted to the teaching and assessing writing. Another main issue is the way of correcting the pupils’ compositions. Some teachers devote little importance to corrections because of time. Those who initiate to correct compositions in a correction session, provide some general remarks and impressions. In other words, it is a purely holistic assessment without any focus on the form and the content. They sometimes give much attention to mechanics without any comments on organization, diction, style and other aspects. The pupils themselves do not show any concern to such correction since they do not understand both the

teachers' remarks and symbols of the correction code. What makes our pupils neglect the written expression task is the absence of homework. The majority of teachers do not give remedial works at home mainly because of the heavy programme.

- The researcher has also found that rater reliability is problematic due to the

fact that all teachers are not trained to score compositions. In addition, not all of them follow the marking instructions although most of the respondents said they follow the marking instructions and realize that marking written scripts varies from teacher to teacher. In other words, not all of them employ the same criteria while marking, in which case they are marking at high risk of increasing rater unreliability.

- Most of EFL teachers find writing a complicated skill to teach, which, more or

less, affects the pupils' learning outcomes. The problems of teaching writing can be found in such questions as how to teach pupils to write, how to give feedback to their test papers, and how to assess these tests. The focus in rating classes is on the form of the written product rather than on how the pupils should approach the process of writing a composition. In general, pupils are asked to write on topics using the structures given in a relevant theme. The purpose of examining the test papers concerning the composition is to confirm the pupils' weaknesses in writing, investigate the validity and reliability of the testing and undertake the experiment of an analytic correction. First of all, the researcher has designed two different tests. Both of them are in the form of a baccalaureate exam paper. The first test consists of a reading passage, followed by the text type, multiple choice questions, ordering sentences as they occur in the reading passage, true / false statements, references questions, matching pairs and a controlled composition. The second test consists of a text, inference questions, gap filling and a free composition.

4. Summaries of the Findings

The researcher has made an analysis of the numerical data obtained from the closed – ended and open – ended questions in both the questionnaires addressed to pupils and teachers. As for the eleven questions answered by pupils and teachers, the researcher has classified the answers to each question in order to extract information concerning the research questions, i.e., he has checked how many types of answers have been given to the same question to prove or disapprove the two research questions.

The test papers regarding written expression have been analysed for the main purpose of investigating the efficiency of the analytic scoring scale. In addition, the researcher has examined the different criteria regarding writing assessment as well as the selected compositions from the English textbook New Prospects.

The researcher has moved to the assessed compositions and compared the grades of the five tests. At the start of the study, in the diagnostic test, all the pupils have shared common difficulties. Their compositions tend to be very short, often a single paragraph, and thus undeveloped. They comprise a few sentences, and revealed pupils struggling to articulate basic ideas about the topic. It is worth noting that there is an inability to sustain and develop the main idea. Vocabulary used in the compositions has been heavily reliant on vocabulary items introduced in the title. It is evident that pupils had only a limited vocabulary repertoire which has matched the topic of the composition. This lack of topic-related vocabulary has hindered the ability of the pupil in articulating his or her ideas. There is a tendency to produce over-long sentences, creating sentences with too many ideas per sentence. One cause of these long sentences has been excessive chaining of ideas through simple co-ordination, particularly ‘*and*’ or ‘*but*’. More surprisingly, the compositions have shown numerous incidences of grammatical and spelling errors. Omitted verbs, subject-verb disagreements, and spellings reliant on phonic reproduction of English sounds are common. The majority of pupils are generally unaware of how to demarcate sentences correctly with an initial capitalisation and a terminating full stop. What is more, there has been very limited use of internal sentence punctuation such as the comma or the semi-colon.

Lastly, the researcher has employed the analytic assessing procedure in both formative tests and summative assessment to study how helpful and useful as expected it should be and is in practice. More than half of the pupils have written longer pieces, have introduced more ideas and have made a better attempt at arguing a case. Some of them have demonstrated basic mastery of sentence constructions. Control of sentence structure has been generally secure.

It is worth noting that the rhetorical components (content and organization) led to relatively higher score reliability than did the four linguistic criteria (style, diction, grammar and mechanics). In sum, contrary to the hypothesis that holistic scoring scale which is inefficient and unreliable, a higher level of score reliability and validity has been achieved when the compositions have been marked analytically. One possible explanation for the relatively higher score

reliability for analytic rating is that the teacher has relied on assessing thoroughly the six criteria.

Conclusion

The findings favour the analytic assessment over the holistic scoring. The results of the tools are clear answers that the use of the analytic scoring scale can provide pupils and teachers with valuable information to improve the validity of the interpretations and fairness of decisions based on composition scores. As the researcher expected, the findings suggest that the analytic scale results in higher score reliability despite the lack of rater training. Seemingly, the analytic assessment is a consistent remedy as it provides pupils with the opportunity to assess and correct their errors.

Another conclusion we can draw is that some pupils still meet problems in writing. This failure is partly linked to general malaise in teaching and learning. In addition, there seems to be several contradictions between the objectives officially stated and how teaching is actually performed. Neither the approach nor the teachers' methodologies really favour the teaching of writing. In order to be more objective, such observations have to be analysed and the results interpreted. Pupils are offered neither suitable learning conditions nor sufficient time for acquiring adequate knowledge. If such conditions were available, pupils' learning would be fostered and their performance improved. Low achievement in writing may be due to many causes such as the lack of correlation between teaching objectives, classroom practices and holistic evaluation norms. Besides the inadequacy of teacher training programmes, learners' dependence on the teacher represents another handicap which is another topic that deserves further research.

It is then the teachers' responsibility to draw learners' attention on the importance of writing in English and attempts to realize an effective writing skill's teaching and assessment through testing and scoring guidelines.

NOTES On:

- ✓ **Assessment** is a systematic approach to collecting information and making inferences about the ability of a student, the quality or success of a teaching course on the basis of various sources of evidence. Assessment may be done by test, interview, questionnaire, observation, etc. In other words, it is a method for analysing and describing student learning outcomes or program achievement of objectives. Good assessment requires feedback to those who are being assessed so that they can use that information to make improvements. A good assessment program requires using a variety of assessment instruments each one designed to discover unique aspects of student learning outcomes and achievement of program objectives.
- ✓ **Analytic scoring** (testing): a method of scoring that separates and weights different features of the test taker's performance on a writing task and assigns separate scores to each feature. The commonly analysed features in writing tasks include content, organization, cohesion, style, register, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and mechanics.
- ✓ **Holistic scoring** is a method of scoring where a single score is assigned to writing samples on the basis of an overall impressionistic assessment of the test taker's performance on writing task as a whole.
- ✓ **Reliability** (in testing) a measure of the degree to which a test gives consistent results. A test is said to be reliable if it gives the same results when it is given on different occasions or when it is used by different people.
- ✓ **Validity** (in testing) the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure, or can be used successfully for the purposes for which it is intended. A number of different statistical procedures can be applied to a test to estimate its validity. Such procedures generally seek to determine what the test measures, and how well it does so.
- ✓ **Formative test** is given during a course of instruction. It informs both the learner and the teacher how well the learner is doing. A formative test includes only topics that have been taught, and shows whether the learner needs extra work or attention. It is usually a pass or fail test.

- ✓ **Summative test** is given at the end of a course of instruction. It measures or sums up how much a learner has learned from the course. A summative test is usually a graded test, i.e., it is marked according to a scale or set of grades.

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8

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