Investigating EFL Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions about Essay Assessment Criteria

The Case of First-Year Master EFL Students at English Department, Faculty of Letters and Foreign Languages at University Center of Si Al Haoues Barika, Algeria

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Didactics

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Academic Year
2021-2022

Dedication

Praise to Allah, who gave me the strength and perseverance I needed during my years of study.

To my beloved parents: MOUHAMAD and FATIMA. Thank you for all the support you have given to me. Without the inspiration, drive and support you gave me, I might not be the person I am today.

To my husband YAHIA, thank you to the kind words and constant support, to your patient listening ears and the "I believe in you" texts.

To all my sisters HADJER, IKRAM, AICHA, MERIEM, and my little angel SARA who have always been a constant source of inspiration. Thank you for your love.

To my teachers Mr. RIDHA SELLALI and Mr. SAMI BERBECHE who made me love English and teaching profession.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the world's most charming and best parents: ABD EL HAKIM and

SOUAAD (Hayat). For fulfilling all their duties towards me, for always being positive

about me, for seeing the possibility of being a successful woman in me and making me as

strong as I am, I thank you and love you.

To my brothers: ABDELHAQ, KHAIREDDINE, OMAR and my beautiful sisters: HAZAR,

MENISSA and MISK EL JANNAH, nothing compares to the joy of having a family like

you. Thank you for always being there beside me through thick and thin.

To my best friend: AMIRA, my confidant, and my partner in crime. Thank you for

everything.

The dedication extends to all my family without exception DJERIDI, CHENNAFI and

ADLANE.

To my teachers MOUNI BENGUESMI, NOUR BENNAOUI and LAICHI KENZA who

made me love English and teaching profession.

WEAAM

Acknowledgment

In the name of ALLAH, the most Gracious and Most Merciful

Our sincerest gratitude is to our supervisor, Dr Asma RAHMANI for all the necessary facilities.

We place on record, our sincere gratitude to honourable members of our jury: Dr. BOUZIDI and Mrs. BENABES Their insightful comments and evaluable opinions will be of great assistance in improving the purpose of study.

We take this opportunity to record our sincere thanks to all the faculty members of the Department of English and Literature for their help and encouragement.

Last, great pleasure and sincere thanks to our friends, and all our classmates who take part in supporting us, for their endless love and their understanding

Thank You for your Collaboration

Abstract

Essay writing is considered as a perplexing process for students. Even though it is still very significant particularly in the teaching of English as a foreign language, and highly valued in Algerian universities. Efficient assessment criteria, when viewed positively, are predictable to improve students' essay writing. Accordingly, the well-explained assessment criteria encourage learners to enhance their essay writing. This research aimes to investigate the role of using effective assessment criteria in improving students' essay writing skills. It attempts to find out the teacher's emphasis on the assessment process. In other words, research seeks to determine if instructors' assessment techniques improved or hindered students' essay writing. It also intended to obtain suggestions that ameliorate Algerian EFL learners' essay writing. For this purpose, a case study of (50) first-year Master EFL learners at Si Al Haouas University Center and six teachers were undertaken. The data were collected from two different types of tools: a questionnaire for students and a questionnaire for teachers. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively using SPSS. The results reveales objective criteria adopted by the teachers. Thus, both students and teachers know the importance of these criteria. Consequently, students are satisfied with them.

Keywords: assessment, criteria of assessment, essay writing, EFL.

الملخص

تعتبر كتابة المقالات عملية صعبة في نظر الطلبة, إلا أنها مهمة للغاية في مجال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، إذ تحظى بتقدير كبير في الجامعات الجزائرية. عند النظر في معايير التقييم الفعال للمقالات بشكل إيجابي، فنجد أنها تقوم بتحسين مهارة الكتابة لدى الطلبة . يهدف هذا البحث إلى معرفة دور استخدام معايير التقييم الفعال في تحسين مهارات كتابة المقالات لدى الطلبة, كما يهدف أساسا إلى معرفة تركيز الأستاذ في عملية التقييم. بمعنى آخر، يحاول البحث أن يحدد ما إذا كانت تقنيات التقييم المستخدمة من طرف المدرسين قد حسنت أو أعاقت كتابة مقالات الطلبة, بما في ذلك الحصول على الاقتراحات التي من شأنها تحسين كتابة مقالات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجزائر. لهذا الغرض، تم إجراء دراسة بمشاركة خمسين طالبا في السنة الأولى من ماستر اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وستة أساتذة في مركز جامعة سي الحواس, كما تم جمع البيانات باستخدام نوعين مختلفين من الأدوات: استبيان للطلبة واستبيان للأساتذة و تم تحليلهما كما ونوعا باستخدام برنامج الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية. حيث كشفت النتائج عن معايير موضوعية اعتمدها الأساتذة, وبالتالي يعرف كل من الطلبة والأساتذة أهمية استخدامها. كنتيجة لذلك، فأن الطلاب راضون عنها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التقييم، معايير التقييم، كتابة المقالات، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

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List of Acronyms

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FL: Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

L1: The First Language

L2: The Second Language

CBA: Competency-Based Approach

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

Mo: Mode

Q: Questions

% : Pourcentage

General Introduction

The procedure of acquiring information regarding learners' knowledge, skills, abilities, and development is known as assessment. It is an essential component of all educational programs for determining the achievement of students. In reality, it must include effective criteria that enable students to determine their true level of achievement. Thus, the ability to create a clear and effective essay is an essential competence for students to develop because it involves not just the language system but also the cognitive theories for memory and reasoning. Researchers in the field of English teaching have shed light on various useful styles, techniques, and criteria that teachers use to assess students' essays. Albow (1998) mentioned that writing an essay requires the use of two distinct skills that are frequently in conflict with one another. That is, writing requires the ability to develop words and thoughts, as well as the ability to analyze them to choose which ones to adopt. Writing an essay, according to Zamel (2007), is a persistent attempt to explore what one wishes to say. This is a crucial step in the writing process. Thus, it is the act of recognizing and expressing one's desired meanings, as well as the form with which to better accurately express oneself.

In general, the assessment provides numerous chances for teachers to specify their instructional objectives and identify the extent to which the expected requirements are achieved. It improves the teaching-learning process by integrating and modifying the teaching to its outcomes. Likewise, it can be considered a teaching technique that aimed at gathering information about learners' knowledge to conclude the most effective and helpful classroom training. Furthermore, its processes should have a good effect on the learning experience.

Statement of the Problem

Essay assessment needs to adopt appropriate criteria and procedures that encourage students to demonstrate their true accomplishments. Barkaoui (2007, p35) mentioned that learners must use different procedures such as planning, drafting, and revising, as well as automatic word and syntax. Furthermore, the criteria in which essays are assessed can have various effects on learners' essay performance and grades; therefore, a well-designed essay assessment has precise clear criteria and requires learners to demonstrate the amount to which they have absorbed these criteria from the explanation of their teachers.

Yet, the situation under this study is related to teachers' remarks after each exam assessment which denote that the students' essays are not satisfactory and they do not improve the quality of an effective piece of writing. In addition, they observed that students have some difficulties in writing essays such as punctuation, grammar, and a lack of vocabulary.

Learners do not know the assessment criteria adopted by their teachers of writing. Thus, the main problem of this research stems from students' lack of understanding of the objective criteria adopted by their teachers, which allows them to create good pieces of writing with ease. It is also to produce correct essays and enhance writing effectiveness. Furthermore, one of the reasons for students' poor writing performance is how teachers assess them and the criteria they use.

Research Questions

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1) To what extent do EFL teachers of writing adopt objective criteria when they assess their learners' essays?

2) To what extent are first-year Master EFL learners at University Center of Barika aware of these objective criteria?

Research Hypotheses

These questions give rise to the following hypotheses:

1) EFL teachers of writing adopt different objective criteria when they assess their learners' essays.

2) First-year Master EFL learners at University Center of Barika are aware of the essay assessment criteria adopted by their teachers.

Aim of the Study:

The main aim of this research is to investigate if the teachers' assessment methods of using the criteria of assessment helped or hindered students' essay writing abilities. Besides, several main objectives are targeted such as:

1) Exploring the objective criteria adopted by EFL teachers in assessing learners' essays.

2) Investigating the awareness of first-year Master learners at Si Al Houes University Center of Barika of the assessment criteria adopted by their teachers.

3) Examining the impact of essay assessment criteria on learners' essays.

Significance of the Study:

The importance of this research is to show the extent to which the essay assessment criteria influenced the learners' essay writing competence and whether there was a need for remedies in terms of explaining and referring to them in advance. Also this study may serve two categories of people in practice. First, for teachers who have used or are currently adopting criteria of essay assessment in their EFL classes, the research will shed light on the importance of the positive role to assist them to focus on their methods of assessing essays. Furthermore, for those who are or will be teaching EFL courses about essay production who have never used or plan to adopt these criteria of assessment in their EFL classes, the study will inform them on what can be done and how.

Scope of the study:

This study has been limited to first-year Master students at the Department of English and Literature at the University Center of Barika because they have taken enough writing classes during the three previous years of license to write a comprehensive essay.

Structure of study:

To attain the aim of this research, this study will be organized into two main chapters that are intertwined to enlighten the reader about the research.

The first chapter provides a theoretical overview of the essay writing, assessment, and essay writing assessment. Thus, it discusses the writing skills in general with the stages of developing the essay writing, and some definitions related to this skill. Furthermore, it tackles some of the basic literature about the assessment in general and the assessment of essay in particular, explaining its types, techniques, criteria, and activities emphasizing on assessment of essay.

Chapter two is devoted to the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative results gathered from teachers' questionnaire and students' questionnaire. It is divided into three main sections. Thus, the first section covers the methodological framework, followed by a detailed analysis of both students' questionnaire and teachers' questionnaire. Finally, it provided a discussion of the results obtained in this research work

Chapter One

A Review of Literature

Introduction

The current chapter was prepared for the sake of simplicity and clarity by including all of the aspects that correspond to the subject of this study. The current chapter attempts to synthesize concepts stated in teaching English as a second language, such as writing skill, essay writing and assessment, and, lastly, objective criteria and their use in the assessment of essays by teachers and learners. This chapter also covers some basic terminologies that are required for understanding the current study. Furthermore, as variables in our research, essay writing assessment and the use of objective criteria in assessing essays. Moreover, the current chapter refers to and discusses some of the significant works and past studies of the same study subject.

1.1. Theoretical Aspects of Writing an Essay

When learning a particular language, there are four main skills learners have to deal with i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing to express their thoughts smoothly. EFL students can also interact effectively in English if they master these skills. Among the four mentioned skills, writing is a paramount skill and very difficult for most students, if not all, since it requires a lot of patience, time, and practice.

1.1.1. Different definitions of writing skill

In writing, students attempt to convey their minds via language. Since writing is a mixture of ease and struggle. Some students pick up the skill quickly, while others find it challenging. Harmer (2007) stated that writing is part of a larger task for which the focus is on another thing such as language practice, acting, or speaking. Writing is also the process of formulating ideas, selecting how to convey them, and combining them into an essay to reach the reader indirectly.

Additionally, writing is seen to be the expression of a language in a written form through the use of a set of signs or symbols. Besides, it demands the capacity of developing words and

thoughts within oneself, along with the skill of assessing them to describe whichever pieces to be used. (Albow, 1981)

Considering listening, speaking, and reading are all interconnected, Saed and Al-Omari in Yunus and Chien (2016) declare that writing assists in the improvement of these other skills. Likewise, it is widely regarded as an essential skill in the process of teaching and learning EFL because it is a comprehensive skill that strengthens grammar, vocabulary, planning, organizing, editing, revising, and other factors.

Following all of the facts stated above, it is possible to infer that writing is the nature of the creating process of writing. According to Brown (2003), written products are typically the outcome of thinking, writing, and editing operations that need special competencies that not every individual is born with.

1.1.2. Definition of Writing Process

Writing instruction is the most significant and challenging component of teaching English as a foreign language. The writing process techniques enable the teachers and students to collaborate on the creation of an essay. Writing practice in class, on the other hand, is commonly utilized for presenting purposes, determining whether students have learned language structures given in class, and for test purposes. Before finishing the final version of the written piece, learners get the opportunity to plan their writing, create draughts, revise, rewrite, and provide and receive comments and suggestions. Graves (1983) argued that students' engagement in the writing of essays as writers should be described by five distinct phases: prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, and posting.

1.1.3. Definition of Essay Writing

An essay is a work of literature designed to persuade or enlighten the audience on a certain subject. To convince or sufficiently enlighten the reader, the essay must contain several critical features that allow it to flow smoothly. The essay's three primary components are the

introduction, body, and conclusion. Hence, what differentiates essay writing from other types of writing is that an essay is a structured piece of writing with certain norms. Essay writing is regarded as an important element of the curriculum. Further, it is required for all classroom tasks and tests regardless of the field studied. The essay, in its most basic form, is a group of paragraphs that are all about the same subject. It is also an essential part of the EFL learning and assessment process. And students are expected to master it. Writing norms fluctuate, particularly across various communicative groups, and whereas the actual process of writing in L1 is intuitive for mature authors, writing in L2 would become a deliberate activity, specifically if the L2 typography differs from the students' L1 typography (Silva, 1993).

1.1.4. Characteristics of Good Essay

Good essay writing is not a skill that is innate and does not subject to a specific program or formula since many different writing kinds is considered as well writing. However to be able to write, one must examine the components that contribute to a piece of writing being more readable and effective. Hence there are specific characteristics that most good writings share, such as content, form, grammar, style, and mechanics. Liao (2016) indicates the qualities linked with morphology and semantics as native language components, whereas those involved with content, organization, and coherence as global text features.

1.1.4.1. Content.

The most significant aspect of an essay is its substance, which should have an unambiguous fundamental theme which is where the ideas should be adequately articulated. The content should show a comprehension of the required materials and offer all necessary information such as the purpose, the major subject, the main storyline of the article, support, elaboration, imagery, and any selected detail that may create understanding or retain a reader's attention. Regardless of the kind of goal of the essay, the content should have a clear emphasis; however the accompanying components should assist or build on the main idea of the article.

The content of every section ought to be detailed, relevant, explained, and shown using samples, facts, and metaphors that are suitable for the audience and purpose. According to Starkey (2004), an effective literary text is organised, concise, and coherent, with exact language and appropriate choice of words.

1.1.4.2. Form.

The arrangement or form of the essay is the second most significant part that covers the structure of the essay. When information is delivered to reader in a structured style, it signifies that the organisation of the writing is regular and reliable. This benefits the writer by assisting the reader in believing and following what is stated. According to Ibid (2004), adopting an orderly method of writing will lead the audience from the first to the final line; he will also be able to observe how the many arguments are made in an essay.

1.1.5. Types of Essays

Another key factor that influences the overall quality of the essay is style. An author may use, and integrate several style of writing, but the finished work must fit into at minimum one of the four major English academic writing types: expository, argumentative, descriptive, or narrative. Style, then, must be the outcome of the integration of all components of writing to express meaning in a way that captures the reader's attention and interest and encourages him to act in the writer's favour. Bailey (2003) confirms that style is concerned with the mode and objective intended to be represented by one's literary creation

1.1.5.1. Expository Essay.

Expository papers are often written in the third person and are mostly factual. It is also known as informational writing or informative writing since the author focuses on and emphasizes telling or explaining a given topic (Williams, 2001). Figures and photographs are also commonly utilized in this sort of writing to give clear and concise explanations. This type

of writing can be found in several books such as how-to articles, news, Business, recipes, instructional manuals, and scientific research papers.

1.1.5.2. Persuasive Essay.

Argumentative essay writing is perhaps the most popular sort of writing at the university level. Besides, this type of writing assimilates the thoughts, attitudes, and prejudices of the writers, who constantly stand up and be counted for or against a matter and use explanations, arguments, and persuasive reasoning to persuade audience to engage with them. Laurie (2003) pointed out that this form of writing contains logical reasoning, arguments, examples, expert quotations, and justifications to persuade readers.

1.1.5.3. Descriptive Essay.

As claimed by Baker (2010) the purpose of descriptive writing is to describe a person, an event, an item, a location, or an action. As a result, descriptive writing ties the outside world to our interior sentiments. The descriptive style is more detailed, personal, and subjective and it is frequently focused on painting a verbal image of what a person is experiencing and feeling at the time, employing a plethora of rich adjectives and adverbs.

1.1.5.4. Narrative Essay.

Narrative writing is best utilized to demonstrate a person's growth journey to get to a specific point in the story. As a result, it is generally written in the first person. As specified by Strong (2001), this writing style employs the narrative mode, which is a collection of approaches and tactics utilized to express the tale. So the primary goal of this sort of writing is to tell or narrate a story by creating different characters and telling what happens to them like in novels, short stories, and plays. Also, it is mostly personal, imaginative, and self-expressing.

1.1.6. Steps of Essay Writing According to the Process Approach

The process approach is a writing instruction style that emphasises the writer's originality as well as focuses on the creation of effective writing abilities instead of replicating patterns

(Tribble, 1996). According to Hyland (2003), the process approach to writing highlights the writer as an independent creator of words, but it also addresses the topic of what teachers must do and what to take into consideration to aid students in developing a written piece. From this standpoint, the stages of writing according to the process approach`s rules and norms are referred to as the following stages:

1.1.6.1. Pre-writing Stage.

In this stage, and before writing anything, learners attempt to generate some thoughts and decide which they intend to write. To begin, students may pursue shallow notions. Before they begin drafting, they take some time to collect their ideas and decide on a path. This activity can also be called the brainstorming step. Harp and Brewer (1996), on the other hand, highlighted that this level is built on a number of stages, which including setting the objectives and the audience, as well as engaging students' prior knowledge through brainstorming and other activities. Specifically, the exercises in this phase help students overcome what is known as author's block. (Flower, 1981)

1.1.6.2. Writing Stage.

In this second stage, Students should not anticipate or aim toward perfection while writing their first draught (Gaber, 2003). In the following stage, students will be given the opportunity to rewrite and alter their texts as long as their major focus is thinking and writing. Grammar, spelling, and lexical accuracy are not required at this time. So it can be concluded that the first draft should be viewed as a way of further exploring ideas and what the learner wishes to achieve.

1.1.6.3. Rewriting Stage.

The rewriting stage is where learners often address the linguistic correctness of their compositions by correcting grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes (Harris, 1993). As a result, each draft must be reviewed several times to make adjustments in areas where they might

add information, words, and phrases, and remove and reorganize the written paper. According to Noskin (200), the cornerstone of the process of writing is revision, the mechanism through which ideas originate and change.

2.2.   Introduction to Assessment

Assessment is a concept that has received several scholarly attentions recently, and it has been investigated in various ways by many researchers. There are distinctive methods that are utilized in language classrooms. It has diverse principles and is utilized for certain purposes as well. Assessments are used in different activities such as essays.

2.2.1. *Definition of Assessment*

Assessment is a method of determining the knowledge of students, comprehension, competence, and skills. (Astin & Antonio, 2012)

Chapelle & Brinlley (2000) stated that assessment refers to ''the action of gathering knowledge and creating decisions about a student's ability to utilize a language.'' (p. 267) Hence, assessment is the action of gathering information regarding the students learning to help teachers understand and explain the thoughts of their students. It is defined in the same way by Palomba and Banta (1999) as "The systematic gathering, and employ of knowledge on educational activities to improve learning and growth.'' (p. 4)

Accordingly, Assessment is a tool for collecting data that the teacher will examine to create judgments about students' achievements or knowledge for academic expectations to generate the teaching/learning process. A teacher who does not assess his students, on the other hand, cannot recognize the students' knowledge, the amount of retaining from his explanations, and how these lessons are relevant to the students' learning, skills, and grades (Covacevich, 2014).

Thus, assessment entails analyzing students' work and teachers' observation. Carr and Harris (2001) claim that it is "a necessary component of education... Effective classroom assessment applies to current learning." (p. 35)

Furthermore, assessment encompasses the method of reviewing, marking, and rating learners' achievements. It is defined as the process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data to make judgments about learners' progress. In-class assessment can be used to examine students' issues, assess their academic success, provide feedback to students, and schedule courses (Airasian, 1994).

From the above definitions, assessment is linked to instruction and learning to improve teaching quality and learner achievement.

2.2.2. Purposes of Assessment

Assessment can be used for different purposes by teachers. First, the assessment provides teachers with feedback on students' work (Brown et al., 1997). Also, it helps to discover the weaknesses of students such as the not understood part of the lesson, and thus, the best selection of lectures' instructional methods that suit the level of students and then, improve the situation of teaching.

In addition, Assessment is a tool that gives diagnostic feedback on a learner's mastery of specific abilities and assists teachers in gathering more information about the effects of their teaching style on students. Hence, placing students in appropriate classrooms, assessing student development, and measuring the teaching process is for the purposes of assessment. More significantly, it inspires students' and teachers' self-evaluation and is related to a student's success.

In other words, assessment according to Zidane (2010) "…gives information on the type of progress made in attaining the requirements set for the instructional program". This seeks to determine whether the course objectives have been reached or not is done by reviewing the data

acquired through the various assessment procedures. These researched data are also useful for teachers in determining whether students pass or fail.

In summary, assessment is a crucial component of instruction since it assists both teachers and students in reaching academic objectives.

2.2.3. Methods of Assessment

Language education and the teaching-learning process depend primarily on assessment. It indicates accurate, credible, and up-to-date facts about the learner's understanding, abilities, and performance.

Yet, according to Woolfolk et al. (2007), there are two methods of assessment that take place at different times and in different ways to achieve many educational purposes. These methods are formative and summative assessments.

2.2.3.1. Formative Assessment.

Formative assessment is a continuous, enduring, and interactive process that takes place in the educational circumstance (Angelo & Cross, 1993). Thus, it is utilised while learning is occurring. Formative assessment, according to Ouakrime (2000) "have three key features that distinguish it from a summative evaluation: it is informational, participatory, and formative." (p. 62)

Formative assessment, on the other hand, is a type of learning assessment that informs both teachers and students about their accomplishments, areas of strength, and areas for improvement (Cohen et al., 2004). Sadler (1989) mentioned that the learners' task in assessment for learning is to bridge the gap between their current level of understanding and their learning objectives. If the learner is to do this, self-assessment is required. As students work toward their goals, the role of a teacher is to convey suitable goals and encourage self-assessment. Feedback in the classroom should be given by the teacher to the students and from the students to the teachers.

According to all of the above definitions of formative assessment, educators should know the requirements of their students to improve their competency and eliminate their shortcomings. Formative assessment, in other terms, produces valuable input for student progress. This even engages both the assessor and the student in a constant reflective process and makes explicit assessments of the learning performance.

2.2.3.2. Summative Assessment.

Another method of assessment is summative assessment, which occurs at the end of a specific instructional session, such as a research work, unit, topic, academic program, plan, or education year. It demonstrates what students learned at the end of a specified time of study. As a result, it is frequently used to determine academic achievement rather than diagnostically and accomplishment as well as assess the success of educational programs. Furthermore, summative assessment is referred to as final testing because it is thought to be the final judgment concerning a learner's success or failure. (Shute and Rahimi, 2016)

That is to say, as Ouakrime (2000) states, it is ''the assessment of a learner's ability to achieve the apparent goals of a certain language teaching system.'' (p. 60)

According to Miller (2002), summative assessment can be used for a variety of purposes:

- To enable development in additional research.

- To pass or fail a learner in an exam.

- To assign grades to learners.

Furthermore, Benjamin (2013) highlights the distinction between formative and summative assessment in the following table:

Table 1

Comparison between Formative and Summative Assessments

Formative Assessment	Summative Assessment
The learner is notified of the questions across the assessment procedure	The questions on an exam come as a surprise to the learner.

The timetable is adaptable.	The learner must complete the task within the time given.
The teacher's feedback consists of remarks and/or a letter or number grade.	A letter or number grade is assigned by the teacher.
The purpose of the evaluation is to lead future learning.	Learners are ranked and sorted using evaluation.
Considers the learners' zone of early development.	The student does not regard as a unique one.
The test or task could be adaptable.	The test or task is not adaptable.
The learner is engaged in self-assessment.	Only the teacher or an outside agency can assess students.
Establishes attainable goals for future learning	There will be no immediate follow-up; when it's finished, it's over.

In short, any method of assessment is conducted to identify whether and how students are learning and the performance of teaching methods is used by teachers to enhance students' learning.

2.2.4. Principles of Assessment

To provide learners with appropriate and acceptable opportunities to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways, an effective assessment procedure in EFL classes should have several principles (Brown, 2004). These principles include practicality, validity, reliability, authenticity, and accountability.

2.2.4.1. Validity.

McAlpine (2002) defines a valid assessment as "one that measures what it is supposed to measure." This method is deemed to be valid when the sort of assessment utilized in class

assesses the correct skill supposed to be tested. To be valid, the assessment should center on the lesson's objectives. A test of oral production, for example, should just require oral ability.

In other words, Gronlund and Linn (1990, p. 12) mention that "validity relates to the degree to which an examination task examines what is designed to evaluate". Consequently, for this to happen, the assessment tasks should be aligned with the learning outcomes.

2.2.4.2. Reliability.

When assessment instruments produce the same results in diverse settings, they are said to be reliable. In other words, "if you provide the same testing to the same students or matched students twice, the results should be identical" as pointed out by Brown (2004). For instance, if a teacher assigns various duties to his learners and then assigns the same assignments to the same learners after 10 days, the findings would be the same.

2.2.4.3. Authenticity.

This means that the assessment should reflect the real-world condition. That is, all forms of assessment methods should equip learners to function properly in the target culture. In addition, the themes covered should be fascinating, and the pieces should be contextualized.

2.2.5. *Types of Scoring*

According to Hyland (2003), when it comes to scoring students' essays in an EFL setting teachers to take a variety of ways. Holistic and analytic scorings are two of the most commonly used techniques.

2.2.5.1. Holistic Scoring.

In this method, teachers read the full essays of the learners rapidly without focusing on special abilities, and then they provide a single mark for each essay. Its benefits stem from the fact that it is useful when teachers have a large number of essays to correct because it does not take up too much time (Smith, 1989). In addition, the teachers concentrate on their learners' essay strengths. However, holistic scoring has drawbacks in that it does not guide and assist

learners in progressing in their writing ability because it provides no details about their essays' shortcomings. Brown (2004) claimed that "it provides little impact on the writer's subsequent phases of learning." (p. 243)

2.2.5.2. Analytic Scoring.

Teachers use this scoring approach to examine learners' essays by paying close attention to grammar, coherence, spelling, vocabulary, and other aspects. These parts are graded separately, and the distinctive grades are added together to determine the overall grade for the learners' essays. It is helpful in that it assists learners in identifying their writing deficiencies to improve their performance. Yet, it has several drawbacks, such as time constraints (Brown, 2004).

2.2.6. *Assessment of Essays*

There are multiple techniques of essay assessment, and these techniques have expanded as teaching approaches have changed. The emphasis in conventional approaches was on producing grammatically acceptable pieces of writing while ignoring content and self-expression (S.Chelli and W.Khouni, 2003). To put it another way, the product approach was used to teach writing, while the summative assessment was used to evaluate the learners' essays.

However, Frederickson (1984) emphasizes the significance of the primary purpose of essays assessment is to assess a learner's ability to write in the target language. Essays should be authentic, communicative, and include integrative information. Thus, there are two types of essay assessments:

2.2.6.1. Indirect Assessment.

According to Coomber (2010) "indirect essay assessment reflects reliable utilization in word - level constructs and concentrates on syntax, grammatical structures, and punctuation." (p. 91). It emphasizes correctness than proficiency. As a result, it was used in empirical investigation

for a long time; to put it another way, the product framework was used to teach writing, while summative assessment was used to analyze the students' essays. Furthermore, the emphasis was placed on writing grammatically correct essays while ignoring content and self-expression. (S.Chelli & W.Khouni, 2013)

2.2.6.2. Direct Assessment.

This method of assessing essays examines the learners' capacity to communicate through a piece of writing and is based on the production of written texts. With the introduction of the Competency-Based Approach (CBA), which relies on the process of essays rather than the content, this type of assessment is no longer affiliated (Harris et al., 1995). Learners must organize their ideas in the proper topic and utilize appropriate language, vocabulary, syntax, etc. In addition, direct assessment incorporates all aspects of writing an essay. Furthermore, continual assessment of essays such as portfolio assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment take place in this type of assessment of writing essays (Coomber, 2010):

First, a portfolio is described by Hamp Lyons (1991) as "a collection of essays written by the learner during a specified time." (p. 2). This indicates that the portfolio includes a collection of written pieces produced by the learner during a period. Portfolio assessment, then, assists teachers in identifying learners' essay writing weaknesses and, on the other hand, shows learners' progression.

Peer assessment is another technique engaged in essay assessment. Learners in this category exchange pieces of writing, express their opinions, remark on each other's essays and provide feedback. (Coffin et al., 2003) This practice promotes group effort and provides learners with the ability to learn new ideas and facts. More importantly, peer assessment is critical because it is regarded as another means of providing feedback on learners' outcomes. Peer feedback informs learners about their strengths and areas that need to be improved. This feedback might

be positive and encouraging to help learners improve their essays. Moreover, motivating learners to participate in process assessment assists them in managing their learning.

Self-assessment is another tool for assessing writing an essay ability in which learners examine their essay. To make this practice more helpful, it is carried out with the assistance of peers and teachers (Bond, 1995). It also improves learners' critical thinking skills when they recognize their problems and identify appropriate adjustments for better essays, and it makes the class more learner-centered (Taylor et al., 2013).

2.3. Objective Criteria for Assessing Learners' Essays

Assessment criteria inform students about the characteristics, attributes, and components of an assessment work that will be used to assess their performance in each learning outcome. Criteria instruct students about the elements that will be examined when making performance decisions.

2.3.1. Definition of Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria are an important part of the process of assessment. Researchers such as Foxman et al (1989), propose general definitions of assessment criteria, where criteria are considered as a description of the knowledge and abilities acquired by the teacher to make sure that learners acquire learning. Others have defined detailed definitions of assessment criteria like features or characteristics, as well as required concepts previously to a test, which are then utilized to assess individuals against those criteria.

Others have defined detailed definitions of assessment criteria like features or characteristics, as well as required concepts previously to a test, which are then utilized to assess individuals against those criteria (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007; Sadler, 2007).

In this study, the researcher can define criteria as a set of conditions that can be used to assess the quality of learners' essays. It should be noted that assessment criteria have been considered in various ways in the subject of essay writing.

2.3.2. The Integration of Objective Criteria within the Process of Assessment

Objective criteria are regarded as a crucial component of an efficient assessment process because "criteria are traits or rules that are helpful as levers for passing judgment" (Sadler, 2005). The elements of an essay or examination that will be assessed are referred to as assessment criteria (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). Assessment criteria play an important part in assisting students' learning. As a result, understanding the significance of assessment criteria might help students have a better picture of their achievements (Woolf, 2004).

Bloxham and Boyd (2007) further noted that assessment criteria specify which components of an essay are evaluated and, as a result, what learners should focus on. This is evident in the learning and teaching processes, as Orsmond et al., (2000) proved that defining criteria can increase the performance of assessment practice and affect learning outcomes. According to Bloxham (2013), "an effort has been made to make criteria visible through specific details such as assessment criteria, rubric (marking schema), and student objectives." "Students can also engage in these practices if teachers explain the lesson goals and the criteria for assessing their progress toward the goals to them" (Harlen, 2007). Woolf (2004) declared that "Active participation in conversation and the implementation of criteria can support learners in gaining a deeper understanding of the significance of criteria in particular and assessment in general" (p. 488). It appears that criteria must be used in combination with assisting learners' progress. The assessment process cannot be effective unless criteria are supplied for each essay is available to support students in meeting the requisite standards and learning objectives.

2.3.3. Objective Criteria of Essay Assessment

An effective essay, according to Starkey (2004), is organized, clear, and coherent, with accurate language and effective word choice. Furthermore, it contains several elements that EFL learners should be familiar with (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Tompkins, 2004). For example, learners should acquire and understand different objective criteria like correct and

appropriate punctuation, the correct use of grammar, spelling, and capitalization, sometimes known as mechanics. Learners must also recognize and respect coherence in their paragraphs and cohesion in their essays. The same researches show that a balance of appropriate word choice, relevant and correct terminology and appropriate sentence structure enhances exceptional and effective essays. Still, according to the same researchers, directness, and understanding the purpose of writing an essay will help students generate helpful and valuable essays.

To correctly write an essay and express a specific meaning, students must use and respect the mechanism's norms, which include grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation standards.

2.3.3.1. Mechanics.

In essays, mechanics refers to the arrangement of words, such as how they are spelled or placed on paper. According to Kane (2000), the reality that the first term of a sentence is frequently perforated is due to mechanical reasons. These patterns or mechanics are critical in placing together a good quality essay because no matter how innovative the learner's ideas are, they will be lost if he cannot convey them in a clear and precise manner

Starkey (2004) examined grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization as writing mechanics.

Grammar is an essential element of not only essays, but also of language in general in a communication process. Writing an essay requires a full awareness of the parts of speech, linguistic patterns, and figures of speech, as well as the skill to control them in order to write comprehensively. "...for one thing, we must know the rules of the language, what the speech acts do, how words relate with one another, what certain words suggest, and the principles of vocabulary and syntax while writing an essay," Brooks and Penn (1970, p. 20) stated.

Capitalization and punctuation are crucial parts of the essay. Along with many other aspects, "They identify pauses and sentence boundaries while also removing ambiguity. A well-punctuated and capitalized essay should make your work readable, making it more appealing to your audience" Murry & Hughes (2008). Likewise, spelling is among the issues that learners must consider while dealing with writing an essay, as it is an area that many teachers in an EFL environment rely on when assessing students' essays. Furthermore, correct spelling lends credibility to one's essay. The reader will understand not only that one is learned, but also that he is conscientious about his work.

2.3.3.2. Cohesion and Coherence.

Silva (1993) observes that despite the relevance of coherence devices such as conjunctivitis and lexical connections in writing essays, L2 learners utilize far fewer of them. According to the same researcher, those students use the concepts of coherence and cohesion interchangeably.

Cohesion is a crucial aspect that displays the consistency of a text. Furthermore, cohesion indicates the connection that occurs between one part of the essay and another (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Cohesion, according to the same researchers, happens "when the perception of one component in the essay is based on that of another" (p. 4). Likewise, Hewings and Curry (2003) argue that a "good essay contains not only semantic meaning but also devices with textual and interpersonal purposes" (p. 199). The text's related meaning is of the utmost significance, and it is retained with cohesion.

Coherence according to the same researchers is made up of two components: cohesion and register. They believe that "a text is a passage of speech that is coherent in two ways: it is coherent concerning the circumstance and so continuous in the register, and it is coherent with itself and hence cohesive." (p. 23). Additionally, when the order and connecting of propositions inside a text through the use of the suitable information format is addressed, coherence is

characterized as text-based. Furthermore, when the reader and the assignment must be regularly regarded, coherence is reader-based.

From what was mentioned above, cohesion aids in the preservation of textual wholeness while coherence accomplishes the same but at the paragraph level. The penultimate paragraph is organized to provide further information.

2.3.3.3. Word Choice.

Choosing the appropriate words is the greatest technique for a learner to effectively explain his views in an essay. This implies that the reader knows what the author says. According to Starkey (2004) and Kane (2000), while selecting words to utilize, the student should consider two factors: denotation and connotation.

A word's denotation is its basic or literal meaning. Students should double-check their words for accuracy, as some confusion can arise from words that sound or appear similar but have very multiple meanings, words and usages that sound correct but are not recognized in standard English, or words that are misapplied so frequently that their utilization is thought to be correct. Starkey (2004) defines connotation as "the inferred meaning of a word that includes emotions, cultural assumptions, and suggestions". Because connotation asks the student to think outside the dictionary, to what could be indicated or assumed by his essay, the learner should validate that each employed word represents exactly what he means to it.

According to what has already been stated, while choosing a term, both denotative and connotative aspects must be regarded. This is not all, the student should also assess whether the language he is using will deceive or insult his audience. This includes avoiding slang and informal language.

2.3.3.4. Clarity.

When writing an essay, the student's purpose is to transmit information, as well as the fact that he can write an effective essay, Starkey (2004). Clarity is an important aspect of essays that

the student should master to make his essay understandable and ensure that those who read it comprehend exactly what he wishes to convey. Murray and Hughes (2008) underline the necessity of clarity as a key component in making one's work easy to read and understand. According to them, the best way to reach clarity is to use short patterns, to be meaningful, to make every character count, and to avoid expressing more than one topic in each sentence.

According to Starkey (2004), to achieve clarity in essays, the student should:

- Avoid ambiguity by eliminating terms or phrases that have several interpretations. The student should concentrate on what he meant and avoid any language structures that could confuse the reader.

- Make use of strong, specific adjectives and adverbs. Using forceful and particular adjectives and adverbs is one technique to achieve clarity. The appropriate modifiers (adjectives and adverbs) assist the student in conveying his idea in shorter, more correct words. For example, a Chihuahua can stand in for a small dog; exhausted can stand in for really tired, and late can stand in for being slightly behind time.

2.3.3.5. Organization.

Information should be provided to readers in a structured style in essays; even brief essays contain regular, expected organizational patterns. The obvious benefit of structure is that it helps the reader believe what you are saying and voluntarily follow your lead. Ibid (2004) stated that "By following an essay organization, you will lead your reader from the first to the last sentence. He or she will be able to observe how the many ideas you offer in your essay relate to one another." (p. 2)

The organization is generally determined by procedures used before the process of writing an essay. However, before participating in the actual act of writing an essay, the writer selects the organization of his essay using several prewriting approaches, mostly free-writing

and brainstorming. Because a plan is usually developed after reviewing and categorizing the notes acquired from the prewriting activity, the use of prewriting strategies aids in the creation of an effective plan that ensures the organization of the essay.

2.3.4. *Previous Studies Related to Essay Assessment Criteria*

The research of Javid and Umer (2014) aimed at determining the significance of writing assignments, the main areas of problems in academic writing, the factors generating these issues, and corrective approaches in the Saudi EFL academic context. The study's sample consisted of (194) Saudi English-major undergraduates from Taif University who were expected to answer questionnaires about various aspects of writing ability. According to the results of the study, Saudi EFL learners experienced major difficulty with academic writing due to a lack of acceptable vocabulary items, organization of ideas, syntax, spelling, and punctuation.

Another study by Arabi and Ali (2015) aimed at examining the appearance of coherence devices in the essays of fifty students' answer sheets. The instrument of data collection that has been chosen by the researcher is 50 answer sheets from the final examination. The findings of the study showed that students made a lot of errors like syntactic and lexical ones, misapplying definite and indefinite articles, and the poor treatment of punctuation.

A study conducted by Putri (2019) aimed at assessing the published argumentative essays by fourth EFL learners in the English language study program. Thus, the aim of the research was to define the assessment criteria on which the scales should be based. As data sources, eight instructors who are concerned with writing were involved. Their perspectives were studied to determine the criteria for assessing argumentative essays. As the study was a descriptive qualitative, three methods for data collection were used: a questionnaire, an interview, and a focus group discussion. The collected data were analyzed using an Interactive Model, which includes data collecting, data filtering, data display, and verification. The lecturers

recommended that the topic, organization, language, mechanics, and academic writing abilities be considered while judging the specific sort of essay generated by EFL Learners.

The study of Violeta, Milena, and Jove (2021) aimed at establishing general criteria, as well as examining the criteria and indicators for essay assessment made by teachers in terms of their assessment in an attempt to assert general criteria. The study was qualitative, and the sample consisted of analytic lists created by teachers that relate to the introductory paragraph of a five-paragraph essay, which could be viewed as an essay itself. The strategies for analyzing data and deriving conclusions were interpretative analysis, synthesis, and comparison. The results of the study indicated that some of the criteria and all of the indicators for assessing the introductory paragraph cannot be made measurable and precise enough, owing to the complex nature of the written text, which includes students' personal beliefs, attitudes, ideas, and writing style, which are subjected to the teachers' personal beliefs, attitudes, ideas, and criteria approved by them.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the theoretical foundation that underpins essay writing, essay assessment, and objective essay assessment criteria. It aims to introduce the research issue by discussing the core points that are thought to be crucial for the study. Thus, this study is divided into four sections.

The first section is devoted to theoretical aspects of writing skills in general, and essay production in particular. Furthermore, it defines writing skills, with its process. Then, it shifts to essay writing. At first, it sets out a clear definition of essay writing. Next, it points out the characteristics of a good essay including content and form. Afterward, it mentions the types of essays including expository, persuasive, descriptive, and narrative. In the end, it discusses the steps of writing an essay which are the pre-writing stage, writing stage, and re-writing stage.

The second section presents the main aspects of the essays' assessment. First, it provides definitions of assessment and its various purposes. Then, it deals with the assessment's principles after the adopted methods of assessment. Also, the section includes the types of scoring. After that, it sheds light on the essays' assessment including indirect assessment and direct assessment which contains several types of assessment such as: portfolios, peer and self-assessments.

The third section exposes a discussion concerning the objective criteria of essays assessment. Here, it focuses on the objective criteria used by the teachers of writing in assessing their learners' essays as it is the cornerstone of our research. This section covers the definition of assessment criteria, the integration of criteria within the process of assessment, and the types of objective criteria used in essay assessment.

The last section reviews some related previous studies.

Chapter Two

Fieldwork

2.1. Introduction

Besides providing insight on the theoretical basis of the research, that includes the essential principles associated to writing skill, assessment, and essay assessment criteria. This chapter describes the situation being investigated, in addition to the research design and equipments. The descriptive method is used in the current work. Thus, data were collected from the participants using two tools. The first tool is a questionnaire for teachers, and the second tool is a questionnaire for students.

This chapter is devided into three sections. The first section discusses the methodological framework of the research. The second section deals with the analysis of questionnaires from

both teachers and students, and the key results. Furthermore, to make the results more understandable, data analysis will be given in tables and figures. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the key results.

2.2. Research Methodology

The main aim of this research is to see if the teachers' assessment methods of using these criteria helped or hindered students' essay writing abilities. Consequently, this section discusses the methodological considerations that were used in the field work's realization. Two data collection tools were used, and the acquired data was analysed qualitatively and quantitatively, as shown in the section below.

2.2.1. Choice of the Method

The research needs to depend on a method. As defined by Cohen et al. (2005), is "a range of methodologies utilized in educational research to collect data that will be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, explanation and prediction" (p. 44). Consequently, this research is a case study, as described by Yin (1994) "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used". (p.13)

Thus, the purpose of providing information about students' and teachers' adoption of essay assessment criteria, as well as their perceptions and opinions, and how these criteria affect students' essay writing performance necessitates the distribution of a collective questionnaire This would necessitate the comments and analysis of the participants' responses using the descriptive-analytic method.

After deciding on and implementing the research methods of selecting the sample from the whole population are thoroughly explained in the following part.

2.2.2 Population and Sample

This section deals with the target population and the sample of the current research.

2.2.2.1 Population.

According to Polit (2001), the target population is "the entire aggregation of cases that meet a specified set of criteria" (p. 233). The population targeted in this research is first-year Master students and EFL teachers at the department of English, Si Al Haoues university center of Barika.

2.2.2.1.1   Students' Profile.

The population N is estimated to be N=85 enrolled students in the department of English at Si Al Haoues university center of Barika, Algeria. The students are enrolled in the academic year 2021-2022 and their option is Didactics.

2.2.2.1.1   Teachers' Profile.

Teachers' population N is estimated to be N=6 teachers.

2.2.2.2 Sample.

The sample selection step is crucial since it determines the findings of any study. Polit et al. (2001) claim that:

> Sampling involves selecting a group of people, events, behaviours
> or other elements with which to conduct a study. When elements are
> persons, they are known as subjects and the subjects are selected
> from the delineated target population in a way that the individuals in
> the sample represent as nearly as possible the entire population. This
> decision has a major impact on the meaning and generalisability of
> findings. (p. 234)

The sample is collected using the simple random technique. Thus, the simple random selection gives everyone in the population an equal chance of participating. Indeed, Brown (2001) argued that using this sampling technique ensures that "each individual in the population must have an equal chance of being selected." (p. 72)

2.2.2.1.1   Students.

The number of the selected students was 50 first-year Master's students in the department of English and Literature at the Centre University of Barika during the academic year 2021-2022.

2.2.2.2.1   Teachers.

The number of participants' teachers was very low (6). Therefore, all members of the population were selected.

As an ethical measure, all the participants in the selected sample were informed that they are a part of a study whose findings could benefit them and future students. Furthermore, we informed them that their responses would be extremely beneficial for any future developments.

Following the appropriate sample selection, the choice of the most effective instruments that might be employed in this study is the next step. As a result, various tools were used and administered to the selected sample to acquire the necessary data.

2.2.3.   Research instruments

This study is a descriptive study that aims at investigating learners' and teachers' perceptions about essay assessment criteria. Dornyei (2011) states that any investigation is focused on the tools employed to collect data. The researcher may focus on a collection of instruments to meet the requirements of a multi-method approach that necessitates various data sources. This is to examine the validity and reliability of the findings, look at the situation through several views, and validate or reject the hypothesis (Cohen, et al. 2007).

A questionnaire is an essential tool that assists the researcher in gathering evidence by converting research hypotheses into questions. According to Wray and Bloomer (2006) "the questionnaire is useful for surveying a large number of people in a variety of places." (p. 158) In other words, questionnaires were revealed to be more convenient for quantifying and analyzing findings. In this respect, two questionnaires are administered to investigate as explained in the next subsection.

2.2.3.1. Students' Questionnaire.

The questionnaire includes a series of written questions designed to elicit two sources of data: facts and opinions. The questionnaire contains three types of questions: closed-ended, multiple-choice, and open-ended. First, the closed-ended questions were Likert questions. Furthermore, multiple-choice questions include a collection of answers or options from which respondents must choose one or more. Both close-ended and multiple-choice questions generate quantitative information. While open-ended questions offer qualitative data, they take more time to answer and interpret.

The students' questionnaire (appendix A) consists of sixteen items divided into three sections.

> ➢ Section One: (items one to five) is about the general information. This section is concerned with general information, and it seeks broad information about the sample. Here, Students are required to provide information about their gender, age, reasons for studying the English language, and some information about essay writing.

> ➢ Section Two: (items six to 10) is entitled the use of essay assessment criteria. This section is made up of five items. It is mainly concerned with different techniques and procedures as well as the objective criteria adopted by students. Firstly, it seeks information about the essay assessment criteria which include organization, word

forms, grammatical rules, mechanics, clarity, creativity, cohesion, and coherence. Then, the steps of writing essays are followed by students are pre-writing, revising, and editing. Also, it deals with the different techniques and procedures the teacher prefers to use such as holistic and analytic procedures, self and peer assessments. It ends with the teachers' interests in which students are asked about their teachers' interests either the content or the form.

➢ Section Three: (item 11 to 15) is entitled learners' satisfaction and opinions towards the use of essay assessment criteria, this section consists of five questions. It aims at gathering the different opinions of students about the adoption of essay assessment criteria. The questions investigate students about their preferences and others about their opinions. For example, the students were asked whether they like their teachers to explain and provide them with the essay assessment criteria and feedback. Here, the students were asked also about their satisfaction and opinion about the adoption of these criteria of essay assessment.

2.2.3.2. Teachers' Questionnaire.

This questionnaire (appendix B) is combined of written questions that are of different types. The very first sort of question used is the multiple-choice question, which includes a list of options from which respondents must choose one or more. The open-ended question that demands a long response is the second form of question used in the questionnaire. That is, instead of being constrained to selecting a specific option as in multiple-choice questions, respondents are free to express their opinions. This sort of question gives qualitative information while multiple-choice questions provide quantitative data. The main purpose of this questionnaire is to discover the teachers' objective criteria in the assessment of the students' essay writing. Furthermore, it aims at figuring out the teachers' evaluation perception of the

factors that may impact students' written production. Six EFL teachers were involved in this research work. Thus, they were invited to answer the given questions.

This questionnaire (appendix B) consists of 11 questions divided into three sections addressed to teachers, who taught the writing modules.

- The First Section (items one to three): aimed at profiling teachers and seeks for teachers' gender, their experience in teaching generally, and their experience in teaching writing specifically.

- The Second Section (item four to seven): is intended firstly, at recognizing, the types of assessment, activities, and scoring procedures teachers use to assess the students' writing skills respectively. Secondly, knowing the nature of criteria teachers use and whether they inform students with feedback, also exploring the influence of students' handwriting on correction and if teachers focus on these elements; grammar mistakes, clarity, organization, creativity, word choice, mechanics, and the criteria during the correction of students' essays.

- The Third Section: (items eight and nine) intended to know the impact of assessment criteria on students' essay writing, teachers were asked about the importance of criteria used in assessment and the role of it enhancing students' performance. Also, what type of assessment they see is effective for assessing students' essays.

- The final questions of the questionnaire (items 10 to 11) allowed teachers to propose new assessment approaches. As well as, some techniques and activities that they feel are useful in developing essay assessments.

2.2.4. Piloting the Research Instruments

According to Light, Singer, and Willett (1990) "You must evaluate your instruments in a context that allows the pilot results to be directly generalizable to your final study. The reliability and validity coefficients must be transferable between the pilot and subsequent

investigations." (p.216). Hence, before administering the questionnaire (appendix A and B), it was necessary to pilot the instruments.

It is important to note that the administered questionnaires (appendix A and B) are distributed to other teachers from Batna 1 and Batna 2 Universities to provide us with the appropriate feedback. This measure was done to ensure the validity of the questionnaires. Consequently, some of the questions were reformulated on the basis of the pilot study to measure the level of its clarity.

To check the questionnaires' reliability, the results of these questionnaires were analysed depending on Cronbach alpha psychometric test. In this respect, the students' questionnaire (appendix A) and teachers' questionnaire (appendix B) were administered to 10 students and 10 teachers respectively. These respondents do not, of course, belong to this study's sample.

The recorded Cronbach alpha from the students' questionnaire (appendix A), were respectively (α=546) .These findings demonstrate the presence of a high level of internal consistency. While, the recorded Cronbach alpha from the teachers' questionnaire (appendix B), were respectively (α=655). These findings demonstrate the presence of a high level of internal consistency.

Accordingly, the administered questionnaires are reliable instruments since they incorporate teachers' feedback and comments, the replies of ten students, and the findings of Cronbach alpha tests.

2.2.5. *Data Analysis*

The main aim of this research is to see if the teachers' assessment methods of using these criteria helped or hindered students' essay writing abilities. To achieve this aim, the researcher designed a questionnaire for first-year Master's students and a questionnaire for EFL teachers. This is done to measure the teachers' and students' perceptions of essay assessment criteria.

After gathering the necessary information, the researcher examined and calculated them by using frequencies and numbers. Thus, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis.

2.3. Results and Findings

This section analyzes the data gathered from the instruments used to obtain the required data. These data help to identify and expose the limitations of the research. Thus, this section provides the results of both students' and teachers' questionnaires, which will aid in the formulation of some significant recommendations that will greatly assist future students and researchers.

2.3.1. Students' Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire is divided into three sections. It was submitted to 50 first-year Master students. Each question will be dealt with separately, and the reported results obtained are summarized as follows:

➢ **Section one: general information.**

- *Item one: your gender.*
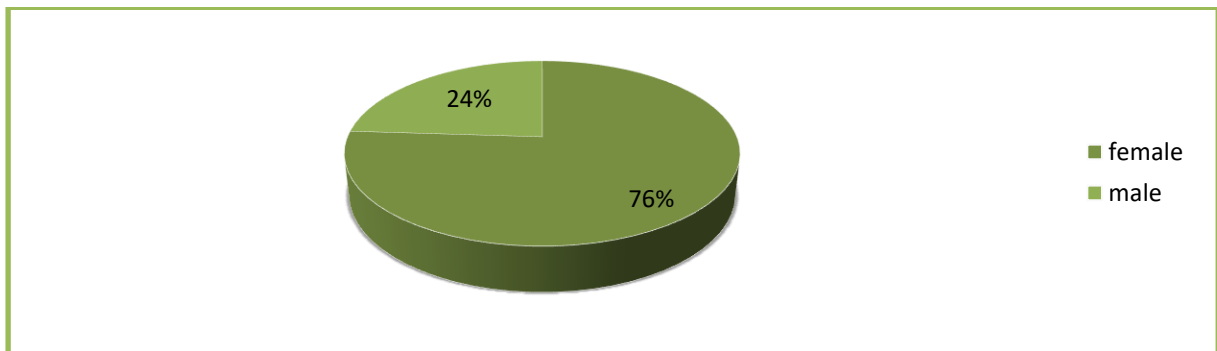
Figure 1 Students' Gender Distribution

The mode of this item was equal to one (mode=1). This means that the finding of the figure (1) supports the widely held belief that females (76 %) prefer to learn languages more than males (24%). This propensity is based on evidence indicating that female students are particularly attentive and concerned with fashion, music, and lifestyle. This past understanding aided them in learning the English language. As a result, it strongly encourages them to study English at university. Males, on the other hand, typically pursue mathematical, scientific, and technical fields.

- *Item two: what is your age?*
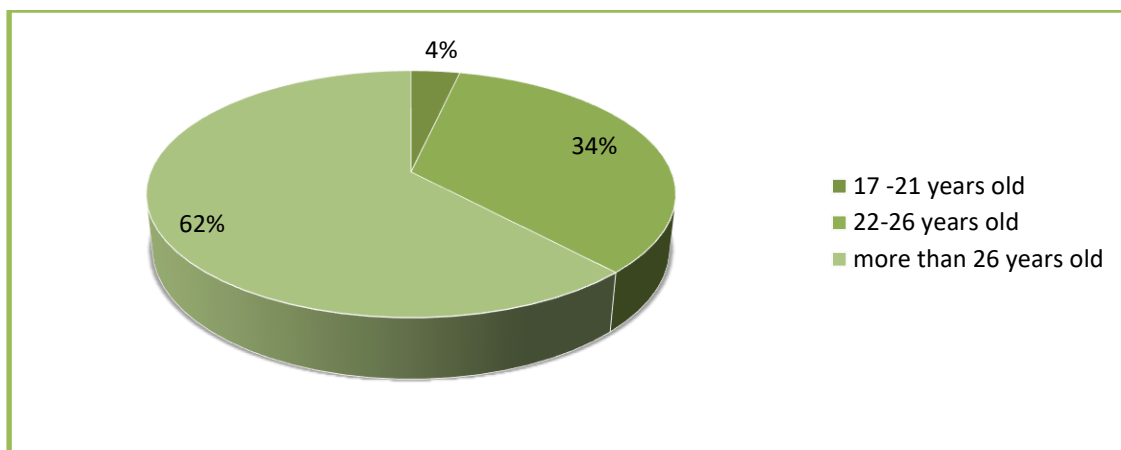
Figure 2 the Age Division among Students

The mode of this item was equal to two (mode=2). This result means that the majority of the selected students in this research work are between 22 and 26 years (62%), whereas, (4%) of students are between 17 and 21 years. There are certain students (34%) whose ages are more than 26. This indicates that the majority of the learners are young.

- *Item three: why did you choose to study the English language?*

Table 2
Students' Reasons to Choose Studying English Language

Option	Respondents	Frequency
Personal choice	44	88%
Parental choice	3	6%

Other	3	6%
Mode=1		

As seen in table (2) above, students have responded to the question according to their reasons. The mode of this item was equal to one (mode=1). This means that the majority of students (88%) declare that they choose to study English according to their personal decision and (6%) of them declare that it was a parental choice.

On the other hand, (6%) of students confirm that they decide to study English because of other reasons includes; some work conditions and the English language marks they obtained in the baccalaureate exam.

- *Item four: what is the skill you are more interested in?*

Table 3
Students' Interest in the Four Skills

Option	Respondents	Frequency
Listening	13	26 %
Speaking	17	34 %
Reading	12	24 %
Writing	8	16 %
Mode =2		

This item seeks to know the extent to which students are interested in writing skills compared to the other skills.

The mode of this item was equal to two (mode=2). Table (3) shows that the majority of students (34%) are interested in speaking, (26%) of them are interested more in listening skill and just (24%) of students choose the option of reading while (6%) of students are interested in writing skill.

Item five: how do you consider your writing essays?

Table 4
Students' Writing Level

Option	Respondents	Frequency
Weak	8	16%
Acceptable	30	60%
Good	9	18%
Very good	3	6%
Mode =2		

This question is aimed at gathering answers about students' level in writing essays.

This item's mode was equal to two (mode=2). This means that the largest number of students

(60%) found it academic to say that their essay writing level was acceptable. (18%) picked out

that their essay writing level was good. while (16%) of students answer weak and only (6%)

were very good.

- *Item six: How often do you use these assessment criteria in your essay?*

Table 5
Students' Use of Essay Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always		Mode
	N	f	N	f	N	f	N	f	
Organization	2	4%	2	4%	17	34%	29	58%	4
Using an appropriate vocabulary and word forms	1	2%	5	10%	27	54%	17	34%	3
Applying appropriate grammatical rules	1	2%	7	14%	24	48%	18	36%	3
Mechanics (punctuation…)	2	4%	8	16%	19	38%	21	42%	4
Cohesion and coherence	1	2%	10	20%	26	52%	13	26%	3
Clarity	3	6%	10	20%	22	44%	15	30%	3
Creativity	2	4%	20	40%	18	36%	10	20%	2

N= number
f= frequency

The question intended to get an insight into the extent to what students use assessment criteria in their essays.

Table (5) shows that the criteria that are always used by students in their essay writing are the mastery of mechanics as well as organization. Their mode was equal to four (Mo= 4) shows that. Furthermore, the criteria which are sometimes used by students are the adoption of appropriate vocabulary and word choice, grammatical rules, clarity, coherence, and cohesion. Their mode was equal to three (Mo=3) which means that students are use these criteria in their essays. While the last criterion which is creativity seems to be as rarely (40%) used by students (Mo=2).

As seen, the findings are very close. This item's mode of answer is either three or four. The close results of this items mode appear that the majority of students use assessment criteria when writing essays. But, what attracted our attention is the creativity results mode was equal two (Mo=2). Students claim that they rarely (40%) be creative in their essay writing.

- ***Item seven: how often do you follow these steps (stages of writing an essay)***
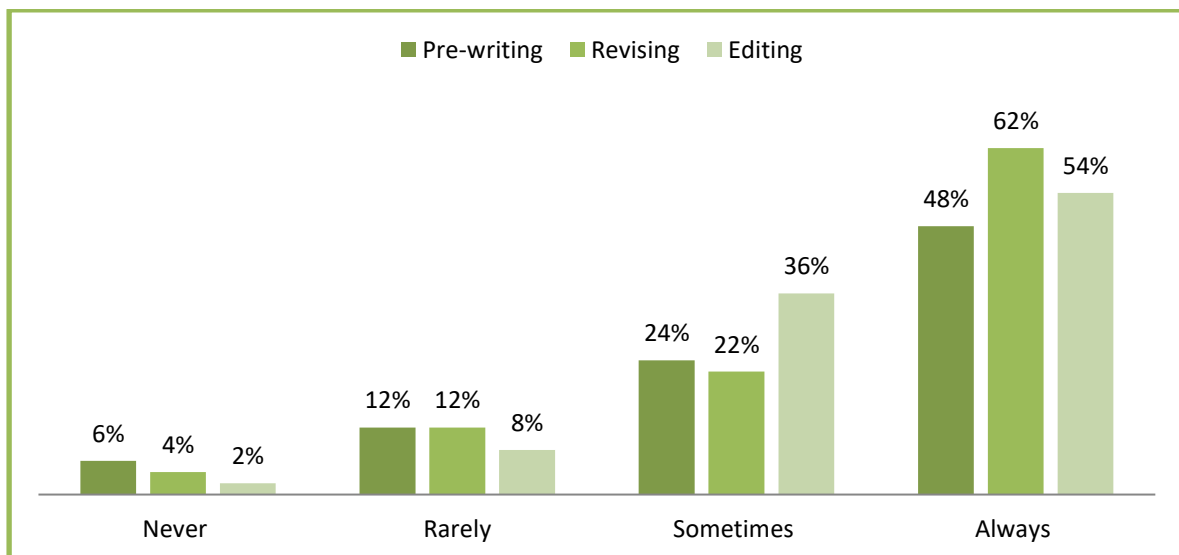
Figure 3 Students' Steps of Writing Essay

The similar mode results of figure (3) was equal four (mode=4). These results disclose that the largest number of students indicate that they always follow the steps of writing essays. As

for the pre-writing stage, (28%) of students declare that they always follow this step. While (24%) of them answered that they sometimes follow this stage. Furthermore, a large number of students consider the editing step (54%), and just 2% of the students never follow this step. Revising is considered an important step for students because (62%) of them assert that they always go through this step.

- *Item eight: what are the techniques of assessment that your teacher of writing tends to prefer in the classroom during the written expression?*
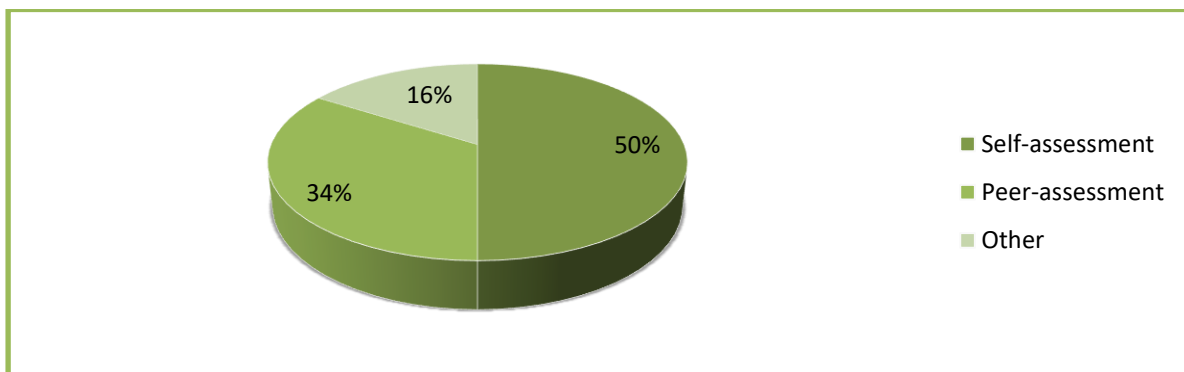
Figure 4 Techniques of Assessment Used by Teachers of Writing

As it is shown in figure (4), the mode of this item was equal one (mode=1). This means that the majority of students (50%) mentioned that their teachers used self-assessment as a technique for assessing essays, while (34%) of them declare that peer-assessment is the most technique used by teachers of writing, and (16%) claimed that their teachers of writing neither use peer-assessment nor self-assessment but they mention another technique which is teacher assessment.

- *Item nine: what type of correction procedures does your teacher use?*

Table 6
Teachers' Correction Procedures

Option	Respondents	Frequency
Holistic correction (the teachers gives you a single mark)	14	28%

Analytic correction (the teacher gives you detailed marks for each element of writing such as grammar, vocabulary… etc)	14	28%
Both of them	22	44%
Mode=3		

In this question, students are asked about the type of correction procedure that their teachers used.

The items' mode was equal three (mode=3). Thus, a great proportion of students (44%) claims that their teachers use both analytic and holistic corrections. Whereas (28%) selected the analytic correction and (28%) selected the other procedure which is the holistic correction.

- *Item 10: according to you, when the teacher corrects your essay writing, is she or he interested more.*
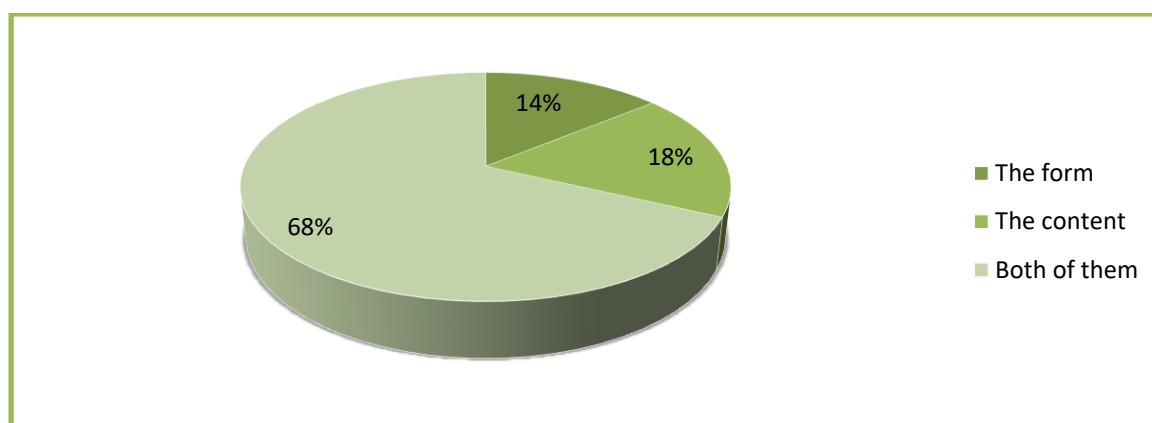
Figure 5 Teachers' Interest in the Essay Correction

Figure (5) shows that the mode of this item's result was equal to three (mode=3). It indicates that the majority of teachers give importance to both form and content. According to the findings, (68%) of students stated that the teacher is interested in both form and content. Nine students (18%) of the total number of students stated that the content matters more than the

form according to the teacher, whereas only 7 students (14%) believed that the teacher is more interested in the form of students' essays.

➢ **Section three: Learners' Satisfaction and Opinions towards the Use of Essay Assessment Criteria.**

- *Item 11: I would like that my teacher explains the criteria of assessment to me.*

Table 7
Students' Opinions towards Teachers' Explanation of Assessment Criteria

Option	Respondents	Frequency
Never	3	6%
Rarely	2	4%
Sometimes	24	48%
Always	21	42%
Mode=3		

This item's results mode was equal to three (mode=3). The results of table (7) mean that the majority of students (48%) sometimes like their teachers' explanation of the essay assessment criteria to them. while 3 students (6%) declare that they never need an explanation of these criteria. Thus, 21 students (42%) affirm the idea of explaining assessment criteria by the teachers all the time 'always'.

- *Item 12: I would like that my teacher provides me with assessment criteria before every essay production.*

Table 8

Students' Opinion towards Providing Them with Assessment Criteria before Every Essay Production

Option	Respondents	Frequency
Never	15	30%
Rarely	4	8%
Sometimes	13	26%
Always	18	36%
Mode=4		

The mode of this item was equal to four (mode=4). This result shows that larger numbers of students (36%) like to provide them with assessment criteria before every essay production. Furthermore, (30%) of students would never want the teacher to provide them with assessment criteria before every essay production. However, (26%) of students declared that they sometimes need to provide them with assessment criteria before they produce an essay.

- ***Item 13: I would like that my teacher provides me with feedback about my essay production.***

Table 9
Students' Opinions on Teachers Feedback

Option	Respondents	Frequency

Never	6	12%
Rarely	2	4%
Sometimes	13	26%
Always	29	58%
Mode=4		

The results' mode was equal to four (mode=4) indicates that the majority of students give important to teachers' feedback on their essays. They like their teachers' comments in recognizing their mistakes and demonstrating how to overcome them.

Thus, the findings in table (9) reveal that (58%) of students like to always be provided with feedback on their essays. Also, there are few students (12%) who never want to be provided with feedback on their essays by the teacher, while (26%) of them are sometimes liked to be provided with feedback on their essays.

- ***Item 14: using the assessment criteria can improve my essay production.***

Table 10
Students' Opinions about Using the Assessment Criteria in Improving Their Essay Production

Option	Respondents	Frequency
Never	0	0%
Rarely	4	8%
Sometimes	12	24%
Always	34	68%
Mode=4		

It is very noticeable in table (10) that the mode values' of this item's finding was equal to four (mode=4). Large percentage of students (68%) who stated that using assessment criteria

always improves their performance when writing essays, while, just a small percentage of students (8%) declare that using these criteria rarely improves their essay production.

- *Item 15: I know the assessment criteria used by my teacher and I am satisfied with them.*

Table 11
The Extent to Which Students are Satisfied with the Use of Assessment Criteria

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Respondents	3	10	21	16
Frequency	6%	20%	42%	32%
Mode=3				

The mode of the table (11) results was equal to three (mode=3). This result means that the majority of students (42%) are satisfied with the adoption of assessment criteria by their teachers. Thus, (32%) of students declare that they always know the assessment criteria used by the teacher and they are always satisfied with it, and (20%) believe that being satisfied with the use of these criteria is rarely happens. It is worthy to remind the readers that only (6%) of students never know the assessment criteria and they are never satisfied with this adoption.

- *Suggestions: provide us with any suggestion(s) about the adoption of criteria of assessment in correcting essays.*

Students provide different suggestions about the adoption of assessment criteria in correcting essays which will be mentioned in the recommendations section.

2.3.2. Summary of Students' Questionnaire Results

Students in section one of the questionnaire were required to give general information about gender, age, reasons for choosing to study the English language, skills interests, and level of writing essays.

From the item one answers, (76%) of the students are females, while (24%) of them are males.

In the second item, students were asked about their ages. Thus, the results of this question show that the selected students in this research work are between 22 and 26 years (62%), whereas, (4%) of students are between 17 and 21 years. Certain students appear to be repeaters of the year or retaking the first-year Master exams since they are older than the age specified for master students (34%).

In the third item, students responded to the question according to their reasons. The findings show that (88%) of students declare that they choose to study English according to their personal decision and (6%) of them declare that it was a parental choice. On the other hand, (6%) of students confirm that they decide to study English because of other reasons includes; some work conditions and the English language marks they obtained in the baccalaureate exam.

Additionally, from question four, students have detected the extent to which they are interested in the four skills. Listening was represented by (26%) of the students. Then, speaking was represented by (34%). And, reading formed 24% of the students. Finally, writing formed only (6%) of them.

The findings obtained from item five reflected that the largest number of students (60%) found it academic to say that their essay writing level was acceptable. (18 %) picked out that their essay writing level was good. While (16%) of students answer with weak and only (6%) were very good.

In addition, from table (4), it appears that the students gave different answers. Thus, the results indicate the criteria that are always used by students in their essay writing are the mastery

of mechanics as well as organization. Their mode was equal to four (Mo=4) shows that. Furthermore, the criteria which are sometimes used by students are the adoption of appropriate vocabulary and word choice, grammatical rules, clarity, coherence, and cohesion. Their mode equals three which means that students sometimes use these criteria in their essays. While the last criterion which is creativity seems to be as rarely (40%) used by students (Mo=2).

However, it is noticeable that the similar mode results of item seven disclose that the largest number of students follow the steps of writing an essay. Hence, the findings' mode equals four which confirms that all students always follow the steps of essay writing.

Besides, from the items (eight, nine, and 10), students' answers appear that their teachers are interested in both content and form (68%). Additionally, they use both holistic and analytic procedures in correcting students' essays (44%).

Section three aimed at gathering different students' opinions and perceptions toward the use of essay assessment criteria. Accordingly, students provide different opinions summarized as follows:

➤ Students like that their teachers explain the criteria of assessment to them. They add that it will be beneficial when teachers provide them with assessment criteria before every essay production. Thus, (48%) of the students declare that they sometimes like that their teachers explain the assessment criteria to them and just three students declare that they never like the explanation of their teachers. While (36%) of students always like that their teachers provide them with assessment criteria before every essay production.

➤ The item's (13) results mode was equal to three (mode=3). This result indicates that the majority of students give importance to teachers' feedback on their essays.

> ➢ The mode of item (14) was equal to four (mode=4) and item (15) was equal to three (mode=3) means that the students know and satisfied with the use of assessment criteria by their teachers since it will improve their essay production.

Teachers Questionnaire Results

The teachers' questionnaire was divided into three sections and answered by six (06) EFL teachers from the Department of English language and Literature of the University Center of Barika.

➢ **Section one: General information**

- *Item one: Gender*

Results can be resumed in the following table:

Table 12
Gender Description

Gender	Number of teachers	Frequency
Female	4	67%
Male	2	33%
Mode = 1		

The mode of this item was equal to one (mode=1). Table (12) shows that the majority of EFL teachers in the department of English language and Literature of the University Center of Barika represent females (67%) while males represent the minority (33%).

- *Item two: Years of teaching experience:*
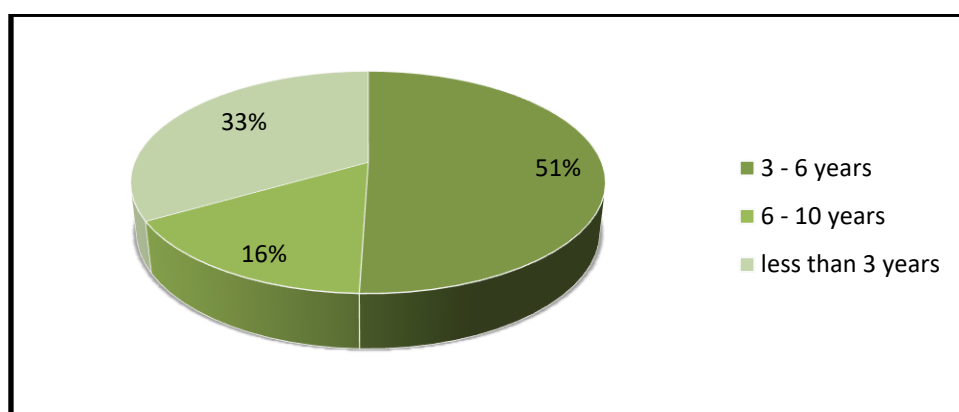
Figure 6 Teaching Experience

49

According to the findings, the participants' lecturers had been teaching at the college for three to ten years.

This item's mode was equal to one (mode=1). This indicates that they have extensive expertise teaching English in foreign language classes.

- *Item three: Years of experience in teaching written expression subject:*

The result of this item is illustrated in the figure below:
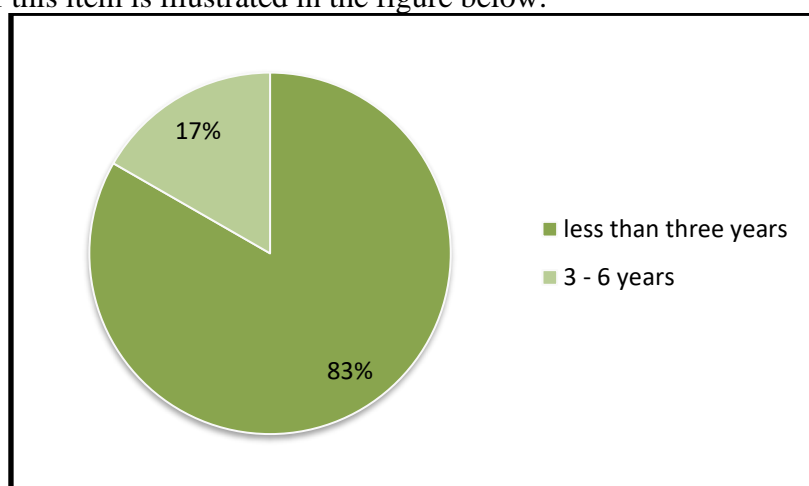
Figure 7 Years of Experience in Teaching the Written Expression Module.

The mode of this item was equal to one (mode=1). As for teachers' experience teaching writing modules, (73%) of teachers have been teaching writing for less than three years. The rest (17%) taught writing for three to six years.

➤ **Section two: The use of objective criteria in assessing learners' essays.**

- *Item four: What types of assessment do you use to assess your learners' essays?*

The answers are summarized as follows

Table 13
Types of Assessment Used by Teachers

Type of assessment	Teachers	Frequency
Formative assessment	3	50%
Summative assessment	1	16.7%
Both	2	33.3%

Other	0	0%
Mode = 1		

As it is displayed in the table the mode of this item was equal to one (mode=1) in which three teachers said that they used formative assessment. One teacher said that she used summative assessment and two others used both summative and formative assessment. The majority of teachers (50%) used formative assessment since it helps students know the mistakes they do in essay writing as well as what they should follow to improve their skills when writing.

- ***Item five: What type of scoring procedures do you use?***

The Result of this question is represented in the figure below:
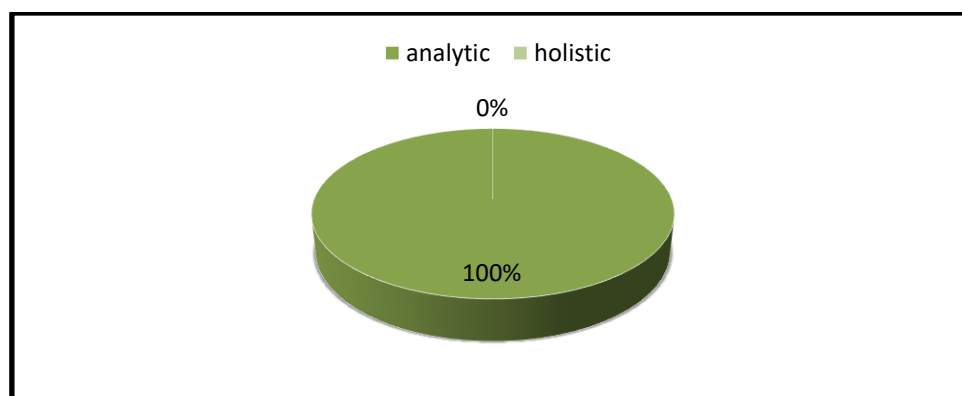
FIGURE 8 SCORING PROCEDURES USED BY TEACHERS.

This question aimed to know the type of scoring that teachers use. The mode of this item was equal to one (mode=1). The result revealed that all the six teachers used only analytic correction. The most obvious benefit of adopting analytic scoring is that they present a nuanced and thorough picture of student performance by considering several factors. It also assisted students in comprehending the reasons for their grades because this kind of scoring gave thorough correction.

- *Item six: How do teachers deal with students concerning the criteria used in assessing the essays?*
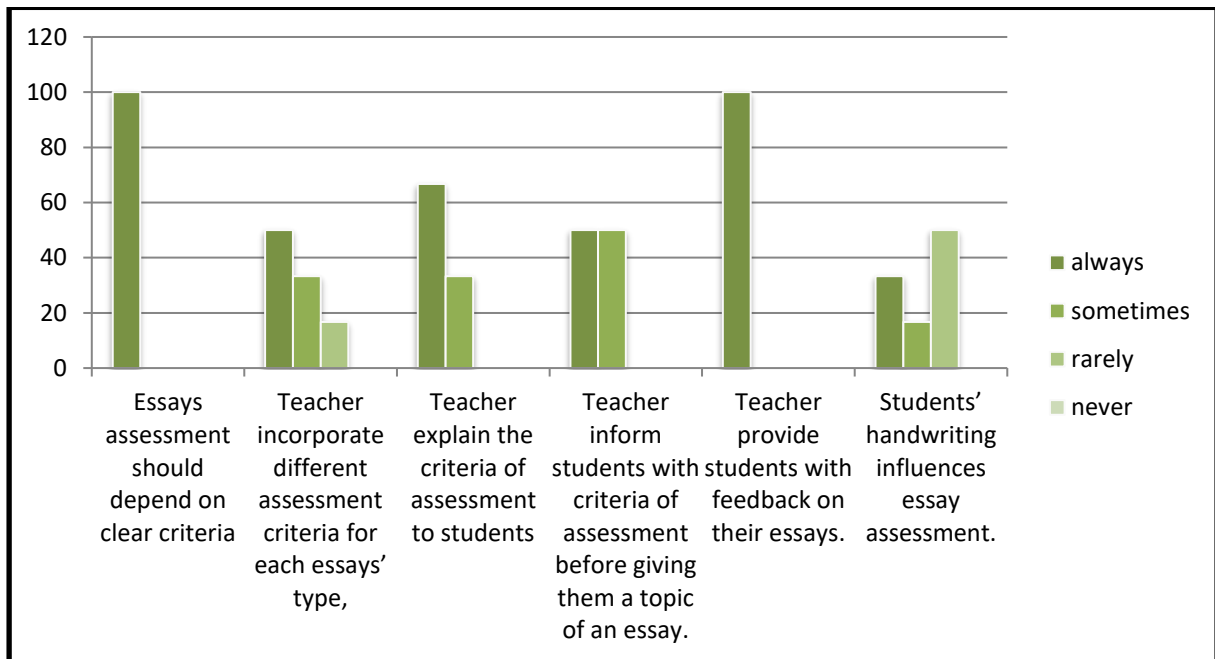
Figure 9 the Criteria Used in Assessing the Essays.

Regarding this item, the mode was equal to one (mode=1). The results have shown that all teachers (100%) claimed that a clear criterion is always important in essay assessment. But only (70%) of teachers indicated that they explain the criteria of assessment to students. As a result of that, teachers are always providing students with feedback on their essays. Three teachers (50%) picked out that they always incorporate different assessment criteria for each essay's type, while the rest do that sometimes. Concerning providing students with criteria of assessment before giving them the topic of the essay, (50%) of teachers said that they always do that. On the other hand, the rest (50%) said that they do that sometimes only. Moreover, the majority (50%) of teachers see that students' handwriting is rarely seen as a problem when assessing students' essays.

- *Item seven: How do teachers assess students' essays? According to what?*
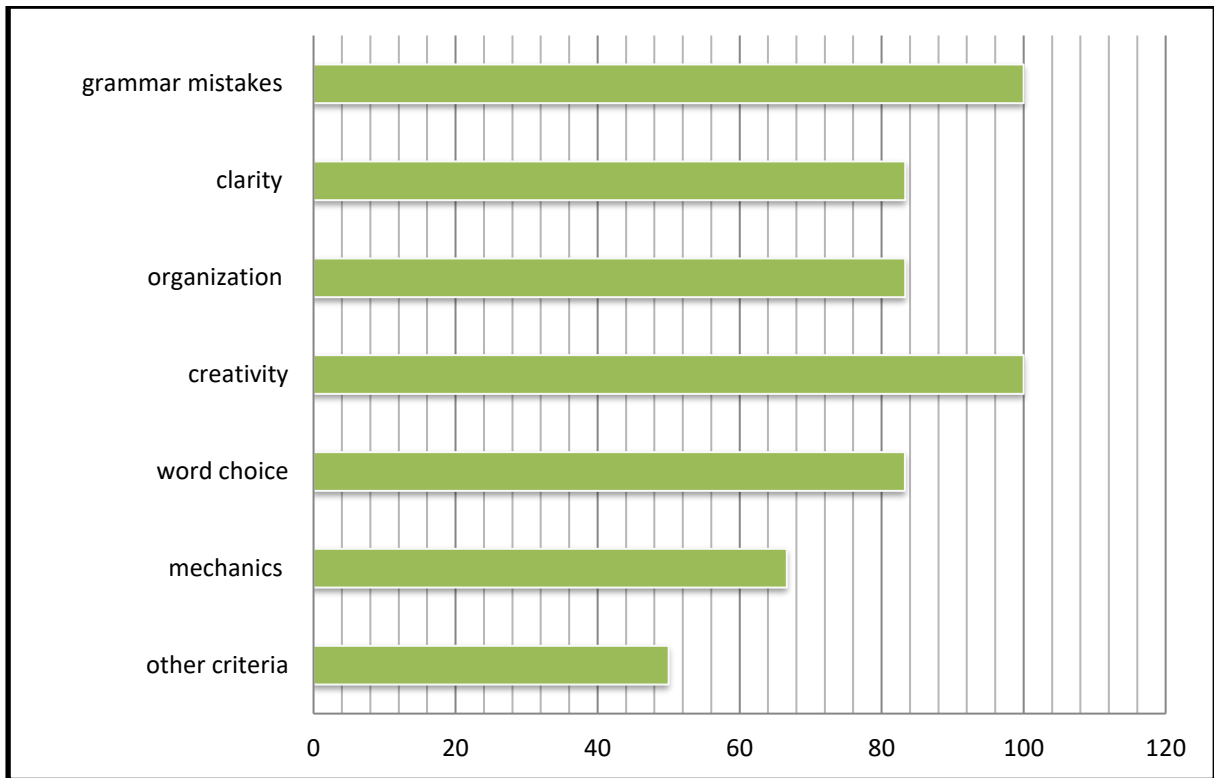
Figure 10 the Teachers' Emphasis during Assessment

The mode of this item was equal to two (mode=2). Concerning the way of assessing students' essays the figure shows that all teachers indicated that they assess their students according to:

Firstly (100%), grammatical mistakes, and creativity. While they usually (80%) focus on clarity, organization and word choice, and mechanics with the frequency of (67%). Some of the teachers declared that they used other criteria, though they did not mention them.

➢ **Section three: the impact of assessment criteria on students' essays.**

- *Item eight: How can assessment improve students' essay writing?*

The mode of this item was equal to one (mode=1). As depicted in the figure, four teachers are strongly agreed with the idea that learners' self-assessment depends on the objective criteria that develop their essays positively and affect their writing performance. One teacher was neutral and only one disagreed with it. The majority of teachers (5) were with the idea of which say that assessing students' essays and providing them with clear criteria for essays assessment can enhance students' achievement. While only one teacher disagreed with these ideas.

- ***Item nine: Which type of assessment should follow to assess students' essays effectively? Why?***

When interrogated about which type of assessment should follow, teachers gave a variety of answers. Three teachers answered that both formative and summative assessments are important for enhancing students' essay writing capabilities. One teacher confirmed that although formative, analytic type assessment is effort-and time consuming, was believed that it is the best way to assess such low grading-reliability tests to make sure that students not only understand what went wrong during their test. But also what writing techniques need to be encouraged. On the other hand, one teacher sees the summative assessment need to be used to

assess the learners' reception of information effectively and their discussion performance in an essay. In other words, using an assessment at the end of this period is the most effective way to assess the learner's understanding. On the contrary, only one teacher recommended another sort of evaluation, which is continual assessment.

- ***Suggestions: What do you suggest as new criteria for an efficient assessment of essays for enhancing the students' achievement in writing essays at the university level?***

Teachers gave many suggestions of criteria and techniques, which they believed are very important for an efficient assessment of essays at the university level; it will be summarized in the recommendations' section.

2.3.3. Summary of Teachers' Questionnaire Results

Teachers in the first section of the questionnaire were required to answer with general information about gender, and their experience of teaching both English generally and writing specifically.

The first item shows that (67%) of the teachers are females, while (33%) of them are males. From item number two, the answers show that the majority of teachers (51%) are well experienced in teaching EFL.

In the third item, teachers were asked about their experience in teaching the writing modules. Thus, the results of this question show that (83%) of teachers have been teaching written expression for less than three years, whereas, (17%) of them between three to six years.

In the fourth and fifth items, teachers have responded to the questions according to which type of assessment and scoring they use. The majority of teachers detected their use of formative assessment (50%) and the analytic scoring (100%).

However, from the items (six and seven), most teachers claimed that providing and explaining a clear criterion of assessment to students is very important in essay assessment,

while handwriting is rarely seen as a problem. Furthermore, they (100%) focus on both grammatical mistakes and creativity, while (80%) of teachers usually focus on clarity, organization, and word choice.

Section three aimed at knowing the impact of assessment criteria on students' essay writing. Nevertheless, the answers obtained from the items (eight and nine) reflected that the largest number of teachers (50%) agreed that the assessment of students' essays and providing them with clear criteria and feedback can enhance their achievements. They also differed regarding which type of assessment is most effective and should be followed. Half of the participant teachers declared that both formative and summative assessments are effective. Meanwhile, two other teachers differed between formative and summative assessments by revealing their own reasons for that.

Items (10 and 11) aimed at gathering different teachers' opinions and perceptions toward new criteria for an efficient essay assessment for enhancing the students' achievement in writing essays at the university level. Accordingly, teachers provide different opinions summarized in the recommendations' section.

2.4. Discussion of Main Results

This section basically discusses the most recent study findings.

2.4.1. Discussion of Students' Questionnaire

The main aim of this research is to see if the teachers' assessment methods of using these criteria helped or hindered students' essay writing abilities. The findings of the students questionnaire is based on first-year Master EFL students' views. (Appendix A)

Despite the students deferring results about their level of interest in the four skills, they understand the importance of each skill and the relationship between them, because each skill completes the other. This finding was confirmed by Saed and Al-Omari in Yunus, and Chien

(2016) who include that writing helps in the development of all other skills such as listening, speaking, and reading, as they are all connected (see chapter 1).

Additionally, students consider their level of writing essay as an acceptable one since they could master the criteria of a good essay. This confirms the findings of Brown (2001) which state that a good piece of writing must includes organization, the correct use of grammatical rules, and other ones (see chapter 1)

Also, the findings of the current research prove that the learners consider different criteria including organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, clarity, creativity, coherence, and cohesion when they develop their essays. This confirms with Bloxham and Boyd (2007) findings that define assessment criteria as elements of an essay that the assessor considers while making judgments or that a student use in producing an essay.

In the current study, it was found that most of the students reported the need to provide them with the criteria for assessing essays that is adopted by their teachers. Additionally, the results show that students like their teachers' feedback, and thus they value the usage of essay assessment criteria because it helps them to get better feedback, and achieve their learning goals. This is consolidated by their answer to item eleven in the questionnaire (appendix A). Hence, these findings support the findings of Orsmond et al (2002) who claimed that assessment criteria have a significant impact on students' learning.

Students must be aware of the precise criteria of each essay so that they know what they need to accomplish to pass the essay assessment. In other words, students may deduce the purpose, which causes them to become more concentrated on their essays. This indicates that providing assessment criteria to students is the key for helping them understand and focus on areas of their essay writing. These findings support the finding of Sadler (2009) who suggested that students should be allowed to comprehend the criteria on which grades and feedback are

issued. This is related to Feng's (2007) findings that all students agreed that it is important to always get stated assessment criteria since it helps them understand how to conduct the essay.

Another finding indicates that students asked teachers to discuss the criteria of assessment with them before every essay assessment (item twelve in the students' questionnaire). This is closely tied to the requirement to create an environment in the classroom where students can access, analyze, and communicate their thoughts on essay assessment criteria. These findings consolidate the findings of Rust (2002) who claimed that providing students with a clear assessment criterion alone is going to occur in better work and more involvement with what is being taught. (See chapter 1)

What can be noticed from the results of items eleven and twelve is that the assessment process is less effective if criteria are not provided before each piece of written work. Thus, it will assist students in achieving their learning objectives, higher grades, and positive feedback through a better knowledge of criteria. These findings support the findings of Ngar-Fun Liua and Carless (2006) which indicated that one technique should apply by the teachers is to engage students in defining and developing essay assessment criteria, which is better for making effective assessments on their essays.

Consequently, EFL teachers must comprehend the importance of essay assessment criteria and be aware that debates about assessment criteria among students or with their teachers are beneficial to students' learning. These results (item 11, 12, and 13 in the students' questionnaire) validate the first hypothesis in which the researchers hypothesize that EFL teachers of writing adopt different objective criteria when they assess their learners' essays.

In the second hypothesis, it was suggested that First-year Master EFL learners at University Center of Barika are aware of the essay assessment criteria adopted by their teachers. That is to say, the procedures and criteria of assessment adopted by the teacher assist students in developing their performance and producing good essays. Likewise, the results and findings of

the students' answers claimed that teachers use both analytic and holistic correction procedures. This result supports the finding of Hylan (2003) who state that when it comes to scoring students' essays in an EFL setting, teachers take different procedures. Furthermore, the holistic correction procedure is used for logical focus. The analytic correction procedure is focused on the language. It also enabled students to comprehend why they received the mark they did because this type offered detailed comments. These conclusions affirm the findings of Brown (2004) and S.Chelli & W.Khouni (2003) about analytic and holistic procedures (see chapter 1). In addition, the results obtained from items fourteen and fifteen in the students' questionnaire (see appendix A) show the majority of students are satisfied with the adoption of assessment criteria by their teachers as it is considered description of the knowledge and abilities they acquired from the teacher to make sure that they acquire learning. These results confirm the findings of Orsmond et al., (2000), Woolf (2004), and Bloxham & Boyd (2007) which indicated that Assessment criteria play an important part in assisting students' learning. (See chapter 1)

As a result, understanding the significance of assessment criteria might help students have a better picture of their own achievement. All these above-explained results validate the second hypothesis in which the researchers hypothesize that the students are informed and satisfied with essay assessment criteria adopted by their teachers because these criteria improve their essay writing performance.

2.4.2. *Discussion of Teachers' Questionnaire*

The findings of the teachers' questionnaire (appendix B) are based on the views of EFL teachers of writing. Thus, the main aim of this research is to see if the teachers' assessment methods of using the criteria of assessment helped or hindered students' essay writing abilities.

Consistent with (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007; Sadler, 2007), the findings in this study indicate that while criteria of assessment help learners to understand their learning process. Also, to help teachers have a complete picture of the learners. Through assessment criteria, Students and

teachers would seek a higher comprehension of what is more and less beneficial, as well as what seems to be of no use at all. These findings confirm the findings of Foxman et al. (1989) who proposes several general definitions of assessment criteria. They are considered as a description of the knowledge and abilities acquired by the teacher to make sure that learners can acquire learning.

The findings of this current study claimed that clarity, mechanics, word choice, organization, coherence, and cohesion. They are the most important assessment criteria that should be contained in a good piece of essay writing and need to be discussed among students or with their teachers (see question 7 from section two of Teachers' Questionnaire). Starkey (2004) confirmed these findings which indicate that an excellent essay evaluation is well-organized, concise, and cohesive, with precise terminology and efficient language. (See chapter 1). Therefore, these results validate the first hypothesis.

As a second hypothesis, it was suggested that First-year Master EFL learners at University Center of Barika are aware of the essay assessment criteria adopted by their teachers. After collecting data through the teachers' questionnaire, the research work disclosed that teachers used clear objective criteria for assessment and their students are satisfied with them.

Although, assessment is seen as a tool that provides diagnostic feedback on a learner's mastery of specific abilities and helps teachers easily in gathering more information about the effects of their teaching style on students which are confirmed by Brown et al (1997) who claimed that assessment provides teachers with feedback on students' work (see chapter 1). However, teachers apply different types of assessment which they see are more effective at enhancing students' essay writing. In the current study, it was found that most teachers use both formative and summative assessments (see questions 4 – 6 from section two of the teachers' questionnaire).

Yet, according to Angelo and Cross (1993) Formative assessment is a continuous, ongoing, and dynamic process that occurs during the teaching/learning circumstance. So, teachers should know the needs of their students to enhance their competency and eliminate their shortcomings.

Shute and Rahimi (2016), state that summative assessment is seen as final testing because it is the final judgment concerning a learner's success or failure. That is to say, it is used to determine learning progress and accomplishment as well as assess the success of educational programs.

Furthermore, it is indicated that providing students with the criteria of assessment and explaining it to them can help the teacher to streamline the obstacles that students face while writing their essays. Also providing them with feedback is considered to be important in developing essay writing skills (see questions 8–9 from section three of the teachers' questionnaire).

As a result, teachers should combine both types of assessment to assist learners' progress and to determine their goals and achievements. These results confirm the validity of the second hypothesis.

2.5. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to cover and discuss the empirical phase of this study. It described the research topic and detailed the research procedures and methodological steps that served as the foundation for this investigation. Furthermore, it defined the participants in this study which are students and teachers of first-year Master at the department of English and Literature at the University Centre of Barika and included analyses of the two questionnaires that administered to both students and teachers as well as interpretations of the results obtained from both questionnaires. As a result, this chapter can be thought of as a study of the process of assessing essays. In reality, it attempted to underline how essays may be appropriately

assessed and the significance of the adoption of objective criteria in the development of essay assessment.

Ultimately, this chapter discussed the results related to the research questions and hypotheses raised. Thus, this chapter included analyses and interpretations of answers, opinions, and attitudes given by both teachers and students. Hence, students and teachers made substantial suggestions and described their wants and demands not only regarding the essay assessment process but also concerning English language instruction and learning.

2.6. Recommendations for Teachers and Learners:

Assessment is used to uncover students' requirements, interests, and achievements, as well as to establish specific education. As a result, teachers are conscious of their responsibilities to students. They must remember that they are there to assist and provide learners with the information and components they require to further their skills. The findings of this study's examination of data collected from the two questionnaires, a set of concrete and practical recommendations proposed to both teachers and learners for the adoption of the essay assessment criteria.

2.6.1. For Teachers

Teachers should adopt other criteria of assessment such as style of writing and topic. In addition, they try to concentrate on vocabulary and word choice rather than other criteria help the learners to improve this skill.

Teachers' assessments should base on students' difficulties faced in producing essays. Additionally, teachers should explain and provide their learners with the assessment criteria at the beginning of the year or before giving them an essay to make it clear and well explained for them. Thus, they can master these criteria successfully and in the right way.

Teachers should ask their learners to produce essays during the class and assess them in the classroom as they can discuss with them for a while their mistakes.

Teachers must increase the number of essays given to them either during the class or as homework but teachers should give one single comprehensive essay to assess per semester (summative assessment).

Teachers should use different types and procedures of assessment including analytic correction and giving detailed grades to each element of the essay, as well as the integration of online assessment

Teachers should make a slight shift of focus in assessing students' essays depending on their level of study (focus on the form over the content for second-year students and focus on

content assessment for third-year students. Here, the focus of assessment should be restricted to structure, grammar, spelling, coherence, and unity).

2.6.2. For Learners

M1 and M2 learners should know how to deliver a well-structured essay with correct grammar, spelling, coherence, unity, formality, word choice, and accurate content.

Learners should know that there is no specific perfect answer in essay writing, yet creativity and following the given criteria will lead to well-written essay and a fair satisfying assessment.

Learners should not believe that the teachers are the exclusive judges. Students are expected to concentrate on both the form and the topic of their essays as well as all the assessment criteria.

General Conclusion

A well-designed essay assessment has precise clear criteria and requires learners to demonstrate the amount to which they have absorbed these criteria from the explanation of their teachers. However, it has been observed that some students have difficulty in applying the essay assessment criteria and presenting their ideas accurately and systematically. Thus, making writing essays a challenging work for them.

Ultimately, the main aim of this research is to see if the teachers' assessment methods of using the criteria of assessment helped or hindered students' essay writing abilities. To unveil this aim, the following research questions were put forward:

1. To what extent do EFL teachers of writing adopt objective criteria when they assess their learners' essays?

2. To what extent are first-year Master EFL learners at University Center of Barika aware of these objective criteria?

Furthermore, these questions give rise to the following hypothesis:

1. EFL teachers of writing adopt different objective criteria when they assess their learners' essays.

2. First-year Master EFL learners at University Center of Barika are aware of the essay assessment criteria adopted by their teachers.

To test the validity of the research hypothesis, a case study of fifty first-year Master EFL learners at Si Al Haoues University Center and six teachers are undertaken. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected from two different types of tools: a questionnaire for students, and a questionnaire for teachers. The questionnaire which is meant for teachers of Master one at Si Al Haoues of Barika enquires about their essay assessment and the objective criteria they adopt such as the most important elements they take into consideration when they assess essays, and how they make students respond to it. In addition, the questionnaire given to first-

year Master EFL students reveals their different opinions towards the use of essay assessment criteria by EFL teachers and their perceptions.

This investigation began with a theoretical introduction to writing, assessment, and essay assessment criteria. The researcher gave information regarding the methodological framework in the second chapter. This chapter also included data collection and analysis. Based on the findings of the preceding chapter, it ends with a discussion of both questionnaires' results.

As far as the descriptive method is used, the qualitative and quantitative analysis of students' questionnaire and teachers' questionnaire revealed that students are aware of the need to provide them with the criteria for assessing essays that approved by their teachers. Additionally, students like their teachers' feedback, and thus they value the usage of essay assessment criteria because it helps them to get better feedback and grades and achieve their learning goals. Thus, it indicates that providing assessment criteria to students is the key for helping them understand and focus on areas of their essay writing. Hence, the assessment process is less effective if criteria are not provided before each piece of written work by the teacher. Thus, it will assist students in achieving their learning objectives, higher grades, and positive feedback through a better knowledge of criteria. Finally, EFL teachers comprehend the importance of essay assessment criteria and they are aware that debates about assessment criteria among students or with their teachers are beneficial to students' learning and improve their essay writing performance. Rather, most students and teachers confessed the role of essay assessment criteria in developing the quality of essay assessment. Then, the data collection results provided some answers to the study questions and validated the given hypotheses.

It should be highlighted that the study has some limitations that hampered but did not prevent it from being completed. As a result, there were not enough previous research studies on this topic to encourage future investigation. As well as the few numbers of participants and the short

period. These factors must be taken into account in future research to include taking larger samples, and over a longer period of time. These factors must be taken into consideration in future research to involve a larger sampling, and during a longer period.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the investigator undertook this study because of the importance of using objective criteria in essay assessment for both teachers and students. The recommendations offered are hoped to meet a variety of purposes and provide effective guidance.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Students' Questionnaire

Dear student,

Thank you for accepting to fill in this questionnaire that aims at collecting data concerning the opinions and satisfaction of Master 1 students of English Language at Si Al Haoues University Center of Barika concerning the assessment criteria used by teachers to assess their essays.

Your answers remain anonymous.

Please tick what is appropriate. And answer the questions in the given space.

Section one: General Information

1. Your gender:

   ➢ Male ☐

   ➢ Female ☐

2. What is your age?

   17 – 21 years old ☐   22 – 26 years old ☐ more than 26 years old ☐

3. Why did you choose to study the English language?

   ➢ Personal choice ☐

   ➢ Parental choice ☐

   ➢ Other …….

4. What is the skill you are more interested in?

Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing

5. How do you consider your writing essays?

Weak	Acceptable	Good	Very good

Section two: The Use of Essay Assessment Criteria.

"Criteria of assessment are a set of standards that can be used to assess the quality of learners' essay"

6. How often do you use these assessment criteria in your essay writing? (Tick what is appropriate.)

Assessment criteria	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Organization				
Using an appropriate vocabulary and word forms.				
Applying appropriate grammatical rules.				
Mechanics (such as complete sentences, correct punctuation, etc.)				
Cohesion				
Coherence				
Clarity				
Creativity				

7. How often do you follow these steps (the stages of writing an essay)?

Step	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	always
Pre-writing				
Drafting				
Revising				
Editing				

8. What are the techniques of assessment that your teacher of writing tends to prefer in the classroom during the written expression? (you can choose more than one answer)

   ➤ Self-assessment (The students assesses their essays) ☐

   ➤ Peer assessment (students assess the essays of each other) ☐

   Other (……………………………………………………………….)

9. What type of correction procedures does your teacher use?

   ➤ Holistic correction (the teacher gives you a single mark) ☐

   ➤ Analytic correction (the teacher gives you detailed marks for each element of ☐ writing such as vocabulary, grammar, etc)

   ➤ Both of them ☐

10. According to you, when the teacher corrects your essay writing, is he or she interested more in:

   ➤ The form ☐

   ➤ The content ☐

   ➤ Both the form and content ☐

Section three: Learners' Satisfaction and Opinions towards the Use of Essay Assessment Criteria

(Tick what is appropriate)

Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
11. I would like that my teacher explains the criteria of assessment to me.				
12. I would like that my teacher provides me with assessment criteria before every essay writing production.				
13. I would like that my teacher provides me with feedback about my essay production.				
14. Using the assessment criteria can improve my essay production.				
15. I know the assessment criteria used by my teacher and I am satisfied with them.				

Suggestions:

16. Provide us with any suggestion(s) about the adoption of criteria of assessment in correcting essays.

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………

Appendix B

Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear teachers,

   This questionnaire is a part of a study entitled Using Objective Criteria in Essays Assessment and the Impact of them on EFL Learners' Essays.

We kindly request you to answer honestly because your answers will determine the success of this study.

 Your answers remain anonymous.

Tick what is appropriate and answer the questions in the given space.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Section one: General Information

1. Your gender:

   ➢ Male ☐

   ➢ female ☐

2. Years of teaching experience:

   ➢ Less than 3 years ☐

   ➢ 3 - 6 years ☐

   ➢ 7 -10 years ☐

   ➢ More than 10 years ☐

3. Years of experience in teaching written expression subjects:

   ➢ Less than 3 years ☐

   ➢ 3 – 6 years ☐

   ➢ 7 – 10 years ☐

   ➢ More than 10 years ☐

Section two: The Use of Objective Criteria in Assessing Learners' Essays.

4. What types of assessment do you use to assess your learners' essays?

> Formative assessment (continuously assess students' essays by giving them ☐

  different essays during the semester)

> Summative assessment (giving an essay to the learners at the end of the ☐

  semester)

> Both ☐

> Other ……………………………………………………………

5. What type of scoring procedures do you use?

> Holistic (giving one single mark) ☐

> Analytic (giving detailed marks for each element of the essay) ☐

6. Tick what is appropriate:

Item	Always	Rarely	Sometimes	Never
I think that essay assessment should depend on clear criteria.				
I incorporate different assessment criteria for each essay's type.				
I explain the criteria of assessment to my students.				
I inform my students about the criteria of assessment before giving them a topic for an essay.				
I provide my students with feedback on their essays.				
My students' handwriting influences my assessment of their essays.				

7. When I am assessing my learners' essays, I try to focus on: (you can choose more than one criteria)

   ➢ Grammar mistakes ☐

   ➢ Clarity ☐

   ➢ Organization ☐

   ➢ Creativity ☐

   ➢ Word choice ☐

   ➢ Mechanics ☐

   ➢ Other criteria ☐

   …………………………………..

Section three: the impact of assessment criteria on students' essays

8. tick what is appropriate:

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I think that assessing students' essays can reveal their learning needs and abilities.					
I think that providing clear criteria for essays assessment can enhance students' achievement.					
I think that learners' self-assessment depending on the objective criteria when developing their essays positively affects their writing performance.					

9. According to your experience, which type of assessment should follow to effectively assess students' essays? Why?

……………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………..............

Suggestions:

10. What do you suggest for an efficient assessment of essays at the university level?

…………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………

11. What do you suggest as new criteria of assessment to enhance the students'

achievement in writing essays?

…………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………