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The Impact of Transparent Assessment Criteria on EFL Essay Writing Quality: An Experimental Study with Master's Two ELT Students at Ammar Thelidji University of Laghouat

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of English in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for 'Master' degree in English Language Teaching (ELT)

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Declaration of Authenticity

I declare that the data presented in this work was obtained in an experiment carried out and submitted at the Department of Letter and English Language Faculty of Letters and Languages, University of Laghouat Ammar Thelidji, Algeria. I “Latar Roufida” under the supervision of my supervisor “Dr. Souhila Korichi” declare that the preparation and execution of the experiment and the data analysis, interpretation and discussion are the product of my own work and research. I am aware of the university’s policy on plagiarism, so I carefully cited every work that helped me complete the study at hand. I further stress that this is the only degree this work has been submitted for.

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Dedication

To the dearest to my heart, my dear grandfather, even though he cannot hear these special words: “thank you immensely for raising me. You will forever hold a special place in my heart.”

All love goes to my family, to my father, my mother, my parental grandma, and both of my maternal grandparents. All love to my entire family members who always supported me, especially my aunts Fatima and Fariha. “Thank you all for your encouragement and heartfelt prayers.”

-

Roufida.



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Abstract

A principle that has gained increasing attention as a potential factor influencing essay writing quality is the use of Transparent Assessment Criteria, especially in higher education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of transparent teacher assessment criteria on essay writing quality among Master Two ELT students at Ammar Thelidji University of Laghouat during the 2025-2026 academic year. Accordingly, the study tested the following hypothesis: if EFL students received transparent teacher assessment criteria, then the quality of their essays would have improved. The study also measured changes in key areas, including relevance, organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and overall readability. To investigate this, a quantitative experimental research design was conducted. Out of the initial (29) students who participated in the Pre-test phase, (16) completed the entire experimental procedure, which included three phases: a Pre-test, a Treatment, and a Post-test. These participants were randomly assigned to either experimental or control groups producing a total of (32) essays. Statistical analysis reported that the experimental group achieved an overall improvement of (35%) in comparison to the control group, with significant improvements across all measured aspects. These findings supported the hypothesis, suggesting that access to transparent teacher assessment criteria enhanced EFL students' writing quality. Based on these results, it is recommended that teachers implement such criteria into their practices to further enhance their students' essay writing quality. However, due to the limited sample size, the results cannot be generalized to all EFL students. Future research should explore the applicability of these findings with a larger sample and broader contexts.

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List of Abbreviations

ELT	English Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
M2	Master Two
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TA	Transparent Assessment
TILT	Transparency in Learning and Teaching Framework
TL	Target Language

GENERAL INTRODUCTION



Learning a foreign language (FL) is not a separate set of events, but rather a continuous and dynamic process that requires ongoing development across multiple skills. A vital skill within this process is the ability to write effectively. When the goal of language learning is effective communication, writing skills play a significant role in achieving this objective. Writing is fundamental to FL learning because it deepens students' comprehension of the target language. However, although students write various academic texts, essays remain the most vital type of writing to master. To ensure that learning is taking place and teaching is serving its true purpose, we need to measure the success of this type of writing. This measurement highlights the need to establish effective assessment criteria.

1. Background of the Study

Assessing essay writing is an essential element in higher education. Such measurement emphasizes the need to create well-structured assessment criteria that help students understand the extent to which they have met learning objectives. In literature, the primary focus of developing an effective assessment has mostly been directed towards principles, like practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and wash back. However, recently, the principle of transparency has gained currency in research. Researchers like Silva (2014), Winkelmes (2015), and Trinh (2020) have made great strides toward the implementation of such a concept to improve the judgment, clarity, and fairness of assessment in higher education. Yet, other researchers such as Baartman and Prins (2018), Bearman and Ajjawi (2018), and Alioua and Bousbis (2019) have introduced some critical concerns regarding the use of transparent assessment criteria in education. They argued that the disadvantages outweigh any advantages, as transparency could lead to a lack of creativity and autonomy. Despite its growing recognition, this topical area of research has not yet been explored at Laghouat University's Department of English. In this study, it is noted that many ELT students are still struggling to achieve proficiency in essay writing. Providing transparent

assessment criteria is proposed as one of the techniques to address this problem. Although it has been a debatable issue, this research investigates the utility of providing EFL students with transparent assessment criteria to use when writing their essays.

2. Statement of the Problem

In Algerian higher education, particularly within the Department of English at Laghouat University, ELT teachers often face uncertainty regarding the causes of their students' dissatisfaction with essay assessment outcomes. Students frequently voice their frustration, complaining that the criteria against which their work is judged are implicit. Questions like, "What criteria did the teacher use to assess my essay?" and "What can I do to achieve better production?" are frequently posed. This lack of transparency can make it harder for students to improve and can lower their grades. To address this problem, implementing the principle of transparency in assessment is proposed as a viable solution. However, opinions about its true impact vary significantly within the research community. Some researchers believe it helps students learn, understand and feel treated more fairly, while others warn it might limit creativity or cause other problems. Because of these mixed views, it is important to investigate how transparent assessment practices, that is, assessment methods where teachers clearly communicate the criteria used to judge students' essays, such as scoring rubrics, actually affect the quality of students' essay writing, specifically within the Department of English at Laghouat University.

3. Statement of the Purpose

The primary aim of the present study is to investigate the impact of transparent teacher assessment on the writing quality of essays among students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). If the findings show a positive effect, the integration of transparency within assessment practices could provide teachers with a more effective evaluation strategy while

simultaneously offering students better guidance to improve their writing performance. This approach can have the potential to enhance the overall standard of students' writing and can also foster a deeper understanding of the assessment criteria among students, thereby promoting more academic writing outcomes. Ultimately, these insights could inform broader educational practices, paving the way for more student-centred learning environments in EFL contexts.

4. Objectives of the Study

This study is an attempt to investigate the impact of transparent teacher assessment criteria on the quality of EFL students essay writing, aiming not only to measure its effects but also to provide insights that can inform future teaching practices. Therefore, The objectives of this study are set to systematically:

4.1 General Objective

- Investigate the impact of transparent teacher assessment criteria on the quality of essay writing among Master Two ELT students at Ammar Thelidji University of Laghouat.

4.2 Specific Objectives

- a. Measure the effects of transparent assessment on key criteria of quality essay writing, including relevance of the content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics, and overall readability.
- b. Compare students' average essay writing performance before and after the implementation of transparent teacher assessment criteria.

5. Questions of the Study

This study considers answering the following research questions:

1. To what extent does implementing transparent assessment criteria by ELT teachers

influence the overall quality of students' essay writing?

2. What specific impact does the use of transparent teacher assessment criteria have on key components that constitute quality essays?
3. To what degree does students' essay writing performance change before and after the implementation of transparent teacher assessment criteria?

6. Hypotheses of the Study

In the current study, we assume that using transparent assessment criteria may influence the performance quality of students' essay writing. Accordingly, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1 (Alternative Hypothesis – Positive Impact): If assessment criteria are communicated to students before the assessment, this will positively impact the overall quality of their essay writing.

H2 (Alternative Hypothesis – Negative Impact): If assessment criteria are communicated to students before the assessment, this will negatively impact the overall quality of their essay writing.

H3 (Null Hypothesis): If assessment criteria are communicated to students before the assessment, there will be no significant impact on the overall quality of their essay writing.

7. Previous Research

In higher education, transparency in academic assessment has emerged as a fundamental tenet for effective assessment, highlighting the close connection between academic success and clearly defined assessment criteria. Transparency means clear communication between all stakeholders about the criteria used in the assessment. When

assessment criteria are shared, students are better equipped to understand what is required of them, increasing their likelihood of success, conversely, unclear expectations have the ability to hinder the achievement of the desired educational goals. Researchers and educational institutions (Quality Assurance Agency [QAA], 2009; Silva, 2014) developed models to improve assessment quality and ensure students clearly understood what, when, and how the assessment was carried out. These researchers highlighted the significance of clearly and accessibly communicating assessment criteria to all stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the assessment process and objectives. Jönsson (2014, p. 840) defined transparency as the “student awareness”, regarding the intended purpose behind an assessment. According to Jönsson, using explicit scoring rubrics enabled students to understand what was expected, helped them direct their efforts, and allowed them to self-assess their own performance.

While much of the prior research on transparency has been largely theoretical, empirical studies exploring the real impact of explicit criteria and rubrics has presented mixed results (Silva, 2014; Winkelmes et al., 2015; Balan & Jönsson, 2018; Trinh, 2020). In a 2014 study, Silva experimented on the usefulness of using scoring rubrics in academic writing teachings on university students. According to the study's findings, students who received rubrics and detailed explanations during the prewriting phase performed significantly better than those who did not. Silva suggested from these findings that access to rubrics helps students understand grading criteria, recognise errors, and engage in self-correction, which in turn deepens their awareness of their writing weaknesses and motivates them to engage in self-correction.

Similarly, Winkelmes et al. (2015) introduced an assessment model called: “The Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) Framework”, which emphasised clear communication of objectives, tasks, and assessment criteria. The findings indicated that

defining what excellence looks like by providing tools such as checklists and detailed rubrics students' confidence, motivation, and academic performance were enhanced. However, in another study, Balan and Jönsson (2018) examined to what extent students' performance and motivation are enhanced by the clarity of the assessment criteria. This research applied varying degrees of explicitness. Although there was an observable improvement in students' performance from pre- to post- assessment particularly among lower-performing students, the researchers argued that these improvements were not the direct influence of the degree of explicitness applied, suggesting other factors may have influenced these outcomes. This contrasts with Trinh's (2020) research, which emphasized the beneficial role of rubrics in teaching academic writing to students majoring in English. The study revealed that rubrics provided clear writing standards and expectations, allowing students to evaluate their own work and make improvements. Furthermore, the findings indicated that rubrics enhanced autonomous learning and motivation by aiding students in recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses, consequently, encouraging both peer collaboration and self-reflection.

In the Algerian context, Alioua and Bousbis (2019) examined perceptions of transparency and autonomy in writing. Their findings indicated that despite attempts to provide clear criteria, factors such as limited practice, time constraints, and ineffective feedback hindered students' autonomy. Conversely, Bendahmane and Mostari (2017) conducted experimental research with 60 first-year undergraduate EFL students from the Department of English at the University of Tlemcen, demonstrating that students' awareness of writing criteria through formative rubrics positively influenced their writing quality. Nonetheless, these inconsistencies of the findings could be attributed to differences in participants backgrounds, teaching methods, assessment tools, learning environments, or the influence of other variables. These factors limit the extent to which the findings can be compared or generalized to other academic settings, especially within higher education, which is why

this gap merits further investigation in our educational settings.

Given these mixed findings, it is essential to conduct further research to clarify how transparent assessment practices impact essay writing quality in our educational settings. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the effects of implementing explicit teacher assessment rubrics on students' writing quality in the Department of English at Laghouat University to both contribute to the ongoing discussion and to inform better assessment practices.

8. Significance of the Study

This study is particularly significant as it offers the potential to provide new insights into the challenges ELT students encounter when composing academic essays. By exploring how transparent assessment criteria influence students' writing quality, the research seeks to reveal underlying factors that may contribute to their struggles. Gaining a clearer understanding of these difficulties is essential in developing more effective teaching and assessment practices. Therefore, approaching this issue is necessary for improving students' essay writing skills and supporting their broader academic success in English language learning contexts.

9. Research Methodology

To investigate the effect of transparent teacher assessment criteria (independent variable) on the quality of EFL essay writing (dependent variable), a quantitative experimental design was employed with Master Two ELT students at Amar Telidji University of Laghouat. Using the random sampling method, sixteen participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group, which received the intervention (explicit assessment rubrics), or a control group, which received the typical treatment (no intervention was introduced). Under similar conditions, each participant completed two essays: the first one

was during the pre-test stage before any intervention, and the second one during the Post-test stage after the intervention was introduced. This resulted in a total number of 32 essays collected for this experiment, allowing for direct comparison of their writing's improvements. Essays were evaluated using Silva's (2014) essay scoring rubric covering multiple criteria, such as, content relevance, organization, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the readability of the paper. To ensure objectivity and reliability, corrections were done by both an AI tool and a qualified teacher; an inter-rater reliability test was measured to ensure consistency of the results across raters. The data presented and analysed was obtained from the SPSS as both descriptive and inferential statistics were needed to not just determine the impact of transparency on students' writing but to find to what extent this implementation is significant.

10. Structure of the Study

The present study is organized into four chapters in addition to a general introduction and a general conclusion. The first chapter focuses on essay writing within EFL contexts. It provides a definition of essay writing, examines the various types of essays, outlines the stages involved in the essay writing process, and identifies common challenges encountered by EFL learners, as well as factors influencing this process. The second chapter addresses assessment and the role of transparency in improving writing quality. It reviews definitions and types of assessment, outlines the principles of effective assessment, and discusses scoring rubrics alongside transparency related issues in EFL writing. The primary objective of these two chapters is to establish the theoretical foundation and justify the significance of this research topic. Chapter three is dedicated to the research methodology and the presentation of collected data. It details the research design and approach, describes the population, setting, and sampling methods, and explains the experimental procedure, including the pre-test, treatment, and post-test phases. Furthermore, it discusses scoring reliability, data analysis

techniques, and ethical considerations. This chapter aims to provide methodological justification for the chosen approach and to present and interpret the data collected. The fourth chapter focuses on data analysis and discussion of the findings. It includes inter-rater reliability analysis and inferential statistical tests, such as Independent and Paired Samples t-tests. Initially, descriptive statistics are discussed to examine the intervention's impact on various aspects of essay writing, including relevance, content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and readability. Then, the chapter compares pre-test and post-test results using inferential statistics. Finally, it offers recommendations based on the findings and discusses the limitations encountered during the study. The goal of this chapter is to provide concrete proof of the importance of the study chosen in this research.

CHAPTER ONE
KEY FACTORS OF ESSAY
WRITING FOR EFL STUDENTS

Introduction

Essay writing is the process of formulating a particular thought or idea into a written text, enabling the writer to communicate their message clearly to the reader, who can then comprehend what is being conveyed. For students of English as a foreign language (EFL), essay writing is an essential skill that plays a pivotal role in developing both linguistic and communicative skills. However, to master this skill, students need to understand and then apply a series of interconnected steps and rules to produce an effective essay. Additionally, it is important to consider common difficulties and factors that can negatively affect this process. Therefore, appropriate strategies should be implemented to overcome these challenges and enhance students' writing abilities. With this background in mind, the following chapter will present the key components of effective essay writing, addressing both the challenges and solutions that form the basis for a better writing proficiency.

1.1. Defining Essay Writing

There is an undeniable link between language and communication. EFL students depend on either spoken and/or written language to understand what is being communicated. Thus, the success of this process demands the development of both speaking and writing skills. The latter has been considered by many the most complex out of all other skills (Haspari, 2018, p. 28).

Writing skills are a vital tool for the effective exchange of ideas and information. Although writing was long overlooked in language teaching, it has recently gained recognition for its importance in academic and professional contexts. Nunan (2003, p.88) considered writing as both a physical and a mental way to communicate words and ideas. However, it has been well documented that EFL students have struggled enormously in their journey to perfect this skill, especially when it comes to essay writing.

An essay can be defined as a structured piece of writing that presents and supports a particular idea. According to Mackenzie (2007, p.6), the definition of an essay may vary by context, but it must always have a clear purpose, follow a specific structure, and come in different types. Typically, an essay consists of an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion, each serves a distinct function in developing and supporting the main idea or theme. However, essay writing remains a complex challenge that every student has to overcome. Students face a variety of difficulties; one prominent challenge is poor vocabulary, which hinders their ability to express ideas accurately. It has also been considered difficult to create and/or organize ideas, use elaborate language and at the same time attempt to master aspects such as grammar, relevancy, choice of words, and pay attention to their mechanics.

Overall, essay writing does not simply mean writing ideas on paper; it is a systematic means of writing thoughts and arranging information. Therefore, in order to assist students to find solutions for their problems, they first need to have knowledge of the different types of essays since each type has different processes and functions.

1.2 Types of Essays

There exist different ways to communicate our ideas through language. This diversity is linked to their purpose. For example, it can be to describe, persuade, narrate, and/ or compare and contrast. These various approaches are known as rhetorical modes, and each serves a unique purpose in both speaking and writing (Weaver et al., 2016, p. 88). A deep understanding of these types enables students to choose the best way to communicate ideas to gradually enhance their writing skills. The following are the most common types of essays.

1.2.1 Descriptive Essays

As the name implies, descriptive essays tend to focus on giving a detailed description of a particular phenomenon, a person, a place, a thing, or a concept. For Kane (2000), descriptive compositions are based on sensory details. Sensory details are defined as descriptions in writing that engage the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, helping readers experience a scene more vividly (Weaver et al., 2016, p. 94). This means that descriptive essays provide a description about what a person sees and later depends on the individual's imagination to visualize the matter described. According to Weaver et al. (2016), to guide the readers through the description in a logical way, the writer needs to create a clear and vivid picture in the reader's mind by moving in a logical order, such as, using spatial order, which arranges ideas based on their physical characteristics or appearances. Similarly, Specht (2020) added that a writer in his or her descriptive composition should give great care to sensory details to describe different features. This means that descriptive essays are a type of writing that seeks to portray reality or the subjects being addressed by focusing on emotions and sensory details, which capture the essence of the intended idea or topic, making it easier for the reader to understand the matter described.

1.2.2 Persuasive Essays

A persuasive essay can be considered as a process where a writer extends his idea (s) in an attempt to convince the reader to adopt a particular viewpoint. For Kane (2000), persuasion aims at shifting the reader's beliefs and thoughts through written words. Thus, persuasive essays are a type of writing that seeks to persuade the reader to adopt a particular opinion or idea. In these essays, writers use compelling language to present arguments and evidence to support their position, they use a variety of methods ranging from the use of logic, facts, and statistics to emotions to validate their claims. Scarry (2010) said that persuasive writing is a type of writing designed to convince readers to accept the writer's viewpoint.

However, stating opinions without presenting arguments, facts, examples, or logical reasoning is not sufficient to change the reader's opinions or reinforce an existing belief. Furthermore, Weaver et Al. (2016) explained that people have a natural tendency to win an argument. However, when both sides are only focused on winning, the argument is often unproductive. A better strategy is to present the viewpoint in a way that encourages others to see it as reasonable and worth adapting, rather than insisting it is the only correct answer. To achieve this, the researchers further outlined five key features that make up the structure of a persuasive essay. First an introduction and thesis statement are needed to present the main argument. The essay then addresses the opposing ideas to show a level of understanding of different perspectives. Then, the writer presents his own evidence to support the main claim. In addition, the writer needs to use an appropriate style and tone of language to engage his target readers. The essay then must end with a strong conclusion that reinforces the argument(s) presented (Weaver et al., 2016, p. 122).

1.2.3 Narrative Essays

Narration depends on telling stories, often from the narrator's perspective, with a clear plot and characters. Narrative essays are characterized by their use of literary elements, such as characters, time, place, and conflict, which distinguish them from other types of writing. Scarry (2010) suggested that making a story more engaging demands vividly “telling a story” to help readers imagine the events recounted. For Boutkhil (2015), narrative essays are stories that can be fiction or factual events with the aim of engaging the readers emotionally by either creating a shared history, providing entertainment, instruction, or insights. According to Weaver et al. (2016), the choice between these two types of stories is determined by the writer's purpose. Factual stories are intended to accurately recount what actually happened in real life, while fictional stories depend on the writer's imagination to create events and characters meant to convey ideas or to simply entertain. This implies that narrative essays are

a genre of literary writing that relies on narration as the primary method for conveying ideas and feelings, seeking to recount events in a way that engages the reader's imagination.

1.2.4 Compare and Contrast Essays

One other popular type of essays is called the compare and contrast essay. In this type, the writer attempts to explore the similarities and differences between two or more subjects. In comparisons, the writer states the similarities between the two or more ideas discussed; contrasts, on the other hand, are written to situate the differences between the ideas discussed. For Duigu (2002), compare and contrast essays have the ability to situate both points of similarities and differences and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each topic in a way that ensures a clear and logical development of ideas. However, simply pointing out what is obvious, is far from being the purpose of writing a compare and contrast essay but rather to “illuminate subtle differences or unexpected similarities.” (Weaver et al., 2016, p.111). That is to say, compare and contrast essays require the writer to have a high level of critical thinking and good planning skills to structure the essay in a way that ensures a balance between the topics examined.

1.3 The Essay Writing Process

Students need to remind themselves that writing an essay is a process. Murray’s seminal work, “Teaching Writing as a Process Not Product” emphasized that “Instead of teaching finished writing, we should teach unfinished writing, and the glory in its unfinishedness” (Murray, 1972, p. 4). Thus, writing is an evolving process rather than a fixed product. This process, in order not to become an intimidating task, needs to respect a set of interconnected steps (Weaver et al., 2016, p. 45). To make this writing effective, this process is divided into the following four steps: Pre-writing, Outlining, Drafting, Revising and Editing (Crowther et al., 2016). It is essential to understand these steps of essay writing to

make it easier for writers to track their ideas and ensure they flow smoothly.

1.3.1 Pre-writing

The initial step of writing an essay is called pre-writing. For Harmer (2004, p. 4) the pre-writing stage demands taking time to plan and organize your ideas before writing a draft just like a list of the grocery is prepared before shopping. This stage is essential to lay the foundations of an organized writing that reflects ideas in a clear flow. Harmer (ibid, 4-5) further added that this stage of writing revolves around three fundamental considerations. First, writers must establish their purpose; that is, what they aim to achieve with their text. This influences the type of text, the language used, and the details included. Next, they need to think about their target audience, that is, who will be reading their text. This is important to consider since it will determine the form, tone, style and how the information is organized and presented. Finally, an effective piece of writing requires paying attention to the ‘content structure.’ This assures that writers' ideas logically move from one point to the next.

1.3.2 Outlining

Outlining is the second step in writing an essay. This step is one of the most essential steps in writing an essay. It provides writers with a solid foundation that helps them not only organize their thoughts but also construct a clear and logical coherence between ideas. An outline is a list of the information that will be put in an essay. Making an outline in advance will both make it well organized and focused. Crowther et al. (2016) referred to this step as the blueprint that helps you to see the full picture of your work. It is stressed that this step ensures you produce a well-crafted essay through creating a well-organized framework for the entire work. This outline is not merely preparing sentences or paragraphs; it is a strategic process that requires writers to understand, organize and anticipate the thesis statement, organize the ideas, and ensure that no important point was forgotten. Similarly, Weaver et al. (2016, p. 50-

51) noted that after the pre-writing stage is complete, creating a “blueprint” or a “plan” is necessary. Creating this outline for them does not only help the writer to see the full picture, but, at the same time, it helps in preventing writers from “getting stuck” when writing their first draft (Ibid).

1.3.3 Drafting

This stage, according to Crowther et al. (2016), could be much easier and less intimidating to write if the preceding stages had been properly completed. Drafting is a critical stage in the writing process, during which a complete version of a piece of writing is produced. Though it is not final, this draft serves as an editable framework that can be improved through subsequent revisions and editing. The objective of this step according to Weaver et al. (2016) is drafting a total of five paragraphs, three of which are body paragraphs. They claim that knowing what a draft looks like can facilitate this process, for this reason, they introduced the “Bowtie Method” shown in the following diagram:

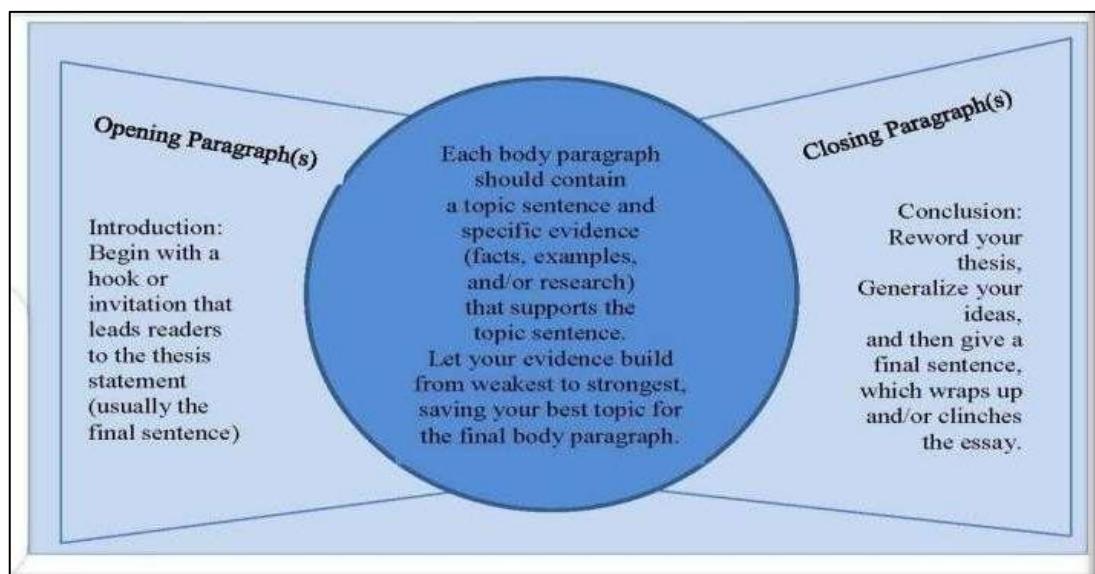


Figure 1.1. The Bowtie Method for Drafting the Essay Paragraph

Adapted from Weaver et al. (2016, p. 57).

The figure above provides a clear framework to help writers structure their essays. It emphasizes the importance of beginning the essay with an engaging introduction that includes a hook or invitation, leading the reader toward the thesis statement, which is typically the final sentence of the opening paragraph. The body paragraphs should each start with a clear topic sentence and be supported by specific evidence such as facts, examples, or research. The Bowtie method also suggests organizing these paragraphs from weakest to strongest to make your essay as compelling as possible. Finally, the closing paragraph(s) should restate the thesis, generalize the main ideas, and end with a final sentence that effectively closes the essay. By following this method, writers can produce essays that are academic and effective.

1.3.4 Revising and Editing

Revising involves a careful review of the produced draft to check for any redundancy of ideas or inappropriate word choices. In this step, the writer needs to make sure the content is sufficiently supported and that the text adheres to rules of cohesion, coherence, and unity. This demands according to Crowther et al. (2016), adding, cutting, moving, or changing ideas to make them clearer, more accurate, interesting, and convincing. Once the content has been refined, editing follows; it focuses on correcting grammar, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure (ibid). Weaver et al. (2016) suggested a set of strategies to take into consideration. First, it can be a difficult task to judge your own writing, which is why it is helpful to step away from it for a while, then, when you return, it will become easier to judge yourself more objectively. To make sure this step was successfully conducted, seeking the valuable feedback from a qualified person can further highlight areas for improvement. Finally, taking the role of a reader can make it easier to evaluate the effectiveness and importance of the work in hand.

1.4 Writing Quality Essays: Key factors

Writing essays can be a challenging task in itself; however, producing quality essays is even more demanding to write and can be a daunting skill to master. Although the primary goal of writing is the production of high-quality texts that meet the academic requirements, there is no universal agreement among assessors on the exact criteria that make good quality essays. However, certain key elements are widely recognised as essential components of effective writing.

Bell and Burnaby (1984) stated that the writing skill demands mastering of the different elements, including control of content, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, grammar, paper format, and letter formation. In addition, the writer must be able to structure and organize the information in hand. It becomes clear, therefore, that producing high quality essays requires a combination of these factors. Thus, it is important to consider these as essential building blocks of academic writing.

As a starting point, it is of high importance to possess a good command over a wide range of academic vocabulary. Coxhead (2000, p.218) defined academic vocabulary as “a set of lexical items a person knows and uses in academic settings.” This suggests that students need to possess the knowledge to recognise and understand a set of words as well as have the ability to make use of them. It is also logical enough for the content produced to be relevant to the assigned topic. Johnson (2003) stressed that to strengthen your argument, every single detail mentioned in the final draft must directly address the essay question assigned. This suggests that every piece of information included in the essay produced must strictly relate to the essay question given, avoiding the inclusion of any irrelevant ideas and details. However, staying relevant requires focus and clear thinking, which can only be maintained through good organizational skills.

According to Starkey (2004) some writers believe that “ organization is a spontaneous and effortless process ”, in reality , this process demands good planning and organizational skills especially when working under time constraints. Thus, organization is key to managing ideas and structuring a good quality essay, which not only helps the writer stay focused but also makes it easier for the reader to follow the argument. To ensure that the final production is qualified, specifically in higher education, Starkey (2004) further argued that you must apply good writing mechanics, that is, good grammar, spelling, and punctuation. However, Flose (2004), stretched the discussion to argue that no matter how good a person's grammar is, without vocabulary you cannot communicate any idea effectively. For him, grammar only shapes how we put words together, while vocabulary is like “rocks” that we need to build a solid structure.

Overall, these elements should be developed simultaneously to achieve successful writing, particularly, in formal academic essays. A good command over all of these elements is essential to effectively communicate abstract ideas in a way that meets academic standards.

1.5 Understanding Key Aspects Affecting EFL Essay Writing

It is true that writing essays in EFL contexts represents a crucial skill that numerous students have aspired to achieve. However, these individuals frequently encounter a multitude of challenges that hinder their effective engagement in the writing process. Nonetheless, understanding these factors and difficulties is vital to effectively support students in overcoming these challenges that prevent them from improving their writing skills.

1.5.1 Difficulties Faced by EFL Students in Essay Writing

According to Raimes (1983, p.6), successful ESL essay writing encompasses nine critical components: “syntax, content, the writing process, audience awareness, purpose, word choice, organization, mechanics, and grammar.” The demand to simultaneously

navigate and integrate each element makes writing essays even more difficult. The following diagram, adapted from Raimes (1983, p.6), is an illustration of these nine essential components involved in producing an effective piece of writing.

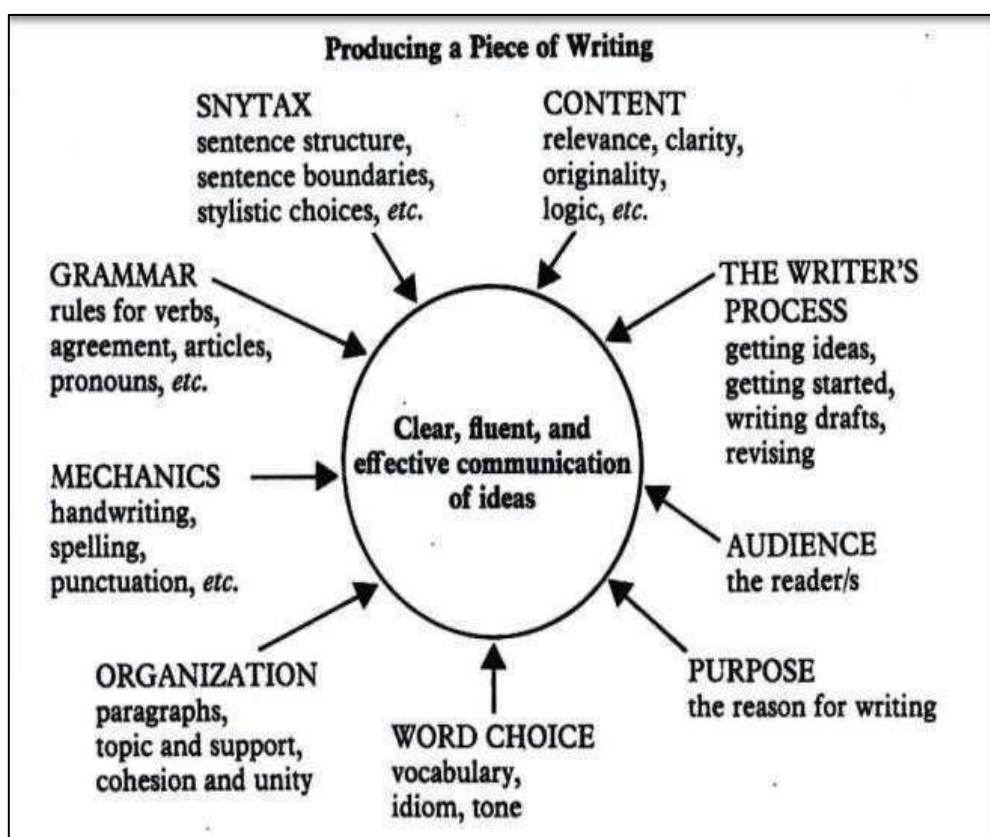


Figure 1.2 : Essential Components of Producing a Piece of Writing.

Adapted from Raimes (1983, p.6).

This figure shows that ESL writers must navigate a number of key criteria emphasizing that successful writing is not achieved by focusing on one single criterion. Due to this complexity, writing essays is a challenging task in which the writer needs to carefully integrate more than just correct grammar and varied word choice to produce clear and well-structured piece of writing. This task becomes even more challenging when the language is not the native language. For example, EFL students experience many linguistic difficulties that hinder their ability to write essays effectively. It has been demonstrated in different

sources that language proficiency is the foremost source of difficulties associated with writing (Al Khairy, 2013; Fareed et al., 2016; Akhter et al., 2019; Alkubaidi, 2019; Moses & Mohammed, 2019).

Research conducted by Moses and Mohammed (2019) identified two primary linguistic challenges students face when writing academic essays: insufficient vocabulary and a limited comprehension of grammatical structures. Students can suffer because they do not have a large enough range of academic words to express their ideas, and this leads to an inability to write about complex concepts. In addition, due to a lack of understanding or mastery of the rules that govern how words are combined, that is, grammar, students' writings can contain errors that make it harder to label the writing academically appropriate.

Scholars have also pinpointed a range of additional factors contributing to the writing difficulties faced by students, including cognitive, affective, pedagogical challenges and other obstacles including a lack of ideas, and issues related to organizing thoughts effectively (Fareed et al., 2016; Pablo et al., 2018; Bulqiyah et al., 2021). Although these difficulties constitute key barriers for EFL students, they represent only a part of the bigger picture of a more complex set of factors influencing writing proficiency. Consequently, a thorough exploration of these various factors is mandatory to reach practical solutions.

1.5.2 Factors Affecting Writing Quality

The quality of essay writing depends on a number of factors. These factors have the ability to directly affect the writer's productivity and ability to express their ideas clearly and effectively. A number of researchers attempted to analyse the students' productions to find out what particular factors influenced this process.

In his influential book, Harmer (2001, p. 261-262) stated that the ability to write cannot be acquired simply through exposure to written texts, developing the students' writing

skills necessitates that teachers take on roles as motivators, resources, and providers of constructive feedback as well as giving structured instruction and continuous practice. As such, teachers play a pivotal role in improving their students' writing skills through providing both motivation, which represents the internal and external drive that allows writers to enhance their skills and engage more in the writing process, and constructive feedback, which is considered an essential tool to help students critically review their work to identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing.

Additionally, effective assessment practices further support this development. Among these, sharing clear assessment criteria is essential. For example, in the UK, calls made to hold the educational system accountable led the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2009) to require the educational institutions to write down and publish detailed specifications. In a remarkable effort to meet these pressures, higher educational institutions have largely focused on the need for increased transparency in assessment practices. As a result, educational institutions began to focus heavily on transparency in their assessment practices. This included the publication of grading rubrics, and detailed marking criteria. Teachers often introduce a rubric at the beginning of a writing project so that students clearly understand the criteria by which their work will be evaluated (Tompkins & Daniel-Jones, 2010, p. 99). Furthermore, Trinh (2020) noted that students face a notable challenge in academic writing, as some are unable to produce a complete academic essay, while others manage to write full essays but with content that is often considered disorganized and lacks clear structure. According to Trinh (*ibid*), this struggle largely stems from students' limited familiarity with the judgement criteria detailed in writing scoring rubrics. Without a clear understanding of these expectations, students find it difficult to produce coherent and well-organized academic writings. The figure 1.3 below is a visual summary of all the previously discussed factors; it demonstrates that aiming to produce effective writings heavily depends

on a multitude of skills that play a definitive role in this goal. These include the following:



Figure 1.3: A Summary of Factors Influencing High-Quality Essay Writing
Adapted from the discussion in the text above

Recognizing the importance of these different factors can support the learning process in general and writing essays in particular. By addressing each of these factors, that is, providing clear grading rubrics, structured instruction, motivational support, constructive feedback, and familiarizing the students with the judgment criteria, teachers can help their students develop their abilities to reach their full potentials.

Conclusion

This chapter has thoroughly explored some of the most crucial aspects of essay writing that every EFL student needs to understand. The chapter opened up with a discussion of the definition of an essay, the different categories of essays, and the stages involved in the essay

writing process. Furthermore, it has elaborated on the discussion to introduce what constitutes good quality essays as well as discuss the common challenges faced by EFL students and the factors influencing the quality of their writing. Most importantly, this chapter has highlighted that effective essay writing demands a clear communication of assessment expectations which can have the potential to help students understand what is expected of them. Building on this idea, the next chapter will further investigate the concept of transparency in assessment. We will analyse how the use of scoring rubrics influences the quality of assessment in general and the written essays of EFL students in specific.

CHAPTER TWO
TRANSPARENCY IN ASSESSING EFL
WRITING

Introduction

The ultimate objective of EFL teaching has been to facilitate measurable progress in students' proficiency in the TL. Consequently, it has been imperative to address all factors influencing this objective, among which assessment is a fundamental component for a successful language education. To ensure that a successful assessment is achieved, it needs to address different language skills, notably, special emphasis has been placed on writing, particularly in higher education contexts where essay writing constitutes a key academic skill which requires effective mechanisms to accurately assess. This chapter highlights key aspects of assessment in EFL writing, including its definition, types, and fundamental principles like validity, reliability, practicality, wash back, fairness, and transparency. This chapter will also examine scoring rubrics as tools for transparent assessment, and review previous research on transparency, specifically in EFL writing assessment. Finally, the chapter discusses the challenges associated with this implementation.

2.1 Definition of Assessment in EFL Writing

In recent years, there has been a widespread recognition of the importance of assessment in education. Although it is often presented as a systematic process that determines whether educational objectives have been met, a closer examination of different definitions has proven that the concept is too complex to be defined by a single definition.

Scriven's (1967, p.40) highlighted that assessment is a judgment-making process with an educational role that extends beyond the application of different measuring tools; it demands a clear justification for each component involved in the assessment. In simpler wording, assessment is a systematic process to determine the performance level of individuals in specific educational contexts. Furthermore, researchers

have noted that the assessment must be compared against an established set of standards and criteria. These chosen criteria can be either implicit or explicit (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p.8; Sadler, 1998, p. 2). According to Taras (2005, p.467), implicit criteria does not communicate the assessor's focus, while explicit criteria create a shared understanding and leads to a greater transparency. Although there is no complete agreement among researchers as to what is meant by assessment, it has been widely acknowledged that the term 'assessment' originates from the Medieval Latin '*assidēre*' or '*assessus*,' implying to sit beside or assist in the office of a judge (Watkins et al., 2007, p.144). In educational terms, the teacher “ sits alongside” the student taking the role of an evaluator, a guide and a supporter. This can both encourage and motivate the students to develop and improve their learning.

The writing skill proved to be a challenging task for students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). As Hyland (2003, p.10) explained, traditional methods of teaching and assessing writing often fail to provide clear guidelines on what constitutes effective writing. This challenge makes it difficult for both teachers and students to understand how to improve their writing skills. However, he suggests that this complexity could be overcome through the successful implementation of an effective assessment (Ibid.). This field according to Taras (2012,p.52) still lacks an agreed-upon definition as little 'homogeneity' existed between the definitions of the previous literature. This signifies that once the educational community agrees upon a unified definition of assessment, a clear stance could be at our disposal.

It is reasonable to say that these varying perspectives are no more than firm proof of the dynamic nature of the field of assessment. Additionally, these perspectives are evidence that it needs further discussion. For this very reason, distinguishing between the different types of assessment and their differences is of high importance to understand how writing skills can be effectively evaluated and developed within EFL classes.

2.2 Types of Assessment

Teachers who seek to enhance their students' writing skills, particularly in EFL classrooms, must have a clear understanding of the different types of assessment and distinguish between the different roles they serve in the learning process. Among these, formative and summative assessments are fundamental, each serving a distinct purpose (Scriven, 1967). Based on this distinction, both approaches require a closer examination.

2.2.1 Formative Assessment

The first documented use of the term 'formative evaluation' appeared in the work of Scriven (1967, p.43), who explained that curriculum reformers are "automatically engaged in formative evaluation" as they are constantly involved in ongoing revisions to improve their judgments. Over the years, other researchers have provided increasing evidence of the critical impact that formative assessment has had on students' learning, and as a result, a variety of definitions have been proposed. In their view, Black and Wiliam (1998) gathered evidence from over 650 studies and found that, if used effectively, formative assessment can improve the performance of students across the curriculum. On the other hand, McMillan (2017, p.110) thought of formative assessment as a circular process of feedback from teachers to students and from students to teachers. According to him, this type of assessment is 'embedded' because it occurs while instruction is still happening. Thus, it consists of a teacher continuously judging students' academic performance to inform decision-making, and the nature of feedback provided.

2.2.2 Summative Assessment

Summative assessment occurs at the end of the instruction to evaluate students' overall performance. Scriven (1967) argued that summative evaluation is considered as a means used to only judge the final product to evaluate the effectiveness of a fully developed

curriculum. Researchers have also addressed this type by using the term ‘assessment of learning’ to describe summative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In other words, McMillan (2017) stated that summative assessment is conducted primarily to record students' overall performance, what they know, what they do not and what they can do with the instructions taught. This judgment provides final grades to report to parents and administration; thus, it is considered an assessment of learning. Notably, McMillan (2017) has noted that the first step toward effective assessment is to “establish and communicate clear learning targets” (ibid, p.110). Thus, whether summative or formative, poorly prepared assessments can affect the students’ motivation, discourage their involvement, and generally affect their overall progress towards the learning goals. For this reason, these assessments need to follow certain principles that are considered the cornerstone of effective assessment.

2.3 Principles of Assessment

The field of assessment is built upon a set of principles that are needed to achieve effective assessment practices. These are foundational to accurately measure the intended skills. These principles include: validity, reliability, practicality, wash back, fairness and transparency.

2.3.1 Validity

In higher education, validity is one of the most important criteria for effective assessment. McCall (1927) defined validity as the extent a test design truly reflects the specific ability it is designed to measure. This includes ensuring that the assessment accurately reflects the stated educational objectives. This view was dominant for years; however, it was later criticized for being overly narrow. The claim that validity means a test measures what it claims it measures (Davies, 1990; Hughes, 2003; and Brown, 2005) has contrasted with emerging claims which have argued that no such thing as a valid assessment

exists.

For example, Green (2014) has claimed that the validation of a test begins at the designing stage. In this stage, teachers need to define the type of knowledge, and skills to be evaluated to establish an assessment process that can “support the interpretations of test scores” (p.76) Green has further claimed that validity is more complicated than to be answered simply with a yes or no. In fact, it is a matter of degree. Thus, inferences can be more or less valid depending on many factors, a test itself is not valid on its own, and validity needs to be based on a set of evidence.

From another perspective, McMillan (2017) explained that the appropriateness of the claims and consequences are judged professionally based on three types of evidence. The first is content-related evidence, which presents the needed evidence that an assessment is indeed representative of the skills that are supposed to be measured. The second is criterion-related evidence, which shows to what extent the assessment results align with other standardized measures that are considered valid. The third one is consequential evidence, which is used to find the consequences of applying a certain measurement. These combined can determine the level of the measurement’s validity, that is, the fairness, trustworthiness, and legitimacy of the inferences made (ibid).

Based on these different views, it is not arguable that assessments gain their value when their validity is carefully established. However, it is not the only measurement of an effective assessment; many other factors are involved in this process.

2.3.2 Reliability

In EFL classrooms, teachers must consider the reliability of their tests. McCall (1927) defined reliability as the stability and consistency of test results. He stressed that factors such as the examiner’s behaviour and the attitudes of the students themselves could make a test

unreliable. This suggests that closer attention should be paid to the testing environment to make sure this consistency is reached.

When administering a test, it is important that the results are consistent if the same individuals were assessed again under comparable conditions (Crocker & Algina, 1986, p.105). In other words, it is assumed that despite any external factors that might affect the individual's score, the overall scores should remain consistent. This is similar to Brown's (2004) definition, which claims that when a test is consistent, dependable, and produces similar results each time it is administered, it can be considered reliable.

Recently, researchers have recognised that several factors can influence this reliability. For instance, Green (2014) has listed a number of elements that, if well considered, can decrease measurement error and ultimately increase the consistency of test results; these include using a variety of assessment tools, applying them in different situations, and involving diverse groups of students. Similarly, McMillan (2017) has linked reliability directly to the concept of error in assessment. He argued that assessment results may not fully represent a students' true knowledge due to the presence of error. However, to minimize this error, teachers need to ensure that tasks and their instructions are communicated clearly with the students (Ibid.).

By taking these different views into account, teachers can work towards making tests reliable and as free from errors as possible. Equally important, however, is considering other principles to ensure the feasibility of the assessment.

2.3.4 Practicality

Practicality refers to the extent to which a test can be effectively implemented given the available resources. Brown (2004) stated that, in order to achieve practicality, certain

conditions must be considered, such as funding, time, equipment, and choice of a suitable scoring method. These factors determine whether an assessment can be realistically and efficiently administered in a particular educational context. Building on this, Bloxham and Boud (2007) argued that assessment tasks should be designed so that they do not overwhelm the students or teachers with demands that exceed their capacity. Similarly, Green (2014) has referred to this principle as the ‘efficiency of a test.’ He has emphasized that a test should not only be economical to administer but also demonstrate that its results justify the costs involved. In other words, an assessment must be both feasible and worthwhile, ensuring that the resources invested lead to meaningful outcomes.

2.3.4 Wash back

In the field of language assessment, increasing attention has been given to the principle of wash back. The term has been used to describe the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Fulcher, 1999). This principle addresses the cause-and-effect relationship between assessment and the learning process, suggesting that a test can influence teaching in either positive or negative ways. Brown (2004) stated that it leads to negative outcomes when assessment is designed solely for grading purposes. This means that when students feel that assessment is designed to support their learning rather than simply exert pressure or assign grades, it enhances their engagement in the learning process. However, Fulcher and Davidson (2007) have argued that earlier definitions of wash back did not capture the full range of its effects. According to them, wash back is far more complex than merely the positive or negative impact a test has on instruction; in fact, they have suggested that wash back may encompass up to fifteen different hypotheses regarding its effects. Taken together, these perspectives prove that wash back is a multifaceted phenomenon that has a huge influence on students' overall learning.

2.3.5 Fairness

It is the duty of the assessor to ensure everyone is given an equal opportunity to succeed. However, the concept of test fairness has been interpreted in various ways. Researchers have conceptualized fair assessment as a key principle to make sure the validity of the assessment process (Willingham & Cole, 1997; Standards, 1999; Willingham, 1999). Some scholars have viewed fairness as an independent principle, emphasizing that assessments should be understood by all students and should address their individual strengths and needs (Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education, 1988; Educational Testing Service, 2002). More recently, researchers have argued that fairness can be achieved by providing all students with transparent learning expectations and clear assessment criteria (Tierney, 2013; McMillan, 2017). This suggests that when students are fully informed about what is expected and how they will be assessed, they are more likely to perceive the assessment as fair, regardless of their individual backgrounds or challenges. Hence, in order to establish a fair environment, it is incredibly important to establish transparent assessment expectations and criteria.

2.3.6 Transparency

Transparency has emerged as a key principle for effective language assessment. It refers to the extent to which assessors provide clear instructions and explicit details about assessment tasks, enabling students to understand the criteria by which their performance will be evaluated. However, it is important for assessors to first understand the relationship between transparency and other fundamental principles of assessment before fully integrating it into their practices.

Settiawana and Hilmawanb (2016) found that while validity, reliability, practicality, and authenticity are critical in designing effective assessments, these qualities must be accompanied by transparency. They argued that a lack of transparency can undermine

the reliability of an assessment, as students unfamiliar with the assessment criteria are less likely to be consistent in their performance.

McMillan (2017) defined transparency as having knowledge of both what will be assessed and how it will be assessed. According to him, transparency requires that both the content of the assessment and the scoring criteria be made explicit to students. He argued that transparency can be achieved by providing rubrics, previous test samples, or blueprints, which not only ensure fairness but also promote intrinsic motivation among students.

Similarly, Akhmadjonov (2019) emphasized that transparency in assessments means providing students with clear, accessible information about all aspects of the task, including requirements (such as word count and formatting), detailed instructions, and a well-defined grading rubric. When these elements are missing or unclear, students often become confused, which delays their progress and prevents accurate measurement of their learning progress. This lack of clarity can result in final submissions that do not reflect intended goals, hinder students' ability to reflect on their own progress, and leave them uncertain about the purpose and expectations of the assessment. Therefore, transparency is crucial to sustain fairness, clarity, and meaningful evaluation in the learning process.

Evans (2023) further argued that students cannot reach their full potential if the assessment criteria are withheld from them. According to him, this lack of transparency not only creates a barrier to learning but also leads to inequality among students. When students are unaware of the success criteria, they rely on their past experiences to meet expectations. Because these experiences differ among students, their chances to succeed are unequal.

These perspectives highlight that transparency is essential to maintain fairness, clarity, and meaningful evaluation in the learning process. By making assessment criteria

explicit, teachers can support all students in understanding expectations and engaging more deeply with their own learning. Moreover, when students have access to clear criteria, they gain more confidence and motivation, reduce anxiety, and reflect better on their own progress, ultimately, enhancing the overall quality of both teaching and learning.

2.4 Scoring Rubrics as a Tool to Promote Transparency

In recent years, creating classrooms where the criteria for success are communicated to students has become an essential step in higher education. Scoring rubrics serve as a key tool to establish classrooms that offer a transparent approach to stakeholders' expectations. Therefore, it is essential to explore this tool by first defining the concept of scoring rubrics, distinguishing between analytic and holistic rubrics, how their implementation enhances transparency.

2.4.1 Scoring Rubrics

A scoring rubric is a structured assessment tool that clearly outlines specific criteria and performance levels used to assess students' work. It serves as a guide for both teachers and students by defining expectations and standards for assignments, such as essays. According to Stevens and Levi (2005, p.3), “rubrics serve as an effective scoring tool that clarifies teachers' expectations by dividing the assignment into its component parts and outlining success requirements for students”. This clarity enhances students' understanding of assignments and guides them on how to fulfil these expectations.

However, as Andrade (2005, p.29) pointed out, rubrics are not “inherently self-explanatory”. Therefore, it is necessary to provide explicit explanations to ensure that students can effectively interpret and apply the provided rubric. Additionally, rubrics function not just as instruments for assessing student performance, but also as aids that enhance students' writing skills (Reddy & Andrade, 2010). This suggests that rubrics are recognized

as essential tools for improving students' written compositions. Jaidev (2011, p.1) emphasized, when students understand how their written compositions will be judged through the use of a scoring rubric, they will take a greater responsibility for their writing.

Overall, these perspectives highlight that both establishing and sharing a scoring rubric are key components in promoting effective learning, particularly in EFL written assessment tasks. Clear rubrics provide transparent criteria that enable instructors and students to understand the standards by which writing is evaluated. Consequently, the implementation of rubrics is a critical step toward achieving fair, consistent, and pedagogically sound assessment practices.

2.4.2 Scoring methods in EFL Writing

There is no one way in which assessment can be conducted. There exists a number of scoring methods to assess EFL students' essays. Adopting one of these methods is crucial to ensure the assessment is professional and not prompt to bias and subjectivity. Essays can be scored in two main ways: Holistically or analytically. In analytic rubrics, the teacher not only assesses each criterion of each students' work separately but provides feedback on different aspects. In contrast, holistic rubrics involve the application of all criteria simultaneously, resulting in a single, overall judgment about the quality of the work (Brookhart, 2013, p.6). The issue is choosing the appropriate essay scoring method. This choice largely depends on the purpose behind the assessment. If diagnostic information is required alongside more specific feedback, then analytical scoring is suitable (McMillan, 2017). Thus, analytic scoring is achieved by giving a separate grade to each identified criterion and collecting those separate grades into a final one. Whereas holistic scoring is more suitable if the teacher does not have enough time or circumstances do not allow him to analytically grade the essays, he can pay more attention to the students essays overall strengths, then, a single grade based on

that overall judgment is provided (Ibid.). Thus, holistic scoring focuses on overall understanding of language performance. It evaluates the essay as a whole rather than focusing on its individual elements, allowing teachers to assess the overall quality of writing.

2.4.3 Using Scoring Rubrics to Promote Transparency

There is no single method to achieve transparency in assessment; rather, transparency can be expressed through many forms. Transparency involves making the criteria, standards, and expectations behind assessments clear and understandable to students, so they know what is required to succeed. However, research shows that scoring rubrics are among the most effective tools for making assessment expectations clear to students.

Defining what constitutes “good” language is a complex task. Fulcher and Davidson (2007) explained that what is considered high-quality language in one situation, may differ significantly according to the context, purpose, and cultural norms. Because these standards can be subjective, they further emphasise the need for clear scoring rubrics to guide the students in understanding the required expectations. These rubrics help students by clearly showing what is expected of them, making it easier to understand how their language will be judged. In this way, rubrics provide guidance and help create a shared understanding between teachers and students about what good language looks like in a given context.

The main theory to justify using rubrics is that they clearly state what is expected from students and, more generally, describe what successful learning looks like (Brookhart, 2013; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Jonsson, 2014). This helps students understand their learning goals and where they need to improve. In other words, rubrics guide students through three important questions: what their learning goals are “Where am I going?,” how well they are currently doing “Where am I now,?” and what steps they need to take to improve “Where to go next?” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). By addressing these questions,

rubrics promote continuous self-assessment and help students take control of their own learning. Thus, well-designed rubrics do more than just explain the criteria and parts of an assignment; they also encourage students to take control of their own learning, promoting both autonomy and self-regulation (Andrade, 2010).

Furthermore, when learning involves the mastery of complex skills, such as, critical thinking and analysis which are essential skills to write in any FL, sharing rubrics becomes a critical step (Brookhart, 2013, p.94). However, it is also argued that these rubrics should be given to the students before the assignment so they know what is expected and can use it to guide their work. Additionally, students who receive rubrics often feel less confused and anxious about what teachers expect. This helps them to decrease the levels of “performance avoidance self-regulation,” which refers to a type of regulation where learners focus on avoiding negative outcomes, such as failure or embarrassment instead of trying to achieve positive goals. This form of self-regulation is the direct result of negative emotions, such as anxiety (Panadero & Jönsson, 2013). Thus, by reducing such negative emotions through rubrics, students can approach their written assignments with a more positive and motivated learning focus.

The aforementioned studies emphasised that achieving transparency in assessment is highly dependent on the effective use of scoring rubrics. That is why it is important to consider the role of sharing these criteria in EFL writing, where clear guidance and criteria can significantly enhance students’ understanding of successful writing to improve their skills.

2.5 Research Findings on Transparency in Writing Assessment

Despite the growing interest in the integration of transparency in assessment, relatively few studies have explored their impact specifically in EFL contexts. These studies

present a valuable source to understand how transparent teacher assessment practices influence the students' writing quality.

One notable study was conducted by Silva (2014) which experimented on the effect of assessment rubrics on EFL students' writing and speech performance. The results revealed that students who received scoring rubrics with explanations showed significantly higher performance than those who did not receive any explicit instruction.

Similar results were reached in Trinh and Nguyen's (2014) paper on the utilization of rubrics in facilitating students' writing process. Rubrics were shared to improve students' writing after it was examined that students typically struggled to produce well-structured compositions. Their findings revealed that the use of rubrics was highly productive as students became more aware of the specific requirements for their compositions and demonstrated noticeable improvements in their writing performance.

Bendahmane and Mostari (2017) conducted experimental research to investigate how formative assessment rubrics, combined with self-assessment, impact the writing quality of Algerian EFL students. They made students explicitly aware of the scoring criteria of writing (such as organization, grammar, vocabulary, etc.). The results showed that students who were made aware of the assessment criteria and actively participated in self-assessment using rubrics demonstrated significant improvement in their writing quality from the pre-test to post-test.

Trinh (2020) found that the use of scoring rubrics in academic writing classes for EFL led to significant improvements in students' academic writing skills. After implementing rubrics, students achieved higher grades and made fewer errors and mistakes. These outcomes suggest that the use of scoring rubrics can play a significant role in supporting the

development of academic writing skills in EFL contexts.

These valuable studies suggest that rubrics enhance clarity, promote self-regulation, and improve writing outcomes. They also highlight the potential of transparent rubrics as effective tools for advancing EFL students' academic writing quality.

2.6 Challenges of Transparent Teacher Assessment Practices

The transparent use of scoring rubrics is widely advocated for by many researchers (Jonsson, 2014; Silva 2014; Bendahmane & Mostari, 2017; Trinh, 2020). Transparent rubrics are believed to provide students with a clear understanding of what is expected in their work, potentially improving their performance. However, several challenges have been raised about the actual impact of this implementation.

In his influential paper, Sadler (2009, p.160) critically examined the use of assessment criteria and rubrics, introducing the concept of “indeterminacy,” which means that even detailed rubrics can never fully account for all aspects of quality work. This is because some important elements of judgment can only be understood by experienced assessors as they are difficult to write down. Panadero and Jonsson (2013, p. 139) further noted that a major concern of implementing this type of scoring rubrics is that students may not always understand or make effective use of the shared rubrics without direct instruction and guidance from teachers. Thus, simply providing the students with the scoring rubrics is not sufficient unless they are further taught how to interpret and apply them to their work.

In addition to these concerns, Baartman and Prins (2018) claimed that transparency does not mean communicating the “full picture” and that it comes with the risk of producing students who are dependent on their teachers and have weak self-regulation skills. In the same vein, Bearman and Ajjawi (2018), on how explicit assessment practices can support student self-regulation in higher education, called out two ‘myths’ associated with

transparency. The first suggests that transparency is achievable. Although the word transparent indicates that everything is visible, some expectations cannot be explicitly stated. The second myth suggests that transparency is neutral, the researchers believed that transparency could lead to control over the students and the way they view knowledge. Thus, the researchers argued that providing explicit assessment criteria is not effective on its own and that engaging the students in discussions about the applications of these criteria is more effective.

Bearman and Ajjawi (2021) further criticized the use of transparency; they consider it as no more than a metaphor. They argued that transparency cannot cover instances where deep and complex thinking is required. According to them, it is difficult for the teachers to accurately describe these criteria. Thus, transparency is not easily attainable. Similar results were found in Djeridi and Benazi's (2022) study which attempted to investigate whether the EFL teacher's and learners' perceptions about the use of essay assessment criteria. Although they initially argued that any essay needs to have a clear and precise scoring criteria for the students to use and for their work to be assessed accordingly, however, they found that the students suffered tremendously in their essays due to difficulty in applying the essay criteria.

Overall, simply providing rubrics may not be enough for students to fully understand or apply assessment expectations. Thus, these studies are no less than a firm proof of the complexity of such implementation in language assessment, specifically, EFL essay writing assessment.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the main concepts and principles of assessment in EFL teaching and learning. It opened up by defining and discussing how assessment principles, such as validity, reliability, practicality, washback, fairness, and transparency, are critical

factors to consider when designing an assessment. It specifically focused on transparency and its impact on students' writing quality. The chapter also highlighted how scoring rubrics can make assessment criteria more transparent for the students. Previous research argued that by making the assessment criteria transparent, students understand what a successful work looks like, ultimately, enhancing their overall performance. However, some concerns were raised about its possible risks, such as reducing creativity and critical thinking skills. Overall, these controversial views need further empirical investigation into how the implementation of transparent assessments affects students' overall writing quality and performance.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND

DATA PRESENTATION

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological design used in this study to investigate the impact of using transparent assessment criteria on the quality of essays written by Master Two ELT students. This chapter begins by discussing the different types of academic research methods and the research approach adopted. Next, it describes the setting, the population, samples, and sampling design. This chapter further gives a thorough explanation of the experimental process and its different stages. The data analysis procedures are then detailed, describing how the collected data were processed, calculated, and interpreted. Finally, the chapter addresses the ethical considerations that were considered during the study.

3.1. Research Methodology and Design

This section outlines the research methodology and design adopted in this study. This methodology is carefully chosen to ensure that the study's objectives are met through systematic data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the research approach, population and sampling design, as well as the key variables used to investigate the impact of transparent assessment criteria on essay writing quality among Master Two ELT students are explained. This thorough explanation helps to set a clear framework to understand how this study was conducted.

3.1.2 Research Approach

This study follows a quantitative experimental research design. Quantitative research primarily involves collecting numerical data to test hypotheses and draw generalizable conclusions. Given the nature of the research questions and hypotheses, as well as the need to establish cause-and-effect relationships, an experimental design was chosen.

Experimental research allows researchers to carefully observe under controlled conditions the effects behind systematically manipulating the independent variable to

observe what changes occur on a dependent variable (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 306). In this study, the independent variable is the use of transparent assessment criteria, and the dependent variable is the quality of students' essays.

Because of this ability to manipulate variables and establish causality, experimental research is widely the suitable method for investigating cause-and-effect relationships. Accordingly, this study is an experiment with ELT Master Two students. The experiment is divided into three stages: a pre-test, the treatment, and a post-test. Two separate groups of participants were exposed to different instructional methods : the experimental group received transparent assessment (using a scoring rubric) while the control group received a typical treatment (non- transparent instruction). The aim was to determine whether the use of transparent assessment criteria has a measurable impact on the quality of students' essay writing.

3.1.3 Population and Sampling Design

This study took place at the Department of English Language at Ammar Thelidji University of Laghouat. The target population comprised all Master 2 students in the English Language Teaching (ELT) section, in the academic year 2024-2025. There are thirty-five students. Since the population was relatively small, the intention was to include all students in the study to ensure representativeness and generalizability of the results. However, three students did not attend their classes at all throughout the year, which reduced the number of potential participants to thirty-two students who were regularly attending their classes. Because the experiment was conducted at the end of the academic year, not all students were present to participate in the pre-test phase of the experiment. Consequently, twenty-nine students participated. As the experiment moved to the next phases, further attrition occurred, resulting in a final sample of 16 students who completed the entire experimental procedure.

To ensure the representativeness and validity of the results, this study used a random sampling method to assign participants to either experimental or control groups. Random sampling helped ensure that each participant had an equal chance of being placed in either group, thereby minimizing selection bias, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study, and improving the generalizability of findings within the population studied.

The choice of Master Two students was deliberate, as they have the required level to write essays, making them suitable to participate in the experiment. In addition, they will soon be the first graduates from this newly introduced branch (ELT) in the department. This fact makes these students a unique population whose experiences and challenges are essential in providing valuable insights to inform future practices.

3.1.4 Research Variables

A Research variable can be defined as “ a condition or characteristic that can take on different values or categories (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 37), such as age or essay quality, and is classified as independent if it is presumed to cause changes and dependent if it is to be influenced by the independent variable. In this study, the independent variable is transparent assessment criteria, while the dependent variable is students’ essay writing quality. The experimental group received the independent variable in the form of a detailed scoring rubric that explains the criteria on which students’ essays will be judged, while the control group did not.

3.2. The Experimental Procedure

In order to find out whether the use of transparent essay assessment criteria has a significant impact on students’ writing, this study employs an experimental procedure. During the error analysis module session, participants were randomly divided into two groups: an experimental group, which received the intervention (scoring rubric), and a control group,

which received the standard treatment. The experiment consisted of three stages: the pre-test, the treatment, and the post-test. Both groups were asked to write compare-and-contrast and narrative essays, two essays for each student, resulting in thirty-two essays written under similar conditions.

During the pre-test, the teacher instructed participants to write a compare- and-contrast essay on *the advantages and disadvantages of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into education*. This topic was chosen due to the participants' interest in how AI is reshaping EFL teaching and learning. The students were given exactly one hour to complete their essays.

During the post-test, participants were required to write a narrative essay about their own experiences as EFL students, focusing on the challenges they faced while delivering presentations and the strategies they used to overcome those challenges and improve their performance. They were also given exactly one hour to write this essay. The same scoring rubric was used to assess both essays in the two stages (pre-test and post-test) to ensure consistency and objectivity in grading.

3.2.1 The Pre-test

When conducting an experiment, the initial stage is called the pre-test. The aim of the researcher at this stage is to evaluate the overall essay writing performance of the participants prior to any introduced intervention. Figure 3.1 is provided to clarify the steps followed.

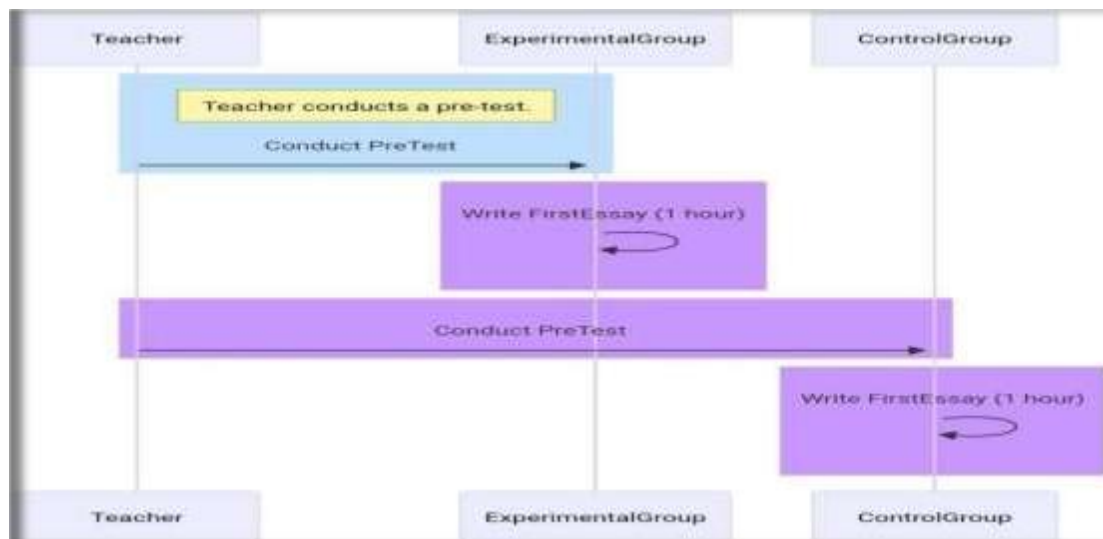


Figure 3.1. Sequence Diagram of the Pre-test Phase

Figure 3.1 presents a sequence diagram outlining the main steps of the pre-test phase. The process began with the teacher conducting the pre-test for both the experimental and control groups. Each participant was then given one hour to write the essay under the same conditions. At this stage, only the teacher had access to the scoring rubric.

3.2.2 The Treatment

Following the pre-test, the treatment stage is conducted. The researcher implements the specific interventions or manipulations intended to test the suggested hypotheses. To this end, the participants were assigned randomly to either the control or experimental group.

It is critical to maintain a clear distinction between the experimental group and the control group. The group that received the intervention was the experimental group; each participant in this group was provided with a printed copy of the standardized scoring rubric developed by Silva (2014) that will be used to assess their essays (see appendix I). This rubric evaluates various aspects of writing, including relevance and content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation, and readability of the paper. Relevance and content focus on how knowledgeable the material is, whether the thesis statement is precise

and well-developed, and if the content stays relevant to the assigned topic. Organization assesses the presence of an inviting introduction and a satisfactory conclusion, the clear development and support of the main idea, skilful paragraph management, and proper cohesion throughout the text. Vocabulary is evaluated based on the use of a sophisticated and appropriate range of words, as well as effective word choice and usage. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation are examined to ensure there are no grammatical errors, especially with subject-verb agreement, that sentence structures are correct, spelling is accurate, and punctuation is properly applied. Finally, readability considers whether the writing is neat, easy to read, and free from errors, ensuring the overall clarity and presentation of the work. In contrast, the Non-transparent group received general instructions without access to the rubric. This distinction is important for later comparisons because it allows the researcher to ensure that any observed change(s) can be attributed to the intervention itself rather than external factors. Figure 3.2 is provided to clarify the steps followed.

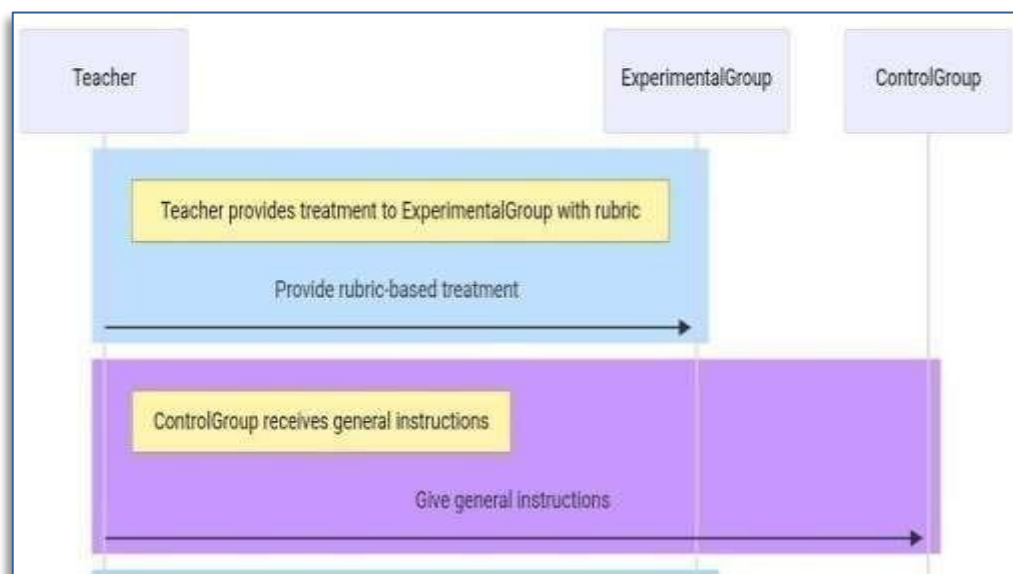


Figure 3.2. Sequence Diagram of the Treatment Phase

Figure 3.2 presents a sequence diagram illustrating the main steps of the treatment phase. The diagram begins with the teacher assigning participants to the experimental

or control group. For the experimental group, the teacher provides each student with a printed copy of the scoring rubric, which explains the criteria for quality essay writing. In contrast, the control group receives only general instructions without access to the rubric.

3.2.3 The Post-test

During the post-test, data was collected using the same methods employed in the pre-test to maintain the reliability of the results. After two weeks and during the error analysis session , the second essay writing test was administered to students by the teacher. Figure 3.3 illustrating the post-test procedure is provided to clarify the steps followed.

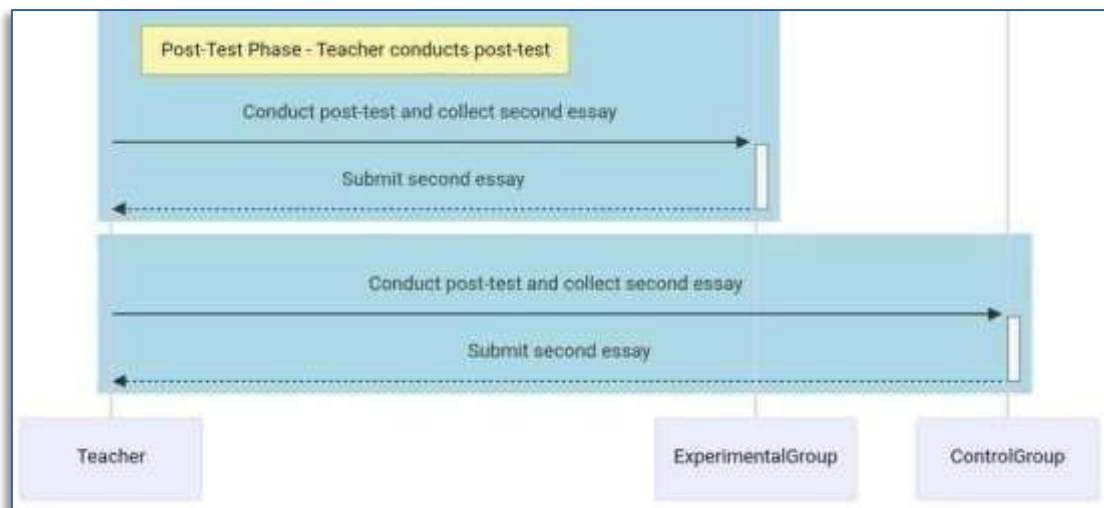


Figure 3.3 Sequence Diagram of the Post-test Phase

Figure 3.3 displays a sequence diagram outlining the main steps of the post- test phase. The process begins with the teacher conducting the post-test for both the experimental and control groups, two weeks after the pre-test. Each participant is asked to write and submit their second essay under the same conditions as before. When all essays from both phases were collected, they were corrected using Silva's (2014) rubric (see Appendix I).

3.3. Data Analysis Procedures

The comparison of pre-test and post-test data allowed the researcher to identify any significant changes resulting from the intervention. This is fundamental in concluding causation and the overall impact of the experiment. However, to sustain reliability in the evaluation process and avoid any manipulation or bias in the results, the essays are corrected first through an AI tool and then by another qualified teacher from the Department of English other than the module teacher graded the essays. This teacher was chosen because he did not know the students personally, which would help reduce bias and make the results more reliable and objective. Once both the AI and the teacher had scored the essays; the median score was calculated to be used in the data analysis.

The inter-rater reliability test was calculated to measure the consistency between the AI-assisted scoring and the teacher's scoring, ensuring the reliability of the assessment process. Furthermore, all the data collected in this study were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were obtained to examine the effects of transparency in assessment on students' writing performance. First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the performance scores of both the transparent and Non-transparent groups on the essay tasks. These statistics provided an overview of the differences within each group. To reach answers to the research questions and test the hypotheses, inferential statistical tests were conducted:

- An Independent Samples T-test was used to compare the Post-test (Essay 2) scores between the transparent and Non-transparent groups. This test determines whether any observed differences between the groups were statistically significant.
 - A Paired Samples T-test was performed to examine changes in performance between the Pre-test (Essay 1) and Post-test (Essay 2) within the same group. This allowed for the evaluation of improvement over time within the same group participants.
-

3.4 Data Presentation and Interpretation

This section presents and interprets the data collected during the experimental study. The results are presented according to the key assessment criteria, with a focus on comparing the performance of the experimental (transparent) and control (non-transparent) groups.

3.4.1 Descriptive Statistics: Pre-test Essay Criteria Scores

The following descriptive statistics are used to summarize the mean pre-test scores of the two groups on five essay assessment criteria: relevance, organization, vocabulary, grammar and mechanics, and readability. These statistics are presented in the following figures, which show the average mean score of each group on each criterion. The Pre-Test average scores of the Non-Transparent Group are presented first.

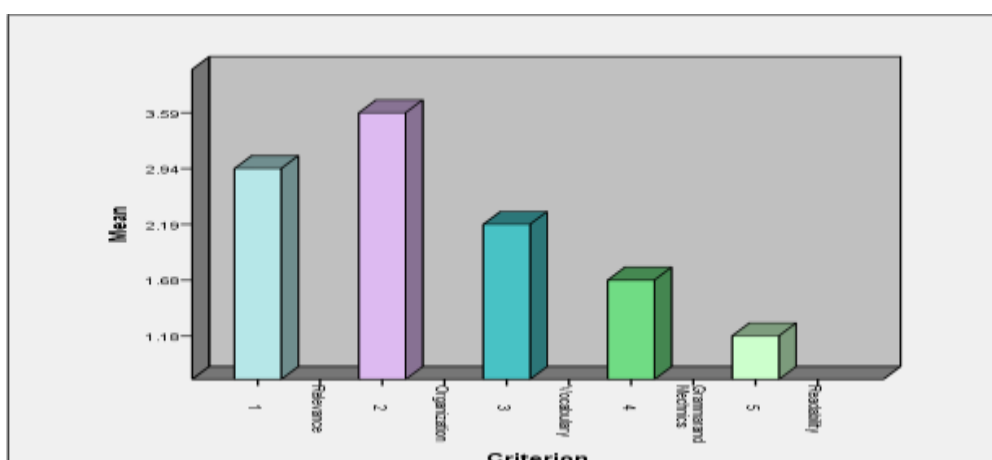


Figure 3.4 Pre-test Average Scores of the Non-transparent Group on Quality Essays Criteria

Figure 3.4 shows the mean scores of the Non-transparent group in the pre-test for each essay quality criterion: relevance (2.94 out of 4), organization (3.59 out of 6), vocabulary (2.19 out of 4), grammar and mechanics (1.68 out of 4), and readability (1.18 out of 2). These scores represent the average performance of all students in this group rather than individual results. For example, the relevance score of 2.94 out of 4 suggests that, on average, students

were successful in addressing the assigned essay topic; the organization score of 3.59 out of 6 reflects a moderate level of essay structure and coherence, showing that students had some ability to organize their ideas but still can improve. Vocabulary, with a mean score of 2.19 out of 4, indicates a fair use of language. The grammar and mechanics score of 1.68 out of 4 points to noticeable challenges with sentence structure, punctuation, or spelling, indicating that this area needs further attention. Finally, the readability score of 1.18 out of 2 implies that the essays were somewhat clear and neat.

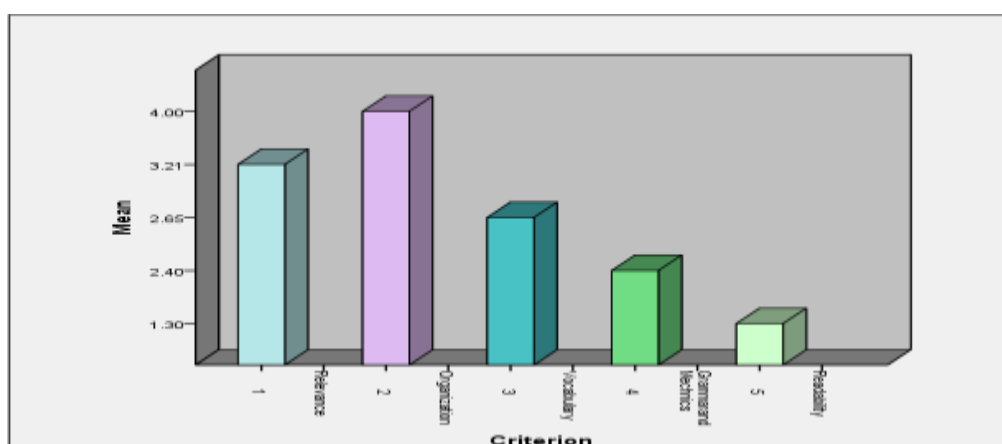


Figure 3.5 Pre-test Average Scores of Transparent Group on Quality Essays
Criteria

Figure 3.5 presents the mean scores of the Transparent group in the pre-test on the same criteria: relevance (3.21 out of 4), organization (3.95 out of 6), vocabulary (2.65 out of 4), grammar and mechanics (2.40 out of 4), and readability (1.30 out of 2). The relevance score of 3.21 out of 4 means that, on average, students demonstrated a good ability to stay focused on the topic, the organization score of 3.95 out of 6 reflects a moderate level of essay structure and logical flow, while vocabulary and grammar scores indicate a fair command over language use and mechanics. The readability score shows that essays were generally clear and easy to read. These results shown in both figures reflect the initial essay writing abilities of the students as measured by the different scores for each criterion.

3.4.2 Descriptive Statistics: Post-test Essay Criteria Scores

The following is a detailed presentation of the descriptive statistics used to summarize the mean post-test scores of two groups on the same criteria as the pre-test. These statistics are presented in the following figures, which show the average mean score of each group on each criterion².

3.4.2.1 Post-test Scores in Relevance

Figure 3.6 presents a comparison between the post-test scores for relevance and content for the two groups: the Non-transparent Group and the Transparent Group, highlighting the differences in performance following the intervention.

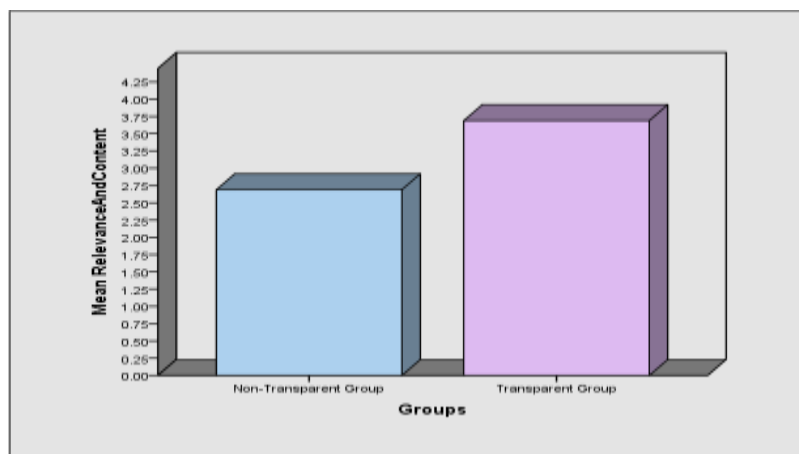


Figure 3.6 Comparisons of Relevance and Content Scores between Non- Transparent and Transparent Groups in the Post-Test

The results presented in the above figure show a clear difference between the two groups in the relevance of the content in the second essay. Participants who were provided with an essay scoring rubric (the transparent group) achieved a higher mean score ($M = 3.75$) compared to those who did not receive the scoring rubric (the non-transparent group, $M = 2.75$). These statistics show that when students understand precisely what is expected of them, they are better able to make their content relevant and focused on only the most relevant information, avoiding the inclusion of irrelevant details.

3.4.2.2 Post-test Scores in Organization

Figure 3.7 compares the post-test performance of the Non-transparent and Transparent Groups based on the organization criterion. The figure illustrates how each group scored following the intervention, highlighting the impact of transparency on participants' ability to organize their responses effectively.

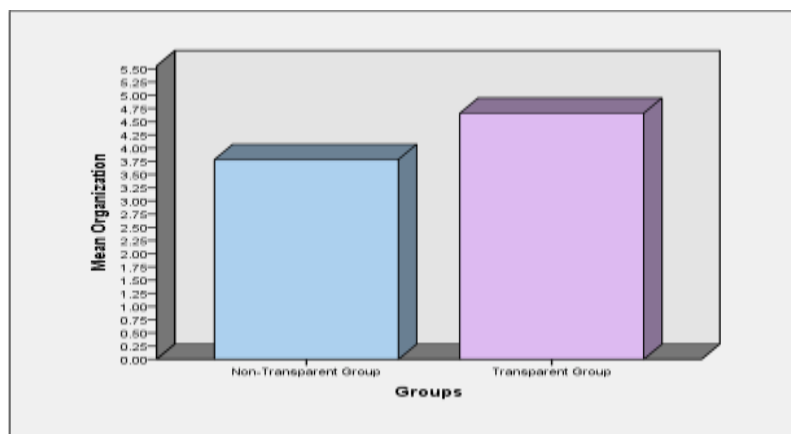


Figure 3.7 Comparisons of Organization Scores between Non-transparent and Transparent Groups in the Post-Test

The data presented in Figure 3.7 indicate a clear difference in the second essay's organization criteria scores between the two groups. Participants who were provided with essay scoring rubric (the Transparent Group) achieved a higher mean score ($M = 4.50$) compared to those in the Non-transparent group, who achieved a lower mean score ($M = 3.75$). This suggests that access to explicit assessment criteria has a positive impact on students' ability to structure their essays in a more organized manner.

3.4.2.3 Post-test Scores in Vocabulary

Figure 3.8 presents the post-test scores for the vocabulary criterion of the Non-Transparent Group and the Transparent Group, highlighting the impact of transparency on participants' use of their vocabulary.

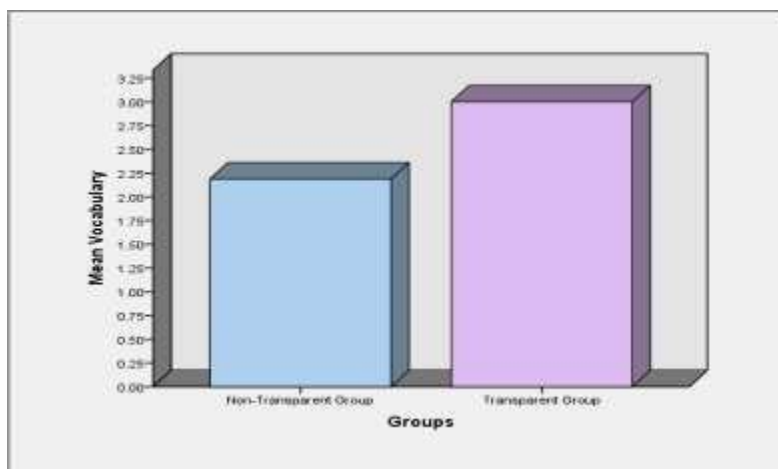


Figure 3.8 Comparison of Vocabulary Scores Between Non-transparent and Transparent Groups in the Post-Test

There is a clear difference in the second essay vocabulary criteria scores between the two groups displayed in the figure above. The transparent group, which had access to the scoring rubric, achieved a higher mean score ($M = 3.15$) compared to the non-transparent group ($M = 2.15$). This result indicates that explicit assessment criteria contribute notably to improving vocabulary use in students' writing.

3.4.2.4 Post-test Scores in Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation

Figure 3.9 presents the post-test scores for the grammar, spelling, and punctuation criterion. The figure displays the average performance of participants in each group, providing a comparison of how each group scored in this specific criterion.

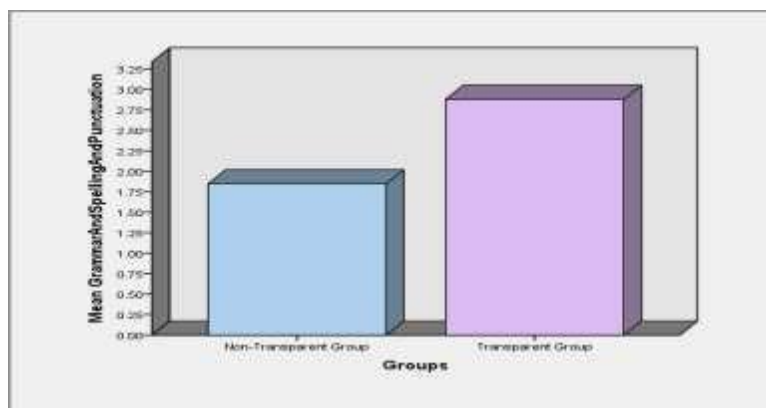


Figure 3.9 Comparison of Grammar, Spelling and punctuation Scores between Non- Transparent and Transparent Groups in the Second Essay

As data shown in Figure 3.9, there is a notable difference in the scores for grammar, spelling, and punctuation between the two groups in the second essay. The transparent group, who had access to the essay scoring rubric, achieved a higher mean score ($M = 3$) than the Non-transparent group ($M = 1.80$). This suggests that explicit assessment criteria had a positive impact on students' grammatical accuracy and mechanics.

3.4.2.5 Post-test scores in Readability

Figure 3.10 presents comparison between the post-test scores for the readability criterion of the Non-transparent Group and the Transparent Group. The figure shows the average results achieved by participants in each group.

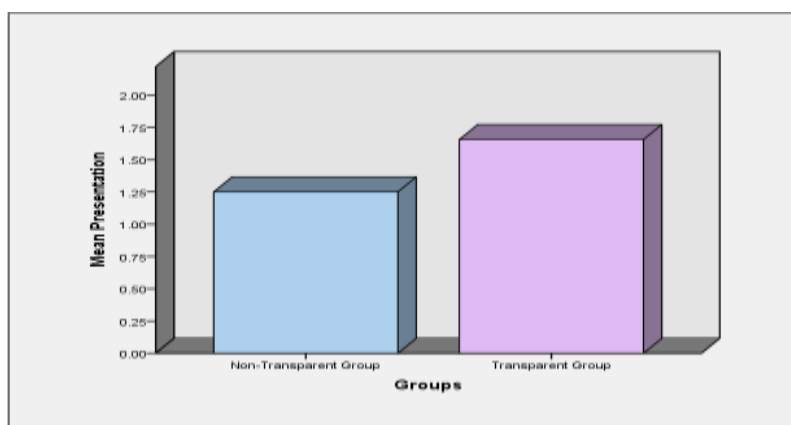


Figure 3.10 Comparisons of Readability Scores between Non-Transparent and Transparent Groups in the Post-Test

The results shown in Figure 3.10 highlight a clear difference in the overall readability scores between the two groups on the second essay. Participants in the transparent group, who received the essay scoring rubric, achieved a higher mean score for readability ($M = 1.65$) compared to those in the Non-transparent group ($M = 1.25$). This suggests that providing students with explicit assessment criteria positively influenced the readability of their work.

The results displayed in this section clearly indicate that students in the transparent group, who had access to a detailed scoring rubric, consistently achieved higher scores than their classmates in the Non-transparent group on all evaluated aspects of essay writing in the post-test. Specifically, the transparent group achieved higher mean scores in relevance ($M = 3.75$ vs. 2.75), organization ($M = 4.50$ vs. 3.75), vocabulary ($M = 3.15$ vs. 2.15), grammar, spelling, and punctuation ($M = 3.00$ vs. 1.80), and readability ($M = 1.65$ vs. 1.25). These findings suggest that providing students with clear assessment criteria results in more focused, and organized essays with improved vocabulary, grammar, mechanics and readability.

3.4.3 Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Results

This section illustrates a detailed comparison of the overall mean essay scores obtained before and after the intervention for each group. By examining these scores, these figures highlight any potential change in performance after the intervention. This approach allows for a clear understanding of whether the instructional strategies implemented had a measurable impact on students' essay writing abilities

3.4.3.1 The Non-transparent Group Average Scores

This section presents a comparison of the overall mean essay scores obtained from both essays for the Non-transparent group. Figure 3.11 highlights any possible changes in performance between the pre-test and post-test. It is important to note that the Non-

transparent group did not receive any intervention. Therefore, any observed difference in scores reflects either natural or progress affected by external factors rather than the impact of a specific intervention.

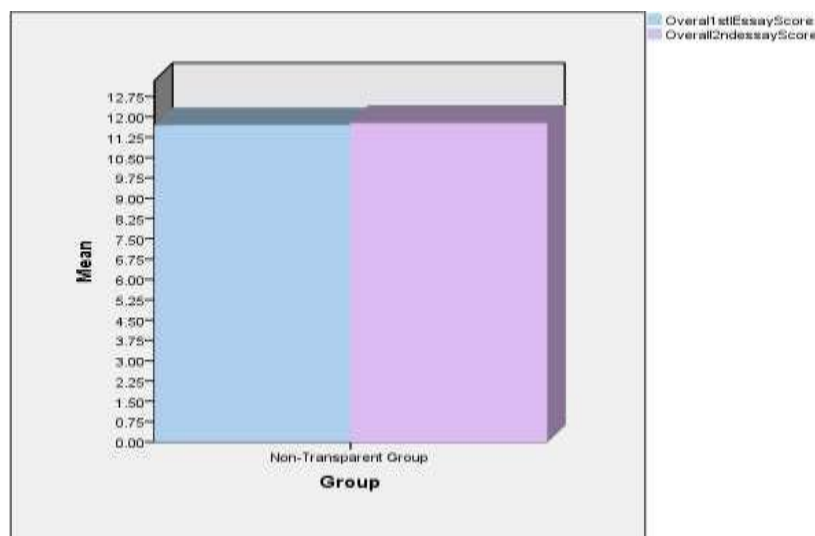


Figure 3.11 Comparison between Pre-test and Post- test Overall Mean Essay Scores of the Non-transparent Group

Figure 3.11 presented a comparison between pre-test and post-test overall mean essay scores for the Non-transparent group. The statistics reveal only a minimal improvement. Participants who did not receive the essay scoring rubric at any stage made a slight increase in their mean score, from 11.65 in Essay 1 (Pre-test) to 11.75 in Essay 2 (Post-test). This minimal change suggests that the absence of explicit assessment criteria did not significantly impact students' overall writing performance.

4.3.2 The Transparent Group Average Scores

This section presents a comparison of the overall mean essay scores obtained before and after the intervention for the Transparent Group. Figure 3.12 shows a comparison of the overall mean essay scores obtained before and after the intervention for the Transparent Group. This figure highlights the changes in performance between the pre-test and post-test.

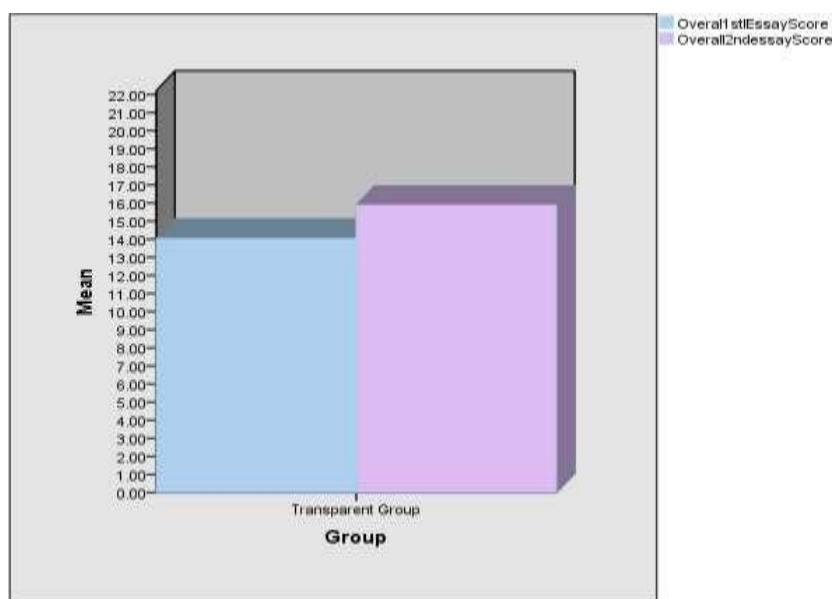


Figure 3.12 Comparison between Pre-test and Post- test Overall Mean Essay Scores of the transparent Group

Figure 3.12 above is a comparison between the pre-test and post-test overall mean essay scores of the transparent group. The results of the students who were provided with essay scoring rubric at the treatment stage show a significant increase. In Essay 1 (Pre-test), the mean score was 13.96, while in Essay 2 (Post-test), the mean score increased to 16. This represents an improvement of 2.04 points, which equals a 14.61 % increase in overall performance. In educational terms, such a gain is considered meaningful, especially over a relatively short intervention period and a hard skill to develop where improvements are usually minimal or gradual. This notable improvement suggests that access to transparent assessment criteria has a direct and positive impact on students' writing quality. However, to confirm that this change is both significant and not random, inferential statistics including Independent and Paired Samples T-tests will be conducted.

This section compared the pre-test and post-test results within each group. The data revealed that both groups improved in the second essay. However, the improvement was minimal in the Non-transparent in comparison to the transparent group,

which showed greater improvement in all assessed criteria. This suggests that providing students with clear and detailed assessment rubrics not only leads to progress in writing skills compared to instructions without explicit criteria.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The essays analysed in this study were part of the students' regular error analysis module assessment, and no explicit informed consent was obtained. This approach was adopted to collect data that was as free from external influence as possible, ensuring that the students' essays reflected their real level of essay writing. It also aimed to prevent any changes in their writing that might occur if they were aware that their works were being used for research purposes. However, in order to protect participants' confidentiality, all data was anonymized using coded IDs (e.g., ID1, ID2), and the teacher responsible for scoring did not know the students' identities. There was no risk of harm to participants, as the data collection involved only routine academic activities and did not affect students' official grades. These measures were taken to protect participant confidentiality and minimize potential bias.

Conclusion

This chapter has systematically presented the methodology, procedures, and interpreted the findings of the conducted experimental study investigating the impact of transparent assessment criteria on the essay writing quality of Master Two ELT students at Ammar Thelidji University of Laghouat. Through the use of a quantitative experimental design, the descriptive statistics clearly showed that the transparent group outperformed the Non-transparent group across all evaluated criteria. Notably, the transparent group not only achieved higher mean scores but also showed greater improvement between Pre-test and Post-test results. This finding indicates that access to clear teacher assessment criteria enables students to understand better the expectations and improve the quality of their work.

CHAPTER FOUR
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents both the analysis and the discussion of the study's findings. Using the SPSS, it will first present an analysis of the reliability of the data collected, and then inferential statistical tests are applied to determine whether these differences are statistically significant between the two group's grades (the Experimental and Control Groups). Then, these results are discussed in light of the study's objectives, with attention to how the rubric influenced students' outcomes and what these findings suggest for future writing assessment practices.

4.1. Inter-Rater Reliability Analysis

The inter-rater reliability analysis is an essential step to ensure the assessments provided by multiple assessors are reliable and free from individual bias. In this study, it was conducted to support the validity of the assigned grades between the two raters involved in the grading process. Table 4.1 below presents the case processing summary for the inter-rater reliability analysis. This table provides an overview of the number of valid and excluded essays included in the assessment.

		N	%
Cases	Valid	32	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	32	100.0

Table 4.1: Case Processing Summary

As shown in table 4.1, each rater independently graded a number of 32 essays (two essays per student), all of which were included as valid in the analysis. This means that all the essays met the required level to be included in the analysis. However, the reliability statistics which offer insights into the level of agreement between the two raters is shown in the following table (Table 4.2). The reliability analysis was conducted to assess the degree of

agreement between two raters using Cronbach's alpha, a widely used statistical measure to evaluate internal consistency.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.954	2

Table 4.2: Reliability Statistics

The statistics above report a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.954, indicating an excellent level of consistency between the two raters is maintained. This level of agreement implies that the results are unlikely to be influenced by individual bias or subjectivity, thereby strengthening the reliability of the data and the validity of the study's findings. This process of examining inter-rater reliability has highlighted the strong consistency and objectivity of the grading process. The results of this test suggest that the assessment process is not influenced by individual bias or subjectivity, which strengthens the upcoming results of the study.

4.2. Inferential Statistics Analysis

This section is dedicated to confirm or reject the hypothesis through comparing means from the control and experimental group at different times (grades without rubrics and with rubrics). To do so, measuring both Independent and Paired Samples T-tests are necessary. The Independent Samples T-test was used to compare the means between the control and experimental groups when the samples are independent of each other (e.g. Different groups), while the Paired Samples T-test was applied to compare the means within the same group across two different conditions. Together, these tests enable us to test the hypotheses regarding the impact of transparent assessment criteria on students essay writing performance.

4.2.1 Independent Samples T-test

To determine whether the observed differences in essay grades between the Transparent and Non-Transparent groups were statistically significant and not random, an Independent Samples T-test was conducted. This test compares the mean grades of two different groups to assess whether any observed difference is likely due to chance or is in fact the direct effect of the applied intervention. The results of the Pre-test and Post-test must be examined in light of two hypotheses; first, the null hypothesis (H_0) which assumes that there is no statistically significant difference between the Pre-test and Post-test mean grades. Second, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) presumes that there is a statistically significant difference between the Pre-test and Post-test mean grades.

The following table presents the results for the overall grades for the second essay in both the Non-Transparent and Transparent groups¹. It summarizes key statistical measures including the mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the mean for each group. This comparison is important to understand the differences in performance between the students in the two groups.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall2ndEssayGrade	Non-Transparent Group	8	11.7500	2.88778	1.02099
	Transparent Group	8	15.8750	2.08310	.73649

Table 4.3: Group Statistics

The mean represents the average grade for each group, with the Transparent group achieving a higher mean ($M = 15.87$) compared to the Non-Transparent group ($M = 11.75$).

¹ The median score between the two rater was used.

This difference indicates that, on average, students who received transparent assessment criteria performed better in essay writing (4.12 points difference). The standard deviation (SD) provides a measure of how much the grades vary within each group; the Transparent group had a lower SD (2.08) than the Non-Transparent group (2.89), suggesting that their grades were not only higher on average but also more consistent, which means all the students from the transparent group benefited from the intervention. Furthermore, the Independent Samples T-test for the two groups is presented in Table 4.4 below to determine whether the observed difference in means is significant enough to reject the null hypothesis.

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.707	.415	-3.277	14	.006	-4.12500	1.25890	-6.82507	-1.42493
EssayGrade Equal variances not assumed			-3.277	12.733	.006	-4.12500	1.25890	-6.85050	-1.39950

Table 4.4: Independent Samples Test

Table 4.4 above presents the results of an Independent Samples T-test, comparing the overall second essay grades between the two groups. The table is divided into two main parts: Levene's Test for Equality of Variances and the Test for Equality of Means. First, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted to check if the variances between the two groups are equal. The significance value (Sig.) for Levene's Test is 0.415, which is greater than 0.05. This result means that the assumption of equal variances is met, so the results under

"Equal variances assumed" in the table above are valid. Second, the T-Test for Equality of Means shows a t-value of -4.125, with a significance (2-tailed) value of 0.006. The mean difference between the groups is -4.125. This result is important to determine whether the difference in mean grades between the Transparent and Non-Transparent groups is statistically significant.

For better visual presentation, these results are represented in the figure 4.1 below. This figure visually compares the results of the mean essay grades for the second essay between the Transparent and Non-Transparent groups obtained from the Independent Samples T-test. The y-axis represents the mean overall essay grade, while the x-axis distinguishes between the two groups.

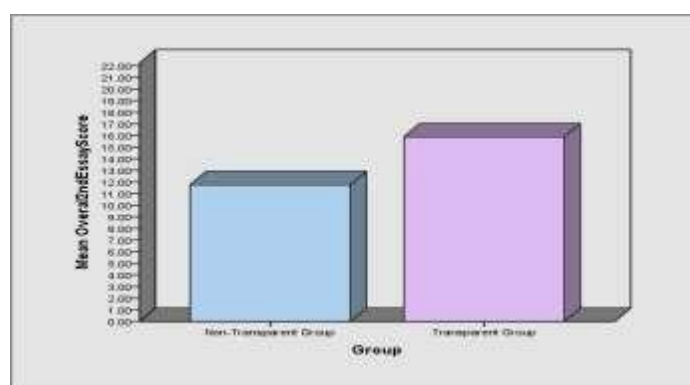


Figure 4.1 Comparison of Essay Two Mean Grades between Both Groups

The figure 4.1 above clearly shows that the Transparent Group achieved a higher Mean grade compared to the Non-Transparent Group in the Post-test assessment. Specifically, the mean grade for the transparent group is approximately 16, while the mean for the Non-Transparent group is around 11.75. This difference is consistent with the numerical results from the Independent Samples T-test table, where the transparent group outperformed the Non-Transparent group by a mean difference of 4.125 points. This difference in mean grades suggests that students who received the intervention (transparent scoring rubrics) performed

better on their essays than those who received the typical treatment. This finding indicates that the intervention has had a significant positive effect on students essay writing performance stressing the importance of such implementation to create more effective assessment processes.

4.2.2 Paired Samples T-test

A Paired Samples T-test is a statistical test used to compare the means of two related measurements of the same group to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between them (Field, 2018). This test is specifically designed for situations where measurements are conducted twice for the same participants, such as before and after an intervention, or under two different conditions (Moore, McCabe, & Craig, 2017).

In this study, the Paired Samples T-test is needed to compare two related measurements from the same students. This test allows for a direct comparison of each student's performance and helps to prove that the observed improvement is due to transparent assessment criteria rather than other external factors. Thus, a Paired Samples T-test was conducted to compare the first essay (Pre-test) and the second essay (Post-test) grades within both the Non-Transparent and Transparent groups. The results are shown in the following tables. Table 4.5 provides the comparison between the overall grades for the first and second essays in the Non-Transparent Group; it includes key statistical measures, such as, the mean, standard deviation, and standard error of the mean for each essay.

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall1stEssayGrades	11.6875	8	2.47036	.87340
Overall2ndEssayGrades	11.7500	8	2.88778	1.02099

Table 4.5: Non-Transparent Group Paired Samples Statistics

The results presented in Table 4.5 show that the mean grade for first essay (pre- test) was 11.68 (SD = 2.47), while the mean grade for the second essay (Post-test) increased to 11.75 (SD = 2.88). That is a difference of 0.06 points, in practical terms, this difference is minimal. This means that there is almost no change in average performance between the two essays.

Table 4.6 below presents the overall grades for the first and second essays in the transparent group. This table provides an important summary of the performance of the students before and after the implementation of the transparent assessment criteria, which helps us to observe any significant changes or improvements.

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall1stEssayGrades	13.9688	8	2.16893	.76683
Overall2ndEssayGrades	15.8750	8	2.08310	.73649

Table 4.6: Transparent Group Paired Samples Statistics

The results presented in Table 4.6 show that the mean grade for the first essay (pre-test) was 13.96 (SD = 2.16), while the mean grade for the second essay (Post-test) increased to 15.87 (SD = 2.08). This improvement of nearly two points suggests that students performed better on the Post-test after being exposed to transparent assessment criteria. The standard deviation between the two tests remained almost the same, which means that the improvement was consistent among the students. To further prove that the results are statistically significant, the following tables represent more detailed results of the Paired Samples T-test.

The Table 4.7 below show the Paired Samples Statistical test comparing the grades from the first and second essays for the Non-transparent group. The key statistical measures

discussed in this table include: The mean difference between the two essays of the same group, the t-value, and the significance level (p- value).

	Paired Differences					T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	d. Error Mean	5% Confidence terval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Overall1stEssay Grades Overall2nd Essay Grades	-.06250-	1.50446	.53191	-1.32026-	1.19526	-.118-		.910

Table 4.7: Non-Transparent Group Paired Samples Test

As shown in the table above, the average difference between the two grades is 0.06250, which means that, on average, the second essay grades were 0.06 points higher than the first essay; this difference is minimal and cannot be considered significant. This is shown in the t-value, which is used to check if the differences between the two essays are due to chance. The closer the t-value is to zero, the more likely it is due to chance. In this group, the t- value is -0.118 which means that the minimal improvement was likely due to chance. The p-value tells if the difference is statistically significant or not. In this group, the p- value is 0.910; since this number is much higher than the standard 0.05, the difference is not statistically significant.

The results presented in table 4.8 below show the results of the paired samples statistical test comparing the grades from the first and second essays for the transparent group.

	Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	d. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Overall1stEssay Grades Overall2ndEssay Grades	1.90625	1.46347	.51741	-3.12974	-.68276	-3.684		.008

Table 4.8: Transparent Group Paired Samples Test

The average difference between the two sets of grades is 1.90625, which means that, on average, the second essay grades were 1.9 points higher than the first essay; this difference is considered high and can be significant. This is represented in the t-value in this group; the t-value is 3.684, which means that the improvement was not due to chance. The p-value for this group is 0.008; this value is less than 0.05. This fact indicates a statistically significant improvement in essay grades for the Transparent Group from the first to the second essay. This finding contrasts with the Non-transparent group, which showed no significant change between essays.

The Paired Samples T-test results showed that transparent group improved significantly in their second essay grades, with an average increase of nearly two points compared to the first essay grades. This improvement was statistically proven to be significant. On the other hand, the Non-transparent group showed minimal change in their grades, which is not statistically significant. These results suggest that using transparent assessment criteria helped students improve their writing.

4.3. Discussion of the Results

The discussion section explains the main findings obtained from the statistical analyses conducted in the study. This section focuses on the impact of transparent assessment scoring rubrics on the students writing performance, focusing on discussing both descriptive

and inferential statistics. Thus, this discussion will explore what the results tell us about the benefits of transparency in assessment.

4.3.1 General Discussion of the Descriptive Statistics

One of the aims of this study was to investigate the impact of providing transparent essay scoring rubrics on various aspects of students' essay writing performance. The results of the descriptive statistics consistently showed that students who received the scoring rubric (the transparent group) achieved higher grades than those who did not (the Non-transparent group) across all measured criteria: content relevance, organization, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation, and readability. Furthermore, these results indicate that the Transparent group achieved a significant improvement in overall essay grades from the pre-test to the post-test, while the Non-transparent group's improvement was insignificant (minimal).

Table 4.9 below provides a summary of the comparison of the mean scores for various writing criteria between the Transparent Group and the Non-transparent group before any intervention (pre-test).

Criterion	Transparent Group Mean	Non-Transparent Group Mean	an increase (points)
Content Relevance	3.21	2.94	0.27
Organization	3.95	3.60	0.35
Vocabulary	2.65	2.19	0.46
Grammar, Spelling and punctuation	2.40	1.68	0.72
Readability	1.30	1.18	0.12

Table 4.9: The Mean Increase of the Different Writing Criteria Improvements in the Post-Test

The results in the table above show that even before the intervention, the transparent group had higher mean scores than the Non-transparent group across all assessed criteria. This is important to take into consideration before discussing the impact of any intervention and its significance.

Table 4.10 below provides a summary of the comparison of the mean scores for various writing criteria between the Transparent group and the Non-Transparent Group after the intervention (post-test).

Criterion	Transparent Group Mean	Non-Transparent Group Mean	Percentage Improvement (%)
Content Relevance	3.75	2.75	36.36%
Organization	4.50	3.75	20%
Vocabulary	3.15	2.15	46.51%
Grammar, Spelling and punctuation	3.00	1.80	66.67%
Readability	1.65	1.25	32%

Table 4.10: The Mean Increase of the Different Writing Criteria Improvements in the Pre-Test

The findings presented in the table above suggest that although the Transparent group had higher mean scores than the Non-transparent group from the beginning, the difference after the intervention became even more evident across all writing criteria: Grammar, spelling, punctuation (+66.67%), vocabulary (+46.51%), content, relevance (+36.36%), organization (+20%), readability (+32%). These outcome suggest that when students clearly understand the expectations (assessment criteria), they are better equipped to focus on writing more relevant content, organize their ideas better, use richer vocabulary, and improve their grammatical and mechanical usage as well as their paper readability. This

means that the intervention was highly effective, thus, the rubric did not only serve as an assessment tool but also as an effective instructional guide that enhanced students' writing.

4.3.2 Inter-Rater Reliability Test

The inter-rater reliability test was conducted to make sure that the essay scoring process in this study was both consistent and not affected by any external factors. This is an essential step to confirm that different raters interpret and apply the scoring criteria without any biases. Otherwise, the results cannot be valid. According to George & Mallery (2003, p. 240) values that equals or above 0.90 are considered "excellent," a value of 0.80 are considered "good," while values that equals or above 0.70 are "acceptable," and values that equal or are below 0.60 are "questionable."

The Cronbach's Alpha in this study is 0.954 which shows an "excellent" level of consistency between the two raters. This level of agreement between raters also shows that the scoring rubric was clearly defined and effectively communicated, allowing both raters to interpret and apply them in a consistent manner. This finding strengthens the validity of the data collected and subsequent tests and analyses.

4.3.3 Discussion of the Inferential Statistics

The inferential statistics help us understand whether the difference in essay grades are meaningful and statistically significant or the effects obtained are more likely to be the direct result of external factors. Thus, this section focuses on discussing both the Independent Samples T-test and Paired Samples T-test to show whether the transparent group's improvement was significant, while the Non-transparent group's improvement was not.

4.3.3.1 Independent Samples T-test

The results shown in Table 4.3 indicate that the Transparent group achieved a higher average grade than the Non-Transparent group, with a difference of 4.12 points (15.87 vs. 11.75), which suggests that providing transparent assessment criteria can have a positive effect on students' performance. The lower standard deviation in the Transparent group (2.08 compared to 2.89) indicates that the grades in this group were more consistent, meaning most students benefited similarly from the use of the transparent criteria.

Moreover, one of the key assumptions of a valid Independent Samples T-test is that the two groups compared have equal variances. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was conducted to assess this assumption. This concept is important because many statistical tests, including the Independent Samples T-test, assume that the groups compared have equal variances. If this assumption is met, the test results are more accurate and reliable. If the variances are very different (a situation called heteroscedasticity), the test can give misleading results or increase the risk of errors (Field, 2018; Laerd Statistics, n.d.).

According to table 4.4, Sig. (0.415) is greater than 0.05, which means the groups have equal variances, so equal variance is assumed. Under the equal variances assumption, the p-value is 0.006 and the mean difference is -4.125. Since $p = 0.006$ is less than 0.05, the difference between the group means is statistically significant. This means it is highly unlikely that the observed difference occurred randomly or by chance.

In the SPSS, the mean difference is calculated as follows: Mean of Group 1 minus Mean of Group 2. Negative results mean that Group 1 graded lower on average than Group 2. The mean difference shown in the table is -4.125 points. This means the first group (Non-Transparent group) graded, on average, 4.125 points lower than the second group (Transparent group). These findings support the conclusion that transparent assessment

criteria have a positive and statistically significant effect on students' essay writing performance. The combination of a higher mean, lower standard deviation, and significant mean difference shows that providing clear assessment rubrics leads to both improved and more consistent writing outcomes. Furthermore, figure 4.1 provides a visual presentation of the impact of transparent assessment criteria on student essay performance. The higher mean grade for the Transparent Group indicates that these students, on average, have significantly better grades compared to those in the Non-Transparent group. To calculate how much higher the Transparent Group's mean grade is compared to the Non-Transparent group, the following steps were taken:

1. To find the difference in grades between the two groups, the mean grade of the Non-Transparent group was subtracted from the mean grade of the Transparent Group. In this case, the Transparent Group had a mean grade of 15.87, and the Non-Transparent group had a mean grade of 11.75. The difference is $15.87 - 11.75 = 4.12$.
2. This difference (4.12) was divided by the mean grade of the Non-Transparent group (11.75) as follows: $4.12 \div 11.75 = 0.351$.
3. The result was multiplied by 100 to find the exact percentage. This percentage shows how much higher the Transparent Group's mean grade is compared to the Non-Transparent group. The result is: $0.351 \times 100 = 35.1\%$.

According to this finding, the Transparent Group's mean grade was 35% higher than that of the Non-Transparent Group. This indicates that the Transparent Group not only achieved a higher mean grade, but this improvement is also significant, especially when it comes to essays, which is a challenging skill to develop.

The findings of the present study can be further supported by the results discussed in Bendahmane and Mostari (2017), who investigated the impact of formative assessment rubrics on EFL students' writing performance. In their experimental research, students' mean writing grades increased from 7.55 in the pre- test to 12.35 in the Post-Test after the introduction of assessment rubrics. This represents a 63.6% improvement, which is a statistically significant result. In summary, these statistics show that transparent assessment criteria have a statistically significant and positive effect on students' essay writing performance. The 35% improvement and lower standard deviation confirms that when students know exactly how their work will be judged, they are better able to meet the success expectations.

4.3.3.2 The Paired Samples T-test

The analysis reveals that students who did not receive clear assessment criteria (Non-Transparent Group) had almost no improvement in their essay grades between the first and second essays. Their grades remained the same, and the noticed change was not statistically significant, meaning it could have happened by chance. On the other hand, students who were given transparent assessment criteria (Transparent group) showed a clear and significant improvement in their essay grades. Their average grade increased by almost two points, and this change was statistically significant, signifying it was very likely due to the use of transparent criteria. This finding suggests that when students know exactly what is expected of them, they can perform much better. Therefore, using transparent assessment criteria helps students understand how to improve their work and this leads to better results.

4.4. Recommendations

The primary recommendations stemming from this research are as follows:

- 1. Providing Clear Rubrics to EFL Classes before the Writing Task:**

Teachers should consider giving their EFL students detailed and easy to understand rubrics before they start writing assignments. This helps students know exactly what is expected and how their work will be graded, leading to improved and more consistent result.

2. Explaining the Rubrics to the Students

Simply giving the students rubrics is not enough to achieve significant results. Teachers should explain the rubric used to the students. This helps clarify expectations and shows what good work looks like in practice.

3. Conducting Future Research on Other Skills

Future studies should look at how transparent rubrics affect other language skills to see if they improve the students' levels in those areas too.

4. Conducting the Experiment on a Larger sample

Future studies should test these results by conducting a similar study on a larger sample to generalize the findings.

4.5. Limitations of the Study

The present study discusses a complex problem which can only be adequately explained through experimentation. However, this study does not claim to be able to solve the problem but only reaches answers to the research questions. So, it would be rash to conclude from this study that the results apply to the whole population of EFL students. The study chose a sample of master two students of English at the department of English at Laghouat University. The nature of the study alongside other factors such as the absentees, withdrawal and limited time and funding made it difficult to examine the situations of all the students. This study also focuses only on essay writing skills which are important but only part of the EFL learning process. We should stress further that these results are only

provisional and further work or research is required in order to reach final conclusions. As with all such studies, there are limitations that offer opportunities for further research.

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of providing transparent essay scoring rubrics on students' essay writing performance. The results indicate that students who received transparent assessment criteria achieved higher and more consistent grades across all measured aspects of writing, including content relevance, organization, vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and readability. The statistical analysis shows that the Transparent group's mean grades were significantly higher than those of the Non-Transparent group, with a 35% improvement observed. The inter-rater reliability analysis confirms that the scoring was consistent and objective, further supporting the validity of these findings. These results highlight that transparent assessment criteria do not only serve as an effective assessment tool but also function as an instructional guide that enhances students' understanding of expectations to improve their writing outcomes. The findings suggest that when students clearly understand how their work will be assessed, they are better able to make significant improvements in their writing. Future research should examine the impact of transparent rubrics on other language skills beyond writing, such as speaking, to determine whether similar benefits can occur. Additionally, future studies should be conducted with larger samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

General Conclusion

This study started on the grounds of a simple motive that transformed into an important question: What happens when students know exactly how their writing will be judged? Through careful experimentation, this research journey has shown that transparent assessment rubrics do more than clarify expectations; they actively enhance the learning outcomes for EFL students.

This investigation sought to highlight a meaningful shift from traditional, implicit grading practices toward more transparent instructional practices. In practical terms, by providing students with transparent rubrics before writing tasks, this approach created conditions where learners could better understand what was expected. In response to the first question ‘to what extent does implementing transparent assessment criteria influence the overall quality of students’ essay writing?, as demonstrated by the Independent Samples T-test used to compare the mean essays grades of the Transparent and Non-transparent groups, the results act as a strong evidence for the effectiveness of implementing transparent assessment. The higher mean score ($M = 15.87$) compared to the Non-transparent group ($M = 11.75$), which indicates a 4.12 points difference and a 35% improvement in the average grades of the transparent group clearly show a statistically significant improvement, these key findings confirm Hypothesis 1 (positive impact) and are further proven to be valid in the high consistency rates shown in the inter-rater reliability test, showing that the rubric was applied both consistently and objectively eliminating any potential bias or subjectivity.

To answer the second research question ‘what specific impact does the use of transparent teacher assessment criteria have on key components that constitute quality essay?’ this study used descriptive statistics to analyse student performance across all assessed criteria: content relevance, organization, vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation, and presentation. For each criterion, the mean scores were compared between the two groups.

Additionally, the percentage improvement for each component was calculated. For example, the Transparent Group outperformed the Non-Transparent group in grammar, spelling & punctuation by 66.67% and in vocabulary by 46.51%. Thus, students who received clear rubrics before writing produced essays that were not higher in quality across all assessed aspects.

To address the third research question ‘to what degree does students’ essay writing performance change before and after the implementation of transparent teacher assessment criteria,’ a Paired Samples T-test was conducted within each group. The Transparent group showed a statistically significant improvement from pre-test ($M = 13.97$) to post-test ($M = 15.87$), with a p-value of 0.008. In contrast, the Non-Transparent group’s improvement was minimal and not statistically significant ($p = 0.910$). This demonstrates that the observed improvement in performance is the direct influence of to the transparent assessment criteria.

In the light of these results, this research highlights not just the theoretical value, but also the practical value of transparency in assessment. The findings encourage educators to rethink traditional assessment method to see rubrics not as a teacher matter but as dynamic guides that can promote a more student-cantered approach, ultimately, encouraging every student to reach higher levels of achievement. Furthermore, the findings of this study can have wider implications for broader educational research to promote deeper learning and student autonomy by emphasizing the value of clarity and transparency in assessment. The significance of this research lies on these potential implications for future educational practices. However, one question remains, which are to what extent the conclusions of this study, may be applicable to other contexts.

This study recognizes its own boundaries, the sample size was limited, and the focus was only on essay writing. Moreover, the success of this approach depends on students’ willingness and ability to engage in this practice, which requires ongoing support and

explanations from educators who must make sure that rubrics are not only provided but also thoroughly explained to the students. Thus, this study suggests a number of new avenues for research and provides a starting point for further examination, such as whether transparent rubrics can help students improve in other language skills in larger and more diverse groups. This study contributes to the ongoing research for improved assessment practices, which in recent years, took a turn to advocate for assessments that not only measure but also actively support student learning and development.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Essay Scoring Rubric By Silva (2014)

Assessing Written Production: Essay (20pts)

Relevance & Content: 4 pts

1. The content is knowledgeable 1 pts
2. Thesis statement is precise and well-developed ... 2 pts
3. Relevant to the assigned topic1pt

Organization: 6 pts

1. Includes an inviting introduction and satisfactory conclusion ... 2 pts
2. The main idea is well-developed and clearly supported ... 2 pts
3. Paragraph is skilfully managed 1 pt
4. Cohesion is properly maintained..... 1 pt

Vocabulary: 4 pts

1. Sophisticated and appropriate range of vocabulary ... 2 pts
2. Effective word choice and usage 2 pts

Grammar, Spelling and punctuation: 4 pts

1. No grammatical errors regarding subject-verb agreement ... 1 pt
2. Correct sentence structures 1 pt
3. Perfect spelling 1 pt
4. Accurate punctuation 1 pt

Readability: 2 pts

1. Neat, easy to read, and free from errors2 pts

Adapted from Silva, 2014, pp.140-141

Level : Master Two

Over the past few years, as an English student, you have delivered multiple presentations for different modules. In a five-paragraphs essay, discuss the challenges you faced during these presentations and the strategies you used to overcome them to enhance your performance

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

In recent years, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into education has transformed how students learn and how teachers teach. In a five-paragraph essay, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of AI integration in education.

Appendix IV: Sample of Pre-test Production

In recent years, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into education has transformed how students learn and how teachers teach. In a five-paragraph essay, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of AI integration in education.

Advantages and disadvantages of AI in Education

Artificial Intelligence is one of many technologies that have been used successfully in many areas, it is attracting more and more attention everyday with beneficial projects in recent years. The goal of AI is to ^{with} imitate the human intelligence through computers, ~~it~~ it's also one of the key technologies that are ready to transform the education.

The integration of AI in education offers significant benefits, ~~from now~~ my audience and purpose of such task.

To conclude the main thing strategy that helped me perform better in presentation was actually practice and volunteering to present the more I did it the less nervous and more willing I was this was the conclusion I came to after comparing ~~the~~ the way I used to present in my first year of university with the way I carry out such task now.

R: 04

Org: 04, 25

Voc: 03, 5

Gram: 03

Pres: 01, 75

Appendix V: Sample of Post-test Production

Over the past few years, as an English student, you have delivered multiple presentations for different modules. In a five-paragraph essay, discuss the challenges you faced during these presentations and the strategies you used to overcome them to enhance your performance.

Challenges and strategies for the multiple presentations

As an English student, I have been through diverse learning experiences, delivering multiple presentations for different modules is worth noting, because providing a good, well done, and organized presentations need a lot of energy and strategies to do so. Hence, for any student

To sum up, every student go through challenges in their learning process. However, the only difference among these students is how they will handle these problems, and which strategies are going to take, to help them avoid such challenges as well as benefits from them for better performance.

R: 03,5

Org: 05

Voc: 02,5

Gram: 02,75

Pres: 01,5

Appendix VI: Pre-test Scores- Non-transparent Group

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Student	Criteria	Teacher's Correction	AI's Correction	Final Grade
1	Relevance	3.5	3	3.25
	Organization	5	4	4.5
	Vocabulary	3	2.5	2.75
	Grammar & mechanics	3	2	2.5
	Presentation	2.5	1.5	1.5
2	Relevance	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Organization	2	3	2.5
	Vocabulary	1.75	1.5	1.75
	Grammar & mechanics	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Presentation	1	1	1
3	Relevance	3	3	3
	Organization	3	3	3
	Vocabulary	2	2	2
	Grammar & mechanics	1	1	1
	Presentation	1.5	1	1.25
4	Relevance	3	2.5	2.75
	Organization	3	3	3
	Vocabulary	3	1.5	2.25
	Grammar & mechanics	1.5	2	1.75
	Presentation	1	1.5	1.25
5	Relevance	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Organization	5	5	5
	Vocabulary	3	3	3
	Grammar & mechanics	2.75	3	3
	Presentation	1.25	1.5	1.5
6	Relevance	3	3	3
	Organization	2.5	5	3.75
	Vocabulary	2	2.5	2.25
	Grammar & mechanics	2	2	2
	Presentation	1	1.5	1.25
7	Relevance	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Organization	3.75	4	4
	Vocabulary	2	2	2
	Grammar & mechanics	1	1	1
	Presentation	1	0.5	0.75
8	Relevance	2.5	1.5	2
	Organization	2.75	3	3
	Vocabulary	1.75	1	1.5
	Grammar & mechanics	1	0.5	0.75
	Presentation	1	1	1

Appendix VII: Pre-test Scores- Transparent

Student	Criteria	Teacher's Correction	AI's Correction	Final Grade
1	Relevance	3	3.5	3.25
	Organization	4	4	4
	Vocabulary	2.75	3	3
	Grammar & mechanics	2.75	1.5	2.25
	Presentation	1.25	1	1.25
2	Relevance	3	3	3
	Organization	2.75	3	3
	Vocabulary	2	3	2.5
	Grammar & mechanics	2	2	2
	Presentation	1	1	1
3	Relevance	3.25	3.5	3.5
	Organization	4.5	4	4.25
	Vocabulary	3	3	3
	Grammar & mechanics	2.75	2	2.5
	Presentation	1.5	1	1.5
4	Relevance	3	2.5	2.75
	Organization	4	3.5	3.75
	Vocabulary	2.75	1.5	2.25
	Grammar & mechanics	2.5	2	2.25
	Presentation	1.25	1	1.25
5	Relevance	3	3	3
	Organization	5	4	4.5
	Vocabulary	2	2	2
	Grammar & mechanics	2.25	2.5	2.5
	Presentation	1.25	1.5	1.5
6	Relevance	4	4	4
	Organization	5	6	5.5
	Vocabulary	3.75	2.5	3.25
	Grammar & mechanics	3.5	2.5	3
	Presentation	1.5	1.5	1.5
7	Relevance	3.75	3.5	3.75
	Organization	5.5	5.5	5.5
	Vocabulary	3	3	3
	Grammar & mechanics	2.75	3	3
	Presentation	1.5	1.5	1.5
8	Relevance	2.75	3	3
	Organization	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Vocabulary	2	2.5	2.25
	Grammar & mechanics	2	2	2
	Presentation	1.25	1	1.25

Appendix VIII: Post-test Scores Non-transparent

Student	Criteria	Teacher's Correction	AI's Correction	Final Grade
1	Relevance	3	3	3
	Organization	3.5	3	3.25
	Vocabulary	2	2	2
	Grammar & mechanics	1.5	1	1.25
	Presentation	1	1	1
2	Relevance	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Organization	4.25	3.5	3.75
	Vocabulary	1.75	1.5	1.75
	Grammar & mechanics	1.5	2	1.75
	Presentation	1.25	1	1.25
3	Relevance	3	3.5	3.25
	Organization	5	5	5
	Vocabulary	2.75	2.5	2.75
	Grammar & mechanics	2.75	2.5	2.75
	Presentation	1.5	1.5	1.5
4	Relevance	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Organization	3	4	3.5
	Vocabulary	3	2	2.5
	Grammar & mechanics	1.5	2	1.75
	Presentation	1.25	1	1.25
5	Relevance	3	3.5	3.25
	Organization	5	5.5	5.25
	Vocabulary	2.75	3	3
	Grammar & mechanics	3	3	3
	Presentation	1.75	1.5	1.75
6	Relevance	2	2	2
	Organization	3	3	3
	Vocabulary	2	2	2
	Grammar & mechanics	2	1	1.5
	Presentation	1	1	1
7	Relevance	3.5	2.5	3
	Organization	4.5	3	3.75
	Vocabulary	2	2	2
	Grammar & mechanics	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Presentation	1.25	1	1.25
8	Relevance	1	1	1
	Organization	3	2.5	2.75
	Vocabulary	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Grammar & mechanics	1	1.25	1.25
	Presentation	2	1	1.5

Appendix IX: Post-test Scores Transparent Group

Student	Criteria	Teacher's Correction	AI's Correction	Final Grade
1	Relevance	4	3.5	3.75
	Organization	5.25	5.5	5
	Vocabulary	3.25	3	3.25
	Grammar & mechanics	2.75	2.5	2.75
	Presentation	1.5	1.5	1.5
2	Relevance	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Organization	3.25	3	3.25
	Vocabulary	2	3	2.5
	Grammar & mechanics	3.5	2	2.75
	Presentation	1.25	1	1.25
3	Relevance	4	3.5	3.75
	Organization	5.5	5.25	5.5
	Vocabulary	3.75	3	3.5
	Grammar & mechanics	3.25	3	3.25
	Presentation	1.75	1.5	1.75
4	Relevance	3.75	3.5	3.75
	Organization	5	4.25	4.75
	Vocabulary	3	2.75	3
	Grammar & mechanics	2.75	2	2.5
	Presentation	1.5	1.5	1.5
5	Relevance	3	4	3.5
	Organization	4	3	3.5
	Vocabulary	2.5	2	2.25
	Grammar & mechanics	2.75	2.5	2.75
	Presentation	1.5	1.5	1.5
6	Relevance	4	3.75	4
	Organization	5.75	5.5	5.75
	Vocabulary	4	4	4
	Grammar & mechanics	3.75	3.75	3.75
	Presentation	2	2	2
7	Relevance	4	3.5	3.75
	Organization	4.25	5	4.75
	Vocabulary	3.5	3	3.25
	Grammar & mechanics	3	2.5	2.75
	Presentation	1.75	1.5	1.75
8	Relevance	3.5	3.25	3.5
	Organization	5	4.5	4.75
	Vocabulary	2.5	2	2.25
	Grammar & mechanics	2.751	2.25	2.5
	Presentation	1.5	1.5	1.5

الملخص

في اللاونة الأخيرة، ظهرت توجهات جديدة حظيت باهتمام متزايد بإعتبارها عوامل محتملة تؤثر على جودة كتابة المقالات، ومن أبرزها استخدام معايير التقييم الشفافة، خاصة في التعليم العالي. وبناءً عليه، هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق في أثر استخدام معايير التقييم الشفافة من قبل الأساتذة على جودة كتابة المقالات لدى طلبة السنة الثانية ماستر تعليمية اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة عمار تليجي بالأغواط خلال السنة الجامعية 2025/2026. لذلك، اختبرت الدراسة الفرضية التالية: إذا تلقى الطلبة معايير تقييم شفافة من طرف الأستاذ، فإن جودة مقالاتهم ستتحسن كما قامت الدراسة بقياس التغيرات في مجالات رئيسية مثل الصلة بالموضوع، والتنظيم، والمفردات والقواعد، والقواعد النحوية و الإملائية وعلامات الترقيم، وسهولة القراءة العامة وللتحقيق في ذلك، تم اعتماد تصميم بحث تجريبي كمي. من بين (29) طالباً شاركوا في مرحلة الاختبار القبلي، أكمل (16) منهم كامل مراحل التجربة، والتي شملت ثلاث مراحل اختبار قبلي، ومعالجة ، واختبار بعدي. وقد تم توزيع هؤلاء المشاركين عشوائياً على مجموعتين: تجريبية وضابطة انتج ما مجموعه (32) مقالة . أظهرت التحليلات الإحصائية أن المجموعة التجريبية حققت تحسناً إجمالياً بنسبة (35) مقارنة بالمجموعة الضابطة، مع تسجيل تحسن ملحوظ في جميع الجوانب التي تم قياسها. وقد دعمت هذه النتائج الفرضية، مشيرة إلى أن الاطلاع على معايير تقييم شفافة من قبل الأستاذ ساهم في تحسين جودة كتابة الطلبة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية واستناداً إلى هذه النتائج، نوصي الدراسة بأن يقوم الأساتذة بتطبيق مثل هذه المعايير ضمن ممارساتهم التعليمية من أجل تحسين جودة كتابة المقالات لدى الطلبة. ومع ذلك، وبسبب حجم العينة المحدود، لا يمكن تعميم هذه النتائج على جميع طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. لذا، ينبغي أن تتناول البحوث المستقبلية قابلية تطبيق هذه النتائج على عينات أكبر وسياقات أوسع.