

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Mohamed Kheidar University of Biskra
Faculty of Letters and Languages
Department of Foreign Languages
Division of English



The Role of Letter Grades-Based Assessment in Improving Students' Written Productions

The Case of Second Year LMD Students of English at Biskra University

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages in Partial Fulfillment for
the Requirements of Master's Degree in English (Sciences of Language)

Submitted by

Ms. Abbou Meriem

Supervised by

Dr. Meddour Mostefa

Board of Examiners	
Supervisor	Meddour Mostefa
Chairman	Slimani Said
Examiner	Hamed Halima

June 2017

DEDICATION

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

All the Pries is due to God alone, the Sustainers of all the worlds

I dedicate this work

To my parents

The dearest persons to my heart

Thank you for all your encouragement, and above all your love

To my sister Sara and my little brother Ahmed Mostapha

To my sweetheart nephew Anouar and niece Lina Nihel

To all my family and best friends

To all those who prayed for me and besought God to help me

Thank you for your patience and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation could not have been completed without the help of my teacher and supervisor Dr. Mostefa Meddour to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude and thanks. I am grateful for your kindness, patience and insightful advice throughout the completion of this work.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation and thanks the Board of Examiners Mr. Slimani Said, Mrs. Aichaoui Theldja, and Mrs. Hamed Halima for their effort.

I am utterly grateful to Mrs. Ladjali for her invaluable help and support.

Also, I would address my most sincere gratitude and thanks to all those who have been my teachers throughout my tertiary studies at Biskra University.

I express my profound thanks to second-year LMD students whose contribution to this research has been quite fruitful.

My deepest thanks go to all my family and best friends who have constantly given me support and strength to continue this research.

ABSTRACT

The present investigation attempts to demonstrate the impact of letter grades evaluation system on students' writing ability. The main problem is that students often remain unsatisfied with their obtained number grades. Also, writing assessments are usually considered subjective which makes students become unconfident and prevents them to improve their writing competences. One hypothesis is formulated that is letter grades would have a positive impact on EFL learners' writing skill if they are properly used. In order to examine the hypothesis an answer research question, a questionnaire for 50 second-year University students of English and an opinionnaire for 5 teachers are administered at the Division of English at Biskra University. The findings reveal that students respond positively to letter grades as a formative feedback in 'Written Expression' as it helps them to become intrinsically motivated, less anxious and confident while writing. This dissertation recommends that teachers need to establish rigorous criteria for A-F grading, clearly communicate them to students, and use them while evaluating their students' writing. On the students' part, they should interact with their teachers so that the opportunity of receiving letter grades increases; consequently, their writing skill will be improved.

LIST OF ABBRERRIATIONS

CBA: Competency-Based Approach

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FL: Foreign Language

L1: Mother Tongue/ First Language

L2: Second Language

LMD: Licence/ Master/ Doctorat

MKU: Mohamed Kheider University

SL: Second Language

WE: Written Expression

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Students' Attitudes towards the Module of 'Written Expression'	55
Figure 2: Students' Area(s) of Difficulty in Writing.....	57
Figure 3: Students' Preferences of Correction Types.....	59
Figure 4: Teacher's Evaluation of Students' Productions.....	61
Figure 5: Students' Attitudes towards the Red Pen.....	62
Figure 6: Students' Attitudes towards Marks.....	64
Figure 7: Students' Attitudes towards the Fairness of Scores.....	64
Figure 8: Students' Opinions about Marks.....	65
Figure 9: Students' Opinions about Objectivity/Subjectivity of Marks.....	66
Figure 10: Students' Satisfaction with their Marks.....	67
Figure 11: Students' Attitudes towards the Reliability of Marks.....	68
Figure 12: Letters/Marks Differences.....	70
Figure 13: Letter Grades Advantages.....	72
Figure 14: Properness in Students' Writing.....	73
Figure 15: Students' wish to Letter Grades Generalization.....	74
Figure 16: Example of How to Use A-F Grading Criteria in Evaluating Students' Writing.....	96

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Difference between Assessment and Evaluation.....	18
Table 2: Summary of Norm/Criterion Referenced Grades.....	22
Table 3: Letter Grades Policy.....	24
Table 4: Grading System in Algeria.....	25
Table 5: A Comparison of Holistic and Analytic Scales.....	44
Table 6: Students' Choice of English.....	53
Table 7: Students' Most Challenging Skill.....	54
Table 8: Students' Attitudes towards the Module of 'Written Expression'.....	55
Table 9: Students' Area(s) of Difficulty in Writing.....	56
Table 10: Teacher's Correction in the Classroom.....	58
Table 11: Students' Preferences of Correction Time.....	52
Table 12: Students' Preferences of Correction Types.....	59
Table 13: Students' Attitudes towards Teacher's Correction.....	60
Table 14: Teacher's Evaluation of Students' Productions.....	61
Table 15: Students' Attitudes towards Teacher's Comments.....	61
Table 16: Students' Attitudes towards the Red Pen.....	62
Table 17: Students' Attitudes towards Marks.....	63
Table 18: Students' Attitudes towards the Fairness of Scores.....	64
Table 19: Students' Opinions about Marks.....	65
Table 20: Students' Opinions about Objectivity/Subjectivity of Marks.....	66
Table 21: Students' Satisfaction with their Marks.....	67

Table 22: Students’ Attitudes towards the Reliability of Marks.....	68
Table 23: Evaluations’ Kinds Students Receive in ‘Written Expression’ Module...	69
Table 24: Students’ Opinions about Letters/Marks Difference.....	69
Table 25: Letters/Marks Differences.....	70
Table 26: Students’ Appreciation of Letter Grades Evaluation System.....	71
Table 27: Letter Grades Advantages.....	72
Table 28: Properness in Students’ Writing.....	73
Table 29: Students’ wish to Letter Grades Generalization.....	74
Table 30: Teachers’ Opinions about Teaching Writing to Second-Year Students.....	81
Table 31: Teachers’ Attitudes towards the Correction of all Students’ Mistakes.....	81
Table 32: Teachers’ Opinions about the relationship between Scoring System and Course Objectives.....	82
Table 33: Teachers’ Experience of Letter Grades.....	83
Table 34: Students’ Possibility of Discussing Writing Problems with their Teachers.....	84
Table 35: The Importance of Grades in Students’ Academic Achievement.....	84
Table 36: The Effect of Grades on Students’ Writing.....	85
Table 37: Letter Grades’ Reduction of Stress and Anxiety.....	85
Table 38: The Objectivity of Letter Grades.....	85
Table 39: The Effectiveness of Letter Grades in Promoting Students’ Writing Proficiency.....	86
Table 40: The Impact of Letter Grades.....	86
Table 41: The Role of Letter Grades in Developing Students’ Writing Ability.....	86

Table 42: The Role of Letter Grades in Developing Students’ Self-Esteem and Autonomy.....	87
Table 43: The Role of A-F Grading in Motivating Students.....	87
Table 44: The Frustration of Letter Grades Experience.....	87
Table 45: Students’ Displeasure from Letter Grades.....	88
Table 46: The Ambiguity of Students’ Real Feelings.....	88
Table 47: Teachers’ Hesitancy during Giving Letter Grades.....	88
Table 48: Students Preparation for A-F Grading.....	89
Table 49: The Conflict of Students’ Personalities with the Alternative Method.....	89
Table 50: The Reutilization of Unsuccessful method of assessment.....	89
Table 51: Students’ Feelings while Receiving Letter Grades.....	90
Table 52: Students’ Appreciation of the Experience of Letter Grades.....	90
Table 53: Teachers’ Joy with the Experience.....	91
Table 54: The Possibility of Using A-F Grading in the Future.....	91
Table 55: Sample Criteria for Evaluation of the Paragraph.....	97

LIST OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	I
Acknowledgments.....	II
Abstract.....	III
List of Abbreviations.....	IV
List of Figures.....	V
List of Tables.....	VI
List of Contents.....	IX
General Introduction.....	1
1. Statement of the Problem.....	2
2. Research Question.....	3
3. Research Hypothesis.....	3
4. Objectives of the Study.....	4
5. Significance of the Study.....	4
6. Research Methodology.....	4
6.1. Methods.....	4
6.2. Population and Sampling.....	4
6.3. Research Tools.....	5
6.4. Procedure.....	5
7. Limitation of the Study.....	6
8. Structure of the Study.....	6

Chapter One: An Overview of Assessment

Introduction.....	8
1. Assessment.....	8
1.1. Purpose of Assessment.....	9
1.2. Components of Assessment.....	10
1.3. Forms of Assessment.....	11
1.3.1. Formative Assessment.....	11
1.3.2. Summative assessment.....	12
2. Test, Evaluation, and Grading.....	14
2.1. Test.....	14
2.2. Evaluation.....	16
2.3. Difference between Assessment and Evaluation.....	17
2.4. Grading.....	18
3. Assessment in Algerian Educational System.....	27
3.1. The LMD system (Higher Educational Reform).....	29
4. The Psychological Impact of Grades on Students.....	30
Conclusion.....	31

Chapter Two: The Writing Skill

Introduction.....	33
1. The Writing Skill.....	33
2. Reasons for Teaching Writing.....	34
3. The Relationship between Writing and Other Skills.....	35
3.1. Four Writing Skills Working Together.....	35

3.2. Writing and Speaking Relationship.....	36
3.3. Writing and Reading Relationship.....	37
4. Effective Writing.....	39
4.1. Organization.....	39
4.2. Clarity.....	40
4.3. Word Choice.....	40
4.4. Mechanics.....	41
5. Writing Assessments.....	42
5.1. Traditional Writing Assessments.....	42
5.2. Alternative/Modern Writing Assessments.....	45
5.2.1. Portfolio Assessment.....	45
5.2.2. Conferencing.....	47
5.2.3. Peer and Self Assessment.....	48
Conclusion.....	50

Chapter Three: Data Analysis

Introduction.....	51
1. The Rational for the Study.....	51
2. Students' Questionnaire.....	52
2.1. Administration of Students' Questionnaire.....	52
2.2. Description of Students' Questionnaire.....	52
2.3. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire.....	53
2.4. Discussion of Findings.....	74
3. Teachers' Opinionnaire.....	79

3.1. Administration of Teachers' Opinionnaire.....	80
3.2. Description of Teachers' Opinionnaire.....	80
3.3. Analysis of Teachers' Opinionnaire.....	81
3.4. Discussion of Findings.....	91
4. Pedagogical Recommendations	95
Conclusion.....	97
General Conclusion.....	99
List of References.....	101
Appendices.....	106
Résumé	110

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Introduction.....	1
1. Statement of the Problem.....	2
2. Research Question.....	3
3. Research Hypothesis.....	3
4. Objectives of the Study.....	3
5. Significance of the Study.....	4
6. Research Methodology.....	4
6.1. Methods.....	4
6.2. Population and Sampling.....	4
6.3. Research Tools.....	5
6.4. Procedure.....	5
7. Limitation of the Study.....	6
8. Structure of the Study.....	6

Introduction

Assessment is the bridge between teaching and learning activities; it is the central process in effective instruction. It helps to discover whether students learned what they taught and whether teachers achieved what they intended to teach. There is a wide range of methods that are used to gather information about students' progress, behavior, and performance, and how well they are learning. Assessment may occur during the instructional course or at the end of the unit mainly to improve students' learning also to motivate them to progress. Assessment can be addressed in many types such as: number grades, letter grades, observation, rubrics... etc

Number grades are the frequently used mode in Algerian schools to evaluate students. It is based on numerical marks to measure students' performance. EFL learners are always graded in numerical marks, and they give importance to marks rather than their significance or to the acquired knowledge. Students always show dissatisfaction with their given marks and they claim that numerical scores remain subjective and they do not reflect their real level of achievement. Furthermore, they usually blame teachers as being unfair, thrifty and careless with their papers. Numerical scores have a direct relationship with students' motivation; sine they are conditioned with marks they behave as the basis of Pavlov's theory stimulus – response i.e. their given marks seems neither convinced nor satisfying as a consequence, students' motivation decreases and affects negatively their learning progress. Criterion-referenced grading (letter grades) utilizes letters A, B, C, D, E and F in relation to percentage or points. This is most commonly used in successful countries such as: America; Finland, Canada and Germany.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Educational assessment helps to determine the improvement of student's achievement and production (feedback) towards their mastery of the four skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading). In EFL classes students have to give equal importance to all skills when it comes to language proficiency. Speaking and writing are two productive skills that can be constantly observed and measured, and the focus is mainly on writing skill in which the learner expresses his/her abilities as well as his/her language difficulties. As a matter of facts, by implementing an alternative mode of evaluation (letter grades) on students writing skill, results will show whether letter grades are successful or not and whether students have developed their writing proficiency skill.

Letter grades are meant to be as a kind of proposal concerning the future procedure in grading Algerian students in their examination as an alternative to numerical marks due to their continuous claiming and dissatisfaction with their given marks.

1. Statement of the Problem

Teaching and learning EFL is not effective unless it is assessed. The major aim of assessment is to educate and improve students' performance on one hand, and to inform teachers about the instructional plans on the other one. Students in Algeria are graded with numerical grades from primary school to university. They are conditioned with marks which influence directly their motivation and lead them to behave as the basis of Pavlov's theory: stimulus- response. The reality claims that whenever students are given back their marks, they are always unsatisfied and they accuse teachers either by being thrifty or do not give importance to their papers. Since there is dissatisfaction and complaining about learners' marks and teachers' way of

evaluation, an alternative assessment to number grades which is letter grades may change the situation and help students to be satisfied and convinced by their grades in that they focus on learner's efforts and they are considered as a factor of intrinsic motivation. EFL learners consider writing skill difficult and complex, according to them writing needs further practice and techniques to follow in order to master. Thus, the present research tends to highlight the importance of letter grades on students' progress, putting much emphasis on its impact in enhancing students' writing proficiency.

2. Research Question

The research is based on the following question:

How would letter grades assessment affect EFL learners' writing skill if compared to traditional grading? In other words, do letter grades have a positive effect on enhancing learner's writing skill?

3. Research Hypothesis

This study intends to test the following hypothesis:

- Letter grades would have a positive impact on EFL writing skill if it they are properly used as a substitute to numerical grading.

4. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- To identify the importance of letter grades system in assessing students' performance.
- To know the impact of letter grades on students' writing proficiency.

- To provide teachers with suggestions about the usage of letter grades assessment and how it could be successful.

5. Significance of the Study

This research is important to a certain degree. Firstly, it may help students develop their writing skill proficiency by being motivated intrinsically and having self-esteem and autonomy through letter grades. Secondly, it may help teachers to improve their profession by experiencing different form of assessment. Finally, it may contribute in the development of society in terms of having professional teachers and good learners (writers).

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Methods

There are several research methods in social sciences; each issue requires a specific adequate method. However research work about letter grades in EFL seems a very detailed issue. Thus we consider that the mixed method (quantitative/qualitative) is the most adequate to carry out the research as an objective and systematic process to describe and test the relationship between the variables.

6.2. Population and Sampling

The population used to conduct this study consists of 518 students of second year Licence at the Department of Foreign Languages, Division of English at the University of Biskra in the academic year 2016/2017. The population contains 74 male and 439 female. Most of them are from Biskra, the minority came from different towns of Algeria such as: Batna, Bedjaia, El -Oued...etc

The sample used for the current research consists of one group of 50 students: 18 males and 32 females registered in the second year at the Department of Foreign Languages, English Section at Biskra University in 2016/1017.

6.3. Research Tools

There are many research tools. Since the quantitative and qualitative methods are adopted (mixed research), two data gathering tools are chosen to investigate the importance of letter grades in enhancing students' writing proficiency: questionnaire and opinionnaire for the reason that they are valid, faster and the results are immediately.

6.4. Procedure

The choice of the sample (second year students at Biskra University Department of Foreign Languages, English Division) was not arbitrary; they are learning how to master the writing skill of compositions and paragraphs. The sample was not chosen systematically: among ten (10) groups the eighth (8) group was selected according to the number of students (N: 50) and the teacher of 'Written Expression' module who provides her students with letter grades as formative feedback during the instruction. The questionnaire is administered to every students of group (8); while, the opinionnaire is administered to 5 teachers of different modules whom some of them have already experienced the method of letter grades during the instruction to discern their opinions about this method and know how it could help learners to achieve their writing skill.

7. Limitation of the Study

This study emphasizes letter grades, their impact and effectiveness in promoting students' learning process. It is limited by size and location; the data will be collected from one university without a large sampling from various universities with various demographics in different regions. The result will be applicable only to similar students' sites and level. Thus additional data are needed to collect in order to attribute the results to different grade levels. The current research is also limited in time in which the period of data collection is not enough to achieve or come with absolute validity and reliability to the research.

Structure of the Study

The present research will be basically divided into three main chapters. The first two chapters will be devoted to the literature review and chapter three will be about the analysis and discussion of the obtained results from both students' questionnaire and teachers' opinionnaire.

The first chapter is specified for assessment and other related key concepts: test, evaluation, and grading. It will also tackle assessment in Algerian educational system. This chapter will also shed light on the psychological impact of grading on students.

The second chapter of the literature review will be devoted to the skill of writing. It will comprise a description of writing: what writing is about, the criteria that make for writing a good paragraph/essay, and the reasons for teaching writing. It will also shed light on the relationship between writing and other language skills including speaking and reading. This chapter will also present writing assessments and their

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

types regarding traditional and modern assessments that are of central importance in shaping learning process.

Finally, the last chapter of the proposed dissertation will be mainly an investigation of the degree of second-year LMD students' appreciation of A-F grading and its impact on their achievement in writing.

CHAPTER ONE

An Overview of Assessment

Introduction.....	8
1. Assessment.....	8
1.1. Purpose of Assessment.....	9
1.2. Components of Assessment.....	10
1.3. Forms of Assessment.....	11
1.3.1. Formative Assessment.....	11
1.3.2. Summative assessment.....	12
2. Test, Evaluation, and Grading.....	14
2.1. Test.....	14
2.2. Evaluation.....	16
2.3. Difference between Assessment and Evaluation.....	17
2.4. Grading.....	18
3. Assessment in Algerian Educational System.....	27
3.1. The LMD system (Higher Educational Reform).....	29
4. The Psychological Impact of Grades on Students.....	30
Conclusion.....	31

Introduction

Because assessment is the bridge between teaching and learning activities, it represents a fundamental element in effective instruction that promotes students' involvement and achievement. This chapter provides a theoretical overview on assessment starting by defining what assessment means, then its purpose, components, and forms. Following that, key concepts, test, evaluation and grading are developed precisely. Next, this chapter will tackle assessment in Algerian educational system where a new approach 'Competency-Based Approach' was introduced in primary, middle, and secondary schools; and new applied system 'LMD' at the level of higher education in 2005. The chapter will conclude with the psychological impact of grades on students which may influence their learning progress directly or indirectly.

1. Assessment

Assessment has been defined variously in the literature. Among many, Linn and Miller (2005) define assessment as a systematic process of collecting information about students' progress towards the learning goals. From another position, Long et al. (2011) describe assessment as "an endemic in education and for the most part is ongoing, informal, hourly, and daily" (p.51). They maintain that students' performance can be measured in various ways, including "traditional paper and pencil tests, extended responses (essays), performance of authentic tasks, teacher observation, and student self report" (Linn & Miller, 2005, p.26). In the same way, Anderson (2003) differentiates between *performative tasks* and *selective tasks*. The former represents students' performance of some actions i.e. to write or to demonstrate, whereas the second represents students' selection from among possible

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

responses to the task i.e. to circle or to choose. Further, there are two main keys to assessment quality, according to Stiggins et al. (2004), the first key is to determine the intentions of assessment results whether assessment for learning or assessment of learning. The second key to quality is to design assessment that reflects different achievement standards: “mastery of content knowledge, the ability to use knowledge to reason, demonstration of performance skills and product development capabilities” (p.89).

Several studies were made about assessment due to its primordial importance; especially in the field of education. It is a systematic process which determines students’ progress during learning and their success or failure as well.

1.1. Purpose of Assessment

Teachers assess students for many reasons. First of all, teachers are required to assess because there are official exams such as baccalaureate exam that must be administered to districts mandated (Anderson, 2003). Basically, the main aim of assessment is to know whether students made progress (students’ attainments) and whether any regulations are needed to be made to both of content and presentation of their learning experiences (Long et al, 2011). Besides, Edmunds (2006) indicates that classroom assessment have four main purposes. Firstly, to determine students’ previous knowledge and decide which approaches they may use. Secondly, to assess students’ knowledge and performance to alter lesson plans and course designs. Thirdly, to give grades in order to judge and evaluate students’ performance. Finally, to help students develop their skills which reflect on their achievement. There are

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

various reasons for assessing students' performance/achievement in order to accomplish the task of teaching and learning.

1.2. Components of Assessment

Assessment has five major components: attainment, knowledge, skill, understanding and aptitude (Long et al, 2012, p. 51- 55).

Starting by attainment, it refers to students' degree of achievement. They define it as "pupils' level of functioning or ability in particular area" (p. 51). Also, they add that there are several tests to assess various abilities such as: reading, comprehension and spelling and fundamental skills such as: working memory and phonological processing.

Talking about knowledge, it is a set of concepts linked to each other to form a web of information. This later is subdivided into factual knowledge; knowledge of facts and information, and schematic knowledge which is concerned with making relations within a system of related schemes.

The next component is skill that means the quality and the ability to have good procedures in doing things. In addition, it describes the activities and tasks that are well done. Skills are also the abilities of understanding and using knowledge.

Moving to understanding, it includes both the retrieval and the use of knowledge in new situations. Writing in English for instance depends on generating ideas together with existing knowledge and thoughts.

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

Finally aptitude, it refers to learners' ability that is checked throughout assessment; in other words, it emphasizes the capacity for future attainment. Despite of achievement influential factors such as: motivation, confidence and life opportunities, intelligence tests are most used for student's learning potential.

There are five components of assessment namely: attainment, knowledge, skill, understanding, and aptitude. All of them contribute in the enhancement of teaching and learning process.

1.3. Forms of Assessment

There is a shift from traditional assessment forms to a new paradigm. The emergence of two different formats 'formative' and 'summative' assessment has attracted educators' attention in the current literature (William & Thompson, 2008). The terminology of 'formative' and 'summative' was supposed by Scriven (1967) and Bloom (1969) to differentiate the role of motivation (cited in Moussawy, 2009).

1.3.1. Formative Assessment

Formative Assessments are diagnostic in which they figure out students' strengths (where learning is successfully accomplished) and weaknesses (where additional teaching and learning are needed) (Long et al, 2012). Formative assessment or assessment for learning guides future learning and promotes students to participate in classroom activities. According to Hervera, Murry, and Cabral (2007), students nowadays are asked to use their "cognitive development, academic knowledge, and skills to read, comprehend, synthesize, analyze, compare, relate, articulate, write, evaluate and more" (cited in Moussawi, 2009, p. 6). It means that students are

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

required to use all their thinking abilities next to the physical ability to improve their learning. Further, formative feedback holds students confidence and autonomy to accept responsibility for their learning if they feel failure; in this case, checklists assessment are commonly used by teachers to help their learners finish the tasks (Long et al., 2011). This later may influence students' awareness of what they expect to achieve and how they will be judged. They additionally suggest five main types of activity under formative assessment; they are: sharing success criteria with learner, classroom questioning, comment not only marking, peer/self-assessment, and using summative tests formatively (Black & William 2009 cited in Long et al., 2011). Moreover, they argued that effective classroom requires formative interaction follows Initiation- Response- Evaluation (I.R.E) in which teachers may adjust additional questions if student's answer was wrong to guide him for a good understanding and right answer.

Formative assessment is an ongoing process that evaluates student's learning and adjusts instruction; it emphasizes student understanding and engagement; to say it in other words, it supports and assists students learning and develops their critical thinking.

1.3.2. Summative Assessment

Summative Assessment; on the other part, "involves assessment of pupil's general level of functioning" (Long et al, 2011, p. 55). Since it is assessment of

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

learning; it is often carried out at the end of a block of teaching. Exams as formal assessments (called ‘a high-stakes assessment’) are important for both learners in providing access to employment or higher level of education; and schools as an indicator to evaluate teachers and the performance of the school. Curriculum backwash is the result of summative assessments, because content of tests dominate what is taught, in which formal tests must be selective and teachers should teach and assess accordingly. Doig (2006) argues that pupils often use the results of formal assessment to make judgments about their own competence and standing, and when they perceive themselves successful with tasks they establish an independent motivation (cited in Long et al., 2011). Moreover, Edmunds (2006, p. 3) identifies that “summative assessment looks at whether a student has achieved the desired learning goals or met standards”. So its main purpose is to master content and thinking; for instance, training the learner to master the content by memorizing and thinking by writing about big conflicts and debatable themes. Further, he points out four main features of good summative assessments, they are as follows: useful: the assessment must provide useful information about student achievement. Valid for purpose: the assessment must measure what is supposed to measure. Reliable: the extent to which the given score is influenced by unsystematic factors such as luck in guessing the right answer and lack of time to complete the assessment. Fair: the assessment must give the same chance of success to all students.

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

Above all, it seems pertinent to remember that summative assessment is any activity that takes place at the end of instruction which often results by attributing scores or grades on students' performance for administrative decisions.

Formative and summative assessments are two different formats that have attracted researchers' and educators' attention in the field of education. Formative assessments promote learning progress and development. They also alter instruction in relation to the learning objectives. However, summative assessments provide a summary of students' achievement to determine their future progress to higher level of education or to attain a job.

2. Test, Evaluation, and Grading

After having presented the definition of assessment, its purpose and components, and its two main types, three different methods of assessment test, evaluation, and grading will be introduced.

2.1. Test

Test or examination is "a method to determine a student's ability to complete certain tasks or demonstrate mastery or skill or knowledge of content" (Overton, 2009, as cited in "Testing, assessment, measurement and evaluation definition", (n.d.)). From this definition the concept of test is used to measure students' effort and find out what they know and what they have learned; therefore, test is an instrument for assessment. Another proposed definition by Osterlind and Wang (n.d., p. 16) suggests that test is an examination of students' knowledge and ability carried out through scaled tasks, so it involves measurement of learners' performance. In other

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

words, tests are conducted in order to help teachers to measure learning outcomes and benefits on the one hand, and learners' progress and teaching conditions i.e. reshaping teaching items that are poorly learned or acquired as a result of poor teaching or their difficulty for learners to learn them on the other hand. There are different types of tests: *discrete tests* where tests are used to test one single item or skill at a time and *integrative tests* where tests are used to test diverse items or skills into one single test ("Discrete vs. Integrative Test" / Linguistic / Grammar, 2012). Tests are also classified according to their aims and objectives ("Introduction to issues in language assessment and terminology," n.d.), namely:

- Placement tests: for allocating students position (level).
- Achievement tests: for measuring students' achievement in particular course.
- Diagnostic tests: for determining students' difficulty for remediation.
- Aptitude tests: for determining students' aptitude towards a task, course, or program.
- Prediction tests: for predicting learning outcomes.
- Standardized tests: for producing valid or reliable scores.
- Continuous assessment tests: for measuring students' progress regularly.
- Teacher-made-tests: produced for particular classroom use (students' learning needs).

As tests are important and need careful planning; they should be valid, reliable, selective, varied, measure accurately, and represent the teaching and learning process.

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

To conclude, test is an instrument of assessment that is used to measure students' learning. It is essential for providing teachers with consistent information about their students' mastery of content on which they grade them.

2.2. Evaluation

Evaluation is as old as the process of education; it determines whether a change has occurred or whether a progress has been made i.e. future development. Evaluation has been developed in a variety of ways. Hickman (2013, p.11) for example stated that evaluation is “judging the value of something”, this thing could be program, used techniques or strategies, or teaching materials. Hence, evaluation refers to the process through which evidence is judged with respect to its educational value. Additionally, some other concept of evaluation interprets it as “the determination of the congruence between performance and objectives” (Mehrens and Lehmann, 1991, p. 4); it serves as the basis for the improvement of the way activities are carried out and discovers whether these activities have led to the desired outcomes. They also contended that the teacher can evaluate with either qualitative or quantitative data. According to Oguniyi (1984), evaluation is carried for many purposes (cited in Measurement and Evaluation in Education, p. 37) some of them are:

- 1- To determine the effectiveness of the program (student's output).
- 2- To make reliable decisions about education planning.
- 3- To determine the deserving time, energy and sources invested in a program.
- 4- To identify student's progress and/or lack of desirable knowledge, skills, attitude, and values.

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

- 5- To help teacher determine the effectiveness of their teaching techniques and learning materials.
- 6- To identify problems that might prevent the achievement of academic goals.
- 7- To predict the general trend in the development of teaching-learning process.

In short, evaluation affords important information about the results of students' learning, teachers' instruction, and schools' achievements. It is the process of observing and measuring aspects of education, including programs, used techniques and strategies, and students' progress, for the purpose of judging it and determining its value based on given criteria and evidence. Without evaluation; the quality of education could not be improved in the effective process of teaching and learning.

2.3. Difference between Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation are usually used interchangeably by many teachers. Angelo and Cross (1993) defined assessment as an ongoing process emphasizes learning, teaching, and outcomes. Its main aim is to provide students and teachers with information for understanding and improving learning and teaching, whereas evaluation determines the level of quality of a performance or outcome based on the level of quality demonstrated. Key differences between assessment and evaluation are summarized in the table below:

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

Dimension of Difference	Assessment	Evaluation
Content: Timing, Primary purpose	Formative: ongoing, to improve learning	Summative: final; to gauge quality
Orientation: Focus of measurement	Process-oriented: How learning is Going	Product-oriented: what's been learned
Findings: uses thereof	Diagnostic: identify Areas of improvement	Judgmental: arrive at an overall grade/score

Table 1: Difference between Assessment and Evaluation According to Angelo and Cross (1993)

Briefly, assessment is formative and identifies areas of improvement, while evaluation is summative where which students are given scores or grades in order to determine their final level (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

2.4. Grading

“The power of grades to impact students’ future life creates a responsibility for giving grades in a fair and impartial way” Johnson, D. W and R. T. Johnson (2002, p. 249).

From the above saying, grading is a strong influential ingredient in teaching-learning process through which classroom grading should be more faire, more time-efficient, and more conducive to learning so that learners become more confident and autonomous in their learning in particular and life in general. Grading means “the assignment of a symbol to a person’s performance” (Hickman, 2013, P. 11). From another view, Walvoord and Anderson (1998) claim that grading is a ‘complex context-dependent’ process that serves multiple roles: evaluation, communication, motivation, organization, faculty and student reflection. Thus, grading combines the test/assignment to the learning goals over time and helps students acquire knowledge

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

and skills they need besides planning lessons and giving feedback so that students develop themselves (P.1-2).

Grades are the most common type of feedback that students receive in the classroom; it can be norm-referenced grades or criterion-referenced grades

Norm-referenced grade is “designed to discover how an individual pupil’s performance or test result compares to that of an appropriate peer group” (Hickman, 2013, p. 68). It focuses on how students’ scores are compared to each other. The emergence of norm-referenced grade in education had commenced in 1940s in USA as a shift from early days of intelligence testing. Its main purpose is to compare individual’s performance to others (norm group); hence, the variability in the outcome of the instrument, test or examination that differs in difficulty, is very important. Talking about scores, they are reported in a percentile or a grade equivalent score. Since norm-referenced instruments are commonly used for competition, information about students’ performances that are relative to each other are needed (Wikstrom, 2005, p. 14-18)

Norm-referenced grade has potentials and limitation (Wistrom, 2012 and Oribador, 2009). The advantages of using norm-referenced grades are several; some of them are as follows:

- Norm-referenced systems are easy to use.
- They work well where inflexible differences among students are required.
- They are appropriate in large courses (encourage cooperation, stress individual achievement).

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

Conversely, the potential drawbacks that characterize norm-referenced grade can be summarized in three main points:

- They determine an individual's grade by the achievement of others.
- They promote competition rather than cooperation.
- Opportunity to learn may not exist.

It is important to remember that norm-referenced score interpretation focuses on how an examinee's score compares with scores of other examinees in an identified group. Therefore, norm-referenced grade is used to rank students' performance to promote their learning.

Criterion-referenced grade, in contrast, "measures what a pupil understands, knows, or can accomplish in relation to specific performance objectives" (Hickman, 2013, P. 23). The term criterion-referenced grade was introduced by Glaser and Klaus more than 50 years ago (1962) when they published their paper entitled *Instruction Technology and the measurement of learning outcomes: Some questions*. It was the official starting point of criterion-referenced grade and was welcomed by the practitioners in the field of education because it is useful especially for formative purposes (Wikstron, 2005, P. 15). Moreover, Mehrens and Lehmann (1991) state that many specialists would prefer to use various terms concerning criterion-referenced grade: domain-referenced, content-referenced, objective-referenced, and other similar names, but criterion-referenced measurement is the most popular one (p. 239). Its main purpose is to identify student's strengths and weaknesses in relation to skills which are the goal of the instruction and it does not compare pupil to other pupils (Hickman, 2013).

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

Similar to norm-referenced grade, criterion-referenced grade has advantages. The essential one is that students are not compared with each other; they are compared against a specific standard and easy to administer too. However, its objection is that it is difficult to determine reasonable criteria for students to less experienced teachers (Oribador, 2009). In fact, criterion-referenced grade become less frequently used due to the emergence of many forms of it including authentic assessment, performance assessment, and portfolios that are popular nowadays.

Criterion-referenced grade is any measurement that has the purpose of measuring skills, performance, or knowledge has been defined by criterion and is used for finding out performance level of the individuals that are being assessed.

Norm- reference and criterion-reference grades' main points are summarized in the following table:

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

Norm-referenced	Criterion-referenced
Definition	
An assessment designed to discover how an individual pupil's performance or test result compares to that of an appropriate peer group.	An assessment that measures what a pupil understands, knows, or can accomplish in relation to specific performance objectives.
Purpose	
To rank each student with respect to the achievement of others (discriminate between high and low achievement).	To determine whether a student has achieve specific skills or concepts.
Content	
Measures broad skill area taken from a variety of textbooks and syllabi	Measures specific skills acquired from curriculum (those skills express instructional objectives).
Item Characteristics	
Each skill is tested by less than four items. The items vary in difficulty.	Each skill is tested by at least four items to obtain an adequate sample of the student
Score Reporting	
Reported in a percentile rank.	Reported in categories or percentage.
Score Interpretation	
Determine whether a student performed better (higher/lower) than others.	Determine how much student understood curriculum.

Table 2: Summary of norm/criterion referenced grades (Huitt, 1996)

Based on the related literature review, there are two common types of grading system, one involves comparison among students called norm-referenced grade and the other interprets students' performance based on defined criteria called criterion-referenced grade.

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

This research is concerned with two grading approaches; *number grade system* and *letter grade system*. As Tuckman and Monetti (2010, P. 586) defines them, a number grade system is when “student receives a numerical score that corresponds to the percentage of the content and the skills the student was able to display”. A letter grade system is when “teacher takes the numerical score that a student earns and compares it to the school letter grade criteria”. That is to say, letter grade system summarizes students’ performance by means of letters A, B, C, D, and F. Criterion-referenced grading uses letters in relation to percentage by comparing students’ performance to the learning objectives. The most common criteria are: 90% and above gains an A, 80%_ 89% gains a B, 70%_79% gains a C, 65%_69% gains a D, 64% and below gains an F. For more clarification, student who answered eight correct questions out of ten would receive an 80% that refers to B as described in the above criteria.

Letter grades were used since the early 20th century at all levels of education from elementary to university. They are flexible in which they are used in diverse types of works including quizzes, projects and experiments; they are also used to grade a long term of performance such as semesterial report. At first times, letter grades were unfair: if a teacher decides to give B to students achieve 80% - 89%, then student who achieves 89% will get the same as the one achieves 80% while s/he is closer to an A grade than a C grade. As an adjustment to letter grade system, pluses (+) and minuses (-) were added to the grades. Thus, 12 grades instead of 5 grades were established A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, and F to give more refined way of grading students’ performance (“List of books and articles about grades and grading/ online research library: Questia”, n.d.)

The following table shows a detailed transcription of letter grade system by (“Grading system”, 2015).

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

Letter Grade	Numerical Grade	Grade Points	Letter Grade Definitions
A+	90–100	4.33	Excellent. Superior performance showing comprehensive, in-depth understanding of subject matter. Demonstrates initiative and fluency of expression.
A	85–89	4.00	
A-	80–84	3.67	
B+	77–79	3.33	Very good. Clearly above average performance with knowledge of principles and facts generally complete and with no serious deficiencies.
B	73–76	3.00	
B-	70–72	2.67	
C+	65–69	2.33	Satisfactory. Basic understanding with knowledge of principles and facts at least adequate to communicate intelligently in the discipline.
C	60–64	2.00	
C-	55–59	1.67	Pass. Some understanding of principles and facts but with definite deficiencies.
D	50–54	1.00	Minimal pass. A passing grade indicating marginal performance. Student not likely to succeed in subsequent courses in the subject.
F	0–49	0.00	Unsatisfactory. Fail. Knowledge of principles and facts is fragmentary.

Table 3: Letter Grades Policy (“Grading system, 2015)

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

The letter grades equivalent to numerical grading system of Algeria is shown in the following table (“Grading System in Algeria”, n.d.).

Scale	Grade Description	Its Grades	Note
15.00 - 20.00	Trés bien (Very Good)	A+	
13.00 - 14.99	Bien (Good)	A	
12.00 - 12.99	Assez bien (Fairly Good)	B+	
11.00 - 11.99	Passable (Satisfactory)	B	
10.00 - 10.99	Moyen (Sufficient)	C	
0.00 - 9.99	Insuffisant (Insufficient)	F	A conceded pass may be awarded for grades below 10.00 when the overall average for the year is 10.00 and above

Table 04: Grading System in Algeria (“Grading system in Algeria”, n.d.)

There are several advantages of letter grades due to their importance and effect on students’ learning. Among many, seven potentials are as follows (Gundlach, 2005 and Bull; 20013):

- Easy for parents to understand and monitor.
- Easy to interpret.
- More Objective way of grading in addition, they are more cut and dry.

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

- They allow comparing student performance across different institutions or organizations.
- They give clear indication about the quality of students' performance at specific subject or at global level.
- They motivate student intrinsically.
- They ensure the quality of curricular process and its product.

Moving to letter grades drawbacks, they are considered as inefficient and misleading method that still continues because of its familiarity. It offers just a periodic and generalizes evaluation of academic achievement where students are graded based on their ability of performing as much as they can the material they are taught. Further, letter grades are now considered as subjective, restrictive, misguided, unrealistic, invalid, and not adequate to 21st century learners' needs. As a result, many alternatives have been emerged to reshape traditional grading methods (numerical and letter grading) some of them are: standard based grading, self-assessment, and portfolios. (Moreno, 20017, and Rediehs, n.d.)

Letter grade is a method of grading where letters are used in relation to percentage by comparing student's performance to the learning objectives. It consists of five grades A (A+, A-), B (B+, B-), C, D, and F. A is the highest grade and F is the lowest one for failure. Also, A-F grading has advantages and disadvantages that may influence its contribution to the process of teaching and learning

3. Assessment in Algerian Educational System

Many endeavors Algeria has tried in order to constitute a suitable educational system that fits all the needs since the independence. Considering the historical connection with France, Algeria has used French as the language of government and medium of instruction during the French colonialism and Arabic had been relegated to a secondary status. After the independence, Arabic becomes the dominant language through the ‘arabization’ policy in 1971. English was taught as a second foreign language as a result of the decreasing use of French and the world wide socioeconomic changes. The development of education in Algeria can be summarized in two main periods: before the national reconciliation period (1830-1999) and the national reconciliation period (2000 – present) (Bellalem, 2008, P. 54- 60).

To begin with, ‘before the national reconciliation period’ (1830-1999) is the longest period; but it contains different phases that can be divided into four phases. Firstly, the *colonial* phase, where the educational policy of France was dominant while Arabic was neglected. Secondly, the *post-independence* phase, where a respectable change happened to the educational system which is the establishment of the arabisation in 1971 in order to reconstruct the identity of Algeria. Thirdly, the *economic-liberal* phase, where Arabic language was officially used in all instructional subjects and French becomes first foreign language commencing in fourth year of primary school. During this period, parents and instructors wanted English to be taught in primary school instead of French. Unfortunately, ‘civil war’ started and the reform was postponed. Finally, the *political-crisis* phase, where some pilot primary schools introduced English in the fourth year in 1993; then it was generalized by the

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

national territory. Before the national reconciliation period contains four main phases in which various changes are made in order to build an effective system of education.

Concerning the assessment/evaluation, Algerian educational system has known just one form of assessment since its advent which is: summative assessment (Cuq & Gruca, 2006, p. 242). It was applied after the end of each trimester, graded through numerical scale from 1 to 20. Diagnostic evaluation was introduced, but it was not applied until 2005.

The ‘national reconciliation period’ (2000 – present): in 2000, a national commission was constructed by the government included both educators and politicians. In line with country’s philosophy of democracy and reconciliation, the purpose of this national commission is to evaluate recent situation of education and give some recommendations on the necessary reforms. It was recommended that instead of three years, the length of middle schools extended to four years and five years instead of six years in primary schools. In terms of foreign language teaching, French was restored to first foreign language taught in third year of primary schools; whereas, English became second foreign language taught in first year of middle schools.

New approach ‘Competency-Based Approach’ was introduced in 2002, and new books were published for all levels. The reason for adapting it teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is to make students competent in real life tasks (Chelli, 2012).

CBA defined as “the development of complex capacities that enable students to think and act in various fields of activity (...). It consists of achieving knowledge in action, the result of a sound knowledge base that can be put into practice and use to

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

explain what is happening” (Braslavsky, 2005, as cited in “*Competency-based approaches* | International Bureau of Education,” (n.d.)). It is learner-centered approach and based on the demonstration that students have learned the knowledge and skills they are expected to learn together with their progress in education. What makes CBA different is that it measures learning rather than time and its main goal is to ensure that students are acquiring the knowledge and skills that are essential to success in school, higher education, careers, and adult life.

CBA assessment is criterion-referenced rather than norm referenced, continuous and ongoing. Further, learners are assessed according to their previous knowledge, skills and behaviors (Bowden, 1993).

CBA is adapted as the appropriate approach to Algerian educational content in which it focuses on measurable and usable skills and activities.

Algerian educational system knew many reforms over a long period of time during and after France colonialism until it stabilized in 2005 when CBA was adapted in order to improve Algerian education in general and form autonomous learners in particular.

3.2. The LMD system (Higher educational reform)

The main reform happened at the level of higher education in Algeria is the new applied system LMD.

In the year 2004 – 2005 Algeria has integrated the principles of the Bologna process set in Europe in 1999 at the level of higher education (Abdellatif Mami, 2013). This reform aimed to make the Algeria educational system goes hand in hand

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

with the international ones; and was considered as a step towards globalization. It has a great importance to teaching and learning process in the field of foreign language especially English (Rabhi, 2011). The LMD system is made of Licence of three years (six semesters), a Master degree of two years (four semesters), and Doctorate of three years research (six semesters) (Idri, 2005).

Some important changes affected the evaluation method: the educational knowledge is based on the results of the annual credits; the progress from one semester to another depends on the success to the modules (30 units for each semester). For getting Licence degree 180 credits (6 semesters) should be joined and 120 credits (4 semesters) to get Master degree. The compensation is accepted where which students who do not get a pass mark in the units, can conform the semester if they get it (the pass mark) in all joint units. Continuous assessment through TD marks ‘Travaux Dirigés’ is upgraded and personal effort/work is given much more importance (Rabhi, 2011 and Benmati, 2008).

In conclusion, Algeria has gone through a series of educational reforms: from the French colonial period, to a monolingual country after the adoption of Arabization policy, to an open country in the 21st century after the application of CBA in primary, middle, and secondary schools and the LMD system at universities. These reforms are an example of how Algerian government tried to apply uniform systems of most developed countries.

4. The Psychological Impact of Grades on Students

Evaluating students’ performance and achievement by using marking system (letter or numerical grades) is a common practice/feedback in education including

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

schools and universities. The impact of these different grading policies on learning is considerably debatable issue among the academics. Theoretically, the main aim of grading is providing information about students' performance and motivating them to work harder and perform better (Elikai & Schuhman, 2010). However, many researches resulted that grading affects students' motivation. One of them Guskey (1994), he states that grading reduces learning interest and mental ability which leads to problem solving and decision making. Similarly, Butler and Nisan (1986) found that grades emphasized *quantitative* aspects of learning; but not all learning can be quantified. Thus, they weaken student's interest, diminish creativity and foster fear of failure (cited in Lipnevich & Smith, 2008, p. 5). Black and Wiliam (1998) pointed that the impact of receiving a grade depends on whether this grade is good or bad news. Further, they argued that descriptive feedback leads to highest improvement in performance rather than letter grades or scores. The influence of grades is "inconclusive" with university students because "most of university assessment practices involve the assignation of grades" (Lipnevich & Smith, 2009, p. 320). As a conventional suggestion, students should get a qualitative feedback for better improvement, and making them understand and explore concepts is more important than completing curriculum (Guskey, 1994, Black & Wiliam, 1998, Lipnevich & Smith, 2009 and Elikai & Schuhman, 2010). Grades affect students differently according to their personality and level of achievement.

Conclusion

Effective education could not be proved without assessment. It is concluded from this chapter that assessment has a significant role in the process of teaching and learning; it provides students with information about their degree of progress and

CHAPTER I: AN OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT

achievement. Assessment also has different components and two main types (formative assessments: assessment for learning; and summative assessments: assessment of learning). Furthermore, there are two main reforms in Algerian educational system: the adaptation of CBA in the first three levels (primary, middle, and secondary levels) and LMD system at higher education. Finally, the impact of grades differs from one student to another according to their personalities and level of achievement.

CHAPTER TWO

The Writing Skill

Introduction.....	33
1. The Writing Skill.....	33
2. Reasons for Teaching Writing.....	34
3. The Relationship between Writing and Other Skills.....	35
3.1. Four Writing Skills Working Together.....	35
3.2. Writing and Speaking Relationship.....	36
3.3. Writing and Reading Relationship.....	37
4. Effective Writing.....	39
4.1. Organization.....	39
4.2. Clarity.....	40
4.3. Word Choice.....	40
4.4. Mechanics.....	41
5. Writing Assessments.....	42
5.1. Traditional Writing Assessments.....	42
5.2. Alternative/Modern Writing Assessments.....	45
5.2.1. Portfolio Assessment.....	45
5.2.2. Conferencing.....	47
5.2.3. Peer and Self Assessments.....	48
Conclusion.....	50

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

Introduction

In contrast to the traditional way of teaching languages as an object of study, nowadays they are taught as a system of communication; so that writing has become more important. Writing is a fundamental skill in language learning which means the ability to communicate with language via graphic representation of ideas. Utilizing research-based information, this chapter provides an overview on writing skill by considering first of all the nature of writing skill and its definition from diverse views. Secondly, reasons for teaching writing that can be summed up in two main reasons: writing-for-learning and writing-for-writing. Next, this chapter will present the relationship between the four language skills, writing and speaking relationship, and writing and reading relationship because the four language skills are interwoven. Following that, effective writing will be presented including the main key elements to write effectively: organization, clarity, word choice, and mechanics of writing. The chapter will conclude with writing assessments, traditional and modern ones that are of central importance in shaping learning process.

1- The Writing Skill

Writing effectively is an essential ability in modern life throughout the world. Writing is a difficult skill that S/FL learners need to acquire; its mastery requires linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural aspects. According to Weigle (2002, p. 72), there is no single definition to writing since L2 learners differ in terms of age (children/adults), level of education and L1 literacy, and real need of writing (educational or professional enhancement). Further additional factors include the acquisition level of L2/FL i.e. the student should at least know the grammar and vocabulary of language, the similarities and differences between L1 and L2/FL, if

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

they have similar writing system will be easier than if they differ in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and writing mechanics, and finally, the status of the L2/FL if it is of a wider communication; for instance, English learners seems to have more realistic needs for writing in English than in Russian. Thus, Weigle (ibid) deduced that “writing can be understood as meaning anything from forming letters to writing extended discourse”. Moreover, Long et al. (2011, p. 241) declare that writing involves “translating spoken language into its written form -going from the known to the unknown- sometimes referred to as ‘recoding’”. This definition suggests that writing is a specialized form of communication that starts from the known using some cues from which the unknown final form is guessed. They also argued that it is better for children to make early links between language, meaning and the written form of words. These links help them to progress in their process of learning and become a support for their linguistic and intellectual development. Furthermore, writing is related to people’s role in society, learning to write is more than developing a set of orthographic skills, it involves learning new cognitive and social relations (Tribble, 1996).

So, the idea drawn from the above definitions is that writing is the ability to communicate with language via graphic representation of ideas. It is also a central element in language teaching environment where students need to take notes, write assignments and a sophisticated social activity that is important for both native speakers and language learners.

2. Reasons for Teaching Writing

Children acquire speaking skill naturally as a result of being exposed to language, whereas writing ability is learned consciously. Harmer (2010) argues that there are

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

many reasons for teaching writing because it could not be naturally acquired like speaking. Correspondingly, writing affords students more ‘thinking time’ than they get in a natural conversation. This later helps them to think more about the language and process it when they are studying or they are involved in an assignment. Writing could be ‘writing-for-learning’ and ‘writing-for-writing’. The former is used as an aid tool and enabling activity that reinforces grammar structures, vocabulary, and all language practices that those students have studied. Writing-for-writing, on the other hand, develops students’ skills as writers. Here students should become better writers in any kind of writing and have to communicate with other people via writing. Furthermore, good real life reasons for teaching writing may include social, educational, personal, and professional reasons for getting students to write in which they might need to write e-mails, letters, and reports (Harmer, 2010, p. 112 and Lazaro, 1999, p. 90).

Teaching writing requires a special attention and care. There are many reasons for teaching writing, the kind of writing that students are involved in determines the way teachers guide students’ writing and correction.

3. The Relationship between Writing and Other Skills

All language skills either productive ‘speaking or writing’ or receptive ‘reading and listening’ are interwoven and contribute to an effective learning. Teaching writing as an independent skill may not reach the required level; rather it needs to be connected with the other skills for an effective learning.

3.1- Four Language Skills Working Together

There are four language skills speaking, writing, reading, and listening. The first two skills are productive and the last two are receptive. Writing could not be

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

considered an isolated skill because the four skills work together to improve each other. According to Johnson (2008), language skills complement and ameliorate each other. To illustrate, he gave the example of listening and hearing a language which enhance the ability to speak, and reading improves the ability to write, the later (writing) develops phonic knowledge and heightens reading fluency (Cited in Hamadouch, 2010, p. 15).

Thus, all language skills are interrelated, and the development of an individual skill enhances the development of others.

3.2- Writing and Speaking Relationship

Both speaking and writing are considered as language output. Yet, there are contradictory positions about the relationship between writing and speaking. Traditionally, it was held that speech is primary and writing is just a reflection of spoken language, but written language is more correct and valuable so that students should be encouraged to use their oral language strengths when they write a composition. However, the differences between writing and speaking across a number of dimensions were emerged in the recent years (Weigle, 2002, p. 15-16). Some differences between writing and speaking as seen by Brown (1994, p. 352-353) are summed up as follows:

- *Permanence*: oral language is transitory and must be processed in real time, while written language is permanent and can be read and re-read as often one likes.
- *Production time*: writers generally have more time to plan, review and revise their words before they are finalized, while speakers have a little or no time to do this.
- *Distance* between the writer and the reader in both time and space eliminates much of the shared context that is present between speaker and listener in face to face contact and that necessitates greater explicitness from the writer's part.

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

- *Orthography* in writing carries a limited amount of information compared to the richness of devices available to speakers to enhance a message (for example stress, intonation, pitch and so forth).
- *Complexity* written language tends to be characterized by longer clauses and more subordinators, whereas spoken language tends to have shorter clauses connected by coordinators as well as more redundancy (repetition of nouns and verbs).
- *Formality*: because of the social and cultural uses of which writing is ordinarily put, writing tends to be more formal than speaking.
- *Vocabulary*: written texts tend to contain a wider variety of words, and lower frequency words, than oral speech.

The accurate combination of speaking and writing forms enhance speaking and writing abilities since both of them are commonly used for different communication goals, in different settings and for different reasons. Additionally, Jonassen et al. (1996 as cited in Chelli, 2012) resulted that writing via ‘thinking aloud’ is beneficial in improving students’ productions both in length and complexity.

To conclude, both of writing and speaking are productive activities that can be used to meet the same communicative goals, but they differ in terms of complexity, formality, and production time.

3.3- Writing and Reading Relationship

Writing and reading are also two vital skills in language teaching and learning. Despite their differences, writing as a productive skill and reading as a receptive skill, both of them are about the written words, and each skill completes and results proficiency of the other. According to Long et al. (2011, p. 244), reading and writing are not the same thing but they are closely related. The evidence they provide is that learners learn to read and write in parallel because both of them require phonic skills

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

with different extents. For example, children' spelling ability progresses with reading. Thus reading development is based on visual memory for words, and writing development depends on the application of that alphabetic knowledge (letter-sound correspondences). From another angle, Stosky (1983, p. 636) shows a strong link between the two skills writing and reading and states that:

better writers tend to be better readers (of their own writing as well as of other reading materials), that better writers tend to read more than poor writers, and that better readers tend to produce more systematically mature writing than poor readers (cited in Bader, 2007).

Thus, the close link between writing and reading implies that good readers are often good writers; that is to say, reading or the exposure of many readings results in good writing. Moreover, these two skills share some similar features in two levels: the *surface* and the *deep* levels (Tavares, n.d., p. 59-60). The surface level deals with the mechanics of each skill that students are required to learn and master; those mechanics are decoding for reading and spelling, punctuation, and capitalization for writing. The combination of these mechanics helps students to write effectively and readers to understand accurately the conveyed message. However, the deep level includes dealings with readers and writers in which both of them have to reflect, reread, and create a meaningful script via reading. To do so, readers and writers need to share the same knowledge.

Writing and reading are closely related, orienting students to read as much as possible of different types of reading materials will influence their writing in terms of topic choice, writing style, and vocabulary as well as improve their competencies in writing.

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

Writing, reading, speaking, and listening are interwoven skills, no skill stands alone for an effective learning and the proficiency of one skill depends on the others. Teaching them all together leads to a good learning and a better achievement.

4. Effective Writing

Academic writing requires certain conventions of structure, style, and content in relation to writing aspects including organization, vocabulary, punctuation, and capitalization. According to Starkey (2004) there are four elements of an effective essay. He indicates that effective piece of writing should be well organized; clear with careful word choice and accurate language.

4.1- Organization

A logical organization is an important element of effective writing. Having a good organization in writing, as Starkey states,

will guide your reader from your first to the last sentence. He or she will be able to see how the various points you make in your (piece of writing) work together and how they support your thesis. (p. 2)

Imposing some kind of order on information and ideas in one's writing will make it easier to understand and remember. It will also make it seem more coherent especially when the ideas and parts of the paragraph/essay are related and flow well together and this what makes organization and create a sense of the whole product to the reader. There are many different organizational methods to organize a written material (paragraph or essay) such as 'outlining' where students collect the similar ideas, then classify them to major points, minor points, examples and details which progress logically in order to make a sense. 'Pyramid charts' are another organizational method where students place the topic/thesis statement at the top of the pyramid, below it the major points, and the minor points beneath the major ones. Examples and details are

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

added to the correspondent part. The final organizational method is 'listing' where students organize their notes through the following order: order of importance, chronological order, or from general to specific (strakey,2004, p. 1-10).

Guiding students with a clear organization will help them to write effectively on one hand and the readers to understand and remember on the other one.

4.2- Clarity

Creativity and uniqueness are not sufficient for a piece of writing to be well understood. Instead, communicating your ideas and thoughts as clear and as concise as possible is primordial to address readers. There are five guiding principles to clarify a written work as suggested by Starkey (2004, p. 11-20). The first principle is avoiding ambiguous language. The second is using modifiers such as adjectives, adverbs, and specific words. The third is being concise and using the active voice as possible. The fourth is avoiding unnecessary repetition. Finally, using pronouns carefully in which the referent is obvious.

Writing clearly and concisely is another important ingredient of effective writing. It entails frequent revision and focuses readers' attention to ideas and thoughts rather than sentences.

4.3- Word Choice

One of the most difficult parts of writing is to choose the right words in order to write correctly and accurately. During writing, writers should take into consideration *denotative* (the natural meaning of words) and *connotative* (the implied meaning of words) meanings when choosing words, because there are many confusing words that look similar but they differ in meaning. To do so, writers should be aware of the denotative meaning of words they use and keep in mind their implied meaning that involves emotions and social cultural conventions in order to ensure

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

proper language. They should also use inclusive language to avoid the possible aggressive and violent words or phrases. Finally, spelling errors are strongly disallowed; they can be corrected by applying basic spelling rules or using computer spell checkers (Starkey, 2004, p. 21-36).

In short, the right word choice is the best way for learners to convey their ideas in their production accurately. Denotative and connotative meanings should be taken into consideration, but not all students are aware of the implied meanings of the word.

4.4- Mechanics

Grammar rules and mechanics of writing are crucial components for students in learning and acquiring the writing skill. In fact, having these subskills makes their production clear and understandable. However, students do not need to become grammarians and master perfectly those mechanics of writing because they are complex and may mistake even professionals. Starkey (ibid) highlights the most challenging points of mechanics. The common ones are parts of speech including pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions, sentence structure errors especially sentence fragments and run-on sentences, the misuse of tenses and double negations, dangling modifiers, and misplaced punctuation marks and capitalization (Starkey, 2004 p. 39-52).

Writing mechanics are essential for effective writing. By learning them, students could write a polish and correct paragraph/essay that is clear, understandable, and enjoyable for readers.

Writing skill often seems to be a difficult task for students whether during the class or the exams. In order to make it easier, teachers should help students to manage their productions using the essential parts of writing: organization, clarity, word

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

choice and mechanics. Following these points is the successful way for students to improve their writing and write effectively.

5. Writing Assessments

Planning effective instruction for teaching students to develop their writing skill is as important as assessing their production. Generally, correcting written work could be subjective; Lazaro (chapter 5, p. 104) asserts that: “correcting written work can be a very subjective task, teacher should try to do it clearly, precisely and effectively” so that students could make sense of the correction and could understand the given mark and learn from their errors. He also asserted that teacher should use different techniques in their evaluation such as: marking positively, using reliable correction system and using apparent correction codes. There are traditional and alternative/modern writing assessments.

5.1 Traditional Writing Assessments

In the past, writing assessments emphasized grammatical correctness and lexical patterns. There was no freedom for creativity and inspiration that students could add to their writing. Consequently, ‘writing blocks’ appeared as a serious problem in language learning (White, 1996; Raimes, 1983& Hasted, 1975 cited in Chelli 2012, p. 121).

A key component of writing assessment as Weigle (2002) points out is the scoring method; how a written production is scored. She argues that defining the writing skill and ensuring that raters use the scale in appropriate and consistent way are fundamental elements in scoring method. There are three major categories of scales: primary trait scales, holistic scales, and analytic scales. These scales are

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

characterized by two features, whether a planned scale is applicable to a single or group of tasks, and whether a single score or several scores are assigned to each one (Weigle, p. 109-121).

First, primary trait scoring, as Weigle (ibid) says is essential in recognizing how well a student is able to write in a limited identified type of discourse. It consists of scoring one aspect of writing. Through this scoring procedure, the rating scale is described according to a particular writing task, and the paper is evaluated according to the level of achievement that the student has performed (ibid.) Primary trait scoring is rarely used in L2 writing assessment because little was known about its application.

Second, holistic scoring “rates the overall proficiency level reflected in a given sample of student’s writing” (Park, n.d., p. 1). Its usual procedure involves examining quickly each writing sample and then evaluating it according to writing scale that outlines the scoring principles, so it has the advantage of being very rapid. Consequently, holistic scoring is usually used in assessing writing. Both of primary trait scoring and holistic scoring rely on ‘general impression marking’ where scoring criteria are not clearly expressed. The later causes a problem for L2 learners/writers who are exposed to develop different facets of writing skill (organization, vocabulary, and syntax) at different rates (ibid.).

Third, analytic scoring as park (ibid) explains it, “involves the separation of the various features (content, organization, cohesion, register, vocabulary, grammar, or mechanics) of a composition into components for scoring purposes” (p. 2). This explanation indicates that analytic scoring procedures provide more details (strengths and weaknesses) than the holistic ones and emphasizes the different aspects of the writing ability that students utilize in their production. In contrast to holistic scoring,

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

analytic scoring is useful for L2 learners to show their writing abilities via different aspects of writing. Furthermore, analytic scoring takes longer time because teachers are required to make more than one decision for every script taking into consideration all writing conventions as content, grammar, register and so forth (Weigle, 2002 & Park, n.d.). A comparison between holistic and analytic scales based on six qualities of test usefulness presented by Bachman and Palmer (1996 as cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 121) is summed up in the following table:

Quality	Holistic scale	Analytic scale
Reliability	Lower than analytic but still acceptable.	Higher than holistic.
Construct Validity	Holistic scales assumes that all relevant aspects of writing ability develop at the same rate and can thus be captured in a single score; Holistic scores correlate with superficial aspects such as length and handwriting.	Analytic scales more appropriate for L2 writers as different aspects of writing ability develop at different rates.
Practicality	Relatively fast and easy.	Time-consuming; expensive.
Impact	Single score may mask an uneven writing profile and maybe misleading for placement.	More scales provide useful diagnostic information for placement and/or instruction; More useful for writer training.
Authenticity	White (1995) argues that reading holistically is a more natural process than reading analytically.	Raters may read holistically and adjust analytic scores to match holistic impression.
Interactiveness	n/a	n/a

Table 5: A comparison of holistic and analytic scales on six qualities of test usefulness (Weigle, 2002, p. 121)

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

Reliability, construct validity, practicality, impact, authenticity, and interactiveness are six qualities through which Bachman and Palmer make their comparison between holistic and analytic scales. According to them, possible combination of these qualities and selecting relevant ones to a given situation will determine what testing procedure to use.

There are several scoring methods used for writing assessment, the major ones are primary treat scales, holistic scales, and analytic scales. Each one has advantages and disadvantages. Thus, there is no perfect scoring procedure that suits all assessment purposes.

In Algerian academic settings, the dominant method of assessing writing is far from the modern ones that are practiced in different universities throughout the world, maybe for the reason that teachers are not well informed and unfamiliar with. Students' negative feedback about their scores is one evidence to the scoring method.

5.2- Alternative/ Modern Writing Assessments

Because traditional writing assessments are limited and did not fit the desired standards, many recent assessments rise such as portfolio assessment, conferencing, and peer and self assessment.

5.2.1- Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio is an assessment tool which was popular in the mid-1980's and used widely in L1 learning from primary schools to universities, than, it has spread to L2 writing in academic contexts (Weigle, 2002, p. 198). Another definition given by Northwest Evaluation association (1991, p. 4 as cited in Wdcott, 1998), a portfolio is "a purpose for collection of student works that exhibits to the students and/or others

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in a given area". In writing assessments, portfolios are the collection of students' papers that will be assessed and graded at the end of the instruction. There are many common characteristics (differ in the degree higher/ lower) of portfolio assessment programs presented by Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) about how they are collected, evaluated and used. For them, a portfolio

- 1- Is a collection of written works, rather than single writing sample.
- 2- Enables the writer to display a range of writing performances, in different genres and for different purposes.
- 3- Is characterized by a delayed evaluation, giving students both the opportunity and the motivation to revise written products before a final evaluation is given.
- 4- Involves selection of the pieces to be included in the portfolio
- 5- Involves reflection and self assessment, in that student must reflect on their work and decide how to arrange their portfolio (Hamp-Lyon and Condon, 2000, p. 199).

According to Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000), collection, reflection, and selection are the most important components of a portfolio. That is to say, collection may include first draft or finished script, few or large number of writing samples, and may be collected under rigorous criteria or student's choice. However, this collection is useless without reflection and selection. Through careful reflection, teachers should select and arrange content; this process makes a portfolio.

Teachers favor portfolio for many reasons. Wolcott (1998) sees that portfolios combine process and product together and integrate assessment with classroom instruction (cited in Clark et al., 2008, p. 214). Furthermore, portfolios are beneficial

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

for students in terms of the opportunities given for reflection and self awareness, the development of the sense of ownership through which students control and monitor their progress, and the utilization of portfolios as the basis for self-assessment to evaluate their own writing and revise it when preparing them (Murphy and Camp, 1996 as cited in Weigle, 2002, p. 204-205).

Portfolios are the collection of students' pieces of writing that will be graded or assessed. They are effortful for teachers to use them in large classes, but they are one of the best writing assessment tools since they enable students to write in different processes, give them a chance to revise and select their content, and make them motivated and autonomous. Furthermore, they also provide teachers with more detailed information about students' writing abilities in addition to their integration with classroom instructions.

5.2.2- Conferencing

Different ways of formative assessment teachers can provide their students with about their writings, one of them is face-to-face conferencing. Kynland (2003, p. 192) considers that conversation between teacher-student is an effective mean for teachers to respond to their students writing.

The interactive nature of conference gives teachers a chance to respond to the diverse cultural, educational and writing needs of their students, clarifying meaning and resolving activities while saving the time spent in detailed marking of papers. Hence, conferencing is a kind of oral feedback that should be planned carefully to improve students' writing. Consequently, conferencing leads learners to the intellectual development by being motivated intrinsically which is necessary in their learning achievement on the basis of their teacher's feedback. This later is important

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

to students' progress, so teachers should be cautious in making comments and avoid harmful remarks so that students do not lose their confidence and can develop their abilities in writing (Chelli, 2012, p. 127-128).

Over correction to students' papers (writing) could be demotivating, that is why conferencing is a sympathetic form of assessment where oral feedback is given. Conferencing is advantageous to students in developing their writing competences and progression in their learning in general.

5.2.3- Peer and Self Assessments

One of the important aspects of formative assessments is peer and self assessment. Students could develop their understanding by assessing their own work or that of others (peers).

Peer assessment is when students sit in pairs and read and revise each other's writing, looking for mistakes, trying to correct them and giving marks. Students appreciate this kind of assessment because they accept each other's criticism of their production more than their teacher's one that would be taken frivolously. Moreover, a learner prefers to interrupt his peer in order to understand what he did not get from teachers' explanation through which they interact with each other with the language that themselves naturally use. Peer assessment enables students to take responsibility of their work. To make it effective, teachers should train their learners through great practices. Yet, teachers are free to provide students with feedback and have full interventions while peer assessment ("None to Claim Their Bones", 2010, p. 152).

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

Using peer assessment tool to evaluate students' writing is beneficial at certain degree; students feel comfortable and can provide constructive feedback on each other production. So, peer assessment helps them to develop their writing competences.

Self assessment is the process through which students assess themselves: they identify their mistakes, correct them, and give marks under the criteria agreed upon with their teacher. It is used for formative assessment where students need to be coached in self evaluation (ibid). Hence, self assessment makes the students active participants and helps them to make judgments about their learning outcomes and develop autonomy and self reliance (Boud ,1995, Slimjmans, 1998. Cited in Chelli, 2012, p. 129)

Sambell and MacDowel (1998, p. 39) state the strengths of self and peer assessments as follows: they

- 1- Can foster students' feeling of ownership for their own learning.
- 2- Can Motivate students and encourage their active involvement in learning.
- 3- Make assessment a shared activity rather than alone (more objective).
- 4- Lead to more directed and effective learning
- 5- Encourage students to become more autonomous in learning.
- 6- Develop transferable personal skills.
- 7- Produce a community of learning(i.e. students feel that they have influence and involvement)
- 8- Reduce the teacher's work.
- 9- Make students think more deeply, see how others tackle problems and learn to criticize constructively (Sambell and MacDowel, 1998, p. 39)

CHAPTER II: The Writing Skill

To conclude, the above strengths show that self and peer assessments have a considerable impact on students' learning and they help students to become aware of how they are learning, their problems and needs. They also develop a kind of autonomy in students and help them to improve their learning specifically their writing.

Writing assessments are as important as planning effective instruction for teaching students to develop their writing abilities. Writing assessments can range from traditional assessments that emphasize grammatical correctness and lexical patterns, to modern assessments such as portfolios, conferencing, and self and peer assessments, which motivate students and help them to improve their writing competences.

Conclusion

Writing effectively becomes more important for students to reach academic success and to communicate throughout the world. It is concluded from this chapter that writing requires students' knowledge and awareness of its conventions that would reinforce the learning of this skill and make it easier. Furthermore, writing with relation to the other skills (speaking, reading, and listening) is characterized by being interrelated and complementary; to put it in other words, the development of one skill enhances the development of others. Finally, writing assessments have a great importance in determining students' progression and how do they improve their ability to write. However, there is no perfect writing assessment that suits all assessment purposes; for this reason, theorists and practitioners continuously look for plausible ones that are good and serve well teaching/learning process.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

CHAPTER THREE

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction.....	51
1. The Rational for the Study.....	51
2. Students' Questionnaire.....	52
2.1. Administration of Students' Questionnaire.....	52
2.2. Description of Students' Questionnaire.....	52
2.3. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire.....	53
2.4. Discussion of Findings.....	74
3. Teachers' Opinionnaire.....	79
3.1. Administration of Teachers' Opinionnaire.....	80
3.2. Description of Teachers' Opinionnaire.....	80
3.3. Analysis of Teachers' Opinionnaire.....	81
3.4. Discussion of Findings.....	91
4. Pedagogical Recommendations	95
Conclusion.....	97

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The aim of the current research is to investigate the role of letter grades in enhancing students' writing ability. Two data gathering tools were used in order to verify and draw some conclusions on the research hypothesis: letter grades would have a positive impact on EFL students' writing skill if they are properly used as a substitute to numerical grading. The first tool is a questionnaire administered to 50 second year university students of English; it is appropriate for determining students' attitudes towards the alternative method of evaluation and making scientific predictions and decisions. The second tool is an opinionnaire administered to teachers; it is appropriate for exploring teachers' opinions and perceptions of letter grades evaluation method. Data analysis will be reported in tabular and graphic representations with their interpretations.

1. Rational for the Study

One of the indivisible parts of education is assessment; it is a complementary element that provides information to students about the degree of progress and achievement that they have made. However, a single grade will not adequately convey information as guidance of a student's potential. The current emphasis on letter grades system as a substitution to the numerical one outlines the impact of this system on students' writing competencies. In reality, grading is a source of both anxiety and motivation. If this alternative system had been used appropriately, then the study stresses on the change in the two mentioned factors; reducing anxiety that inhibits learning to a normal degree that may promote learning and increasing motivation particularly intrinsic motivation that leads students to learn and to perform at a high level of writing proficiency. Therefore, the present research sheds light on the

importance of A-F grading in relation to its contribution and effects on the process of writing.

2. Students' Questionnaire

Four main points will be covered under the above heading in the following order: questionnaire administration, description, analysis, and discussion of findings.

2.1. Administration of Students' Questionnaire

For the present research, the total number of 50 copies of the questionnaire was administered to second year students of English (group 8) at MKU of Biskra on 12 and 14 march 2017 at the same time 14:50 p.m. They were genuinely sympathetic as well as helpful. Students answered the questionnaire in the classroom, so they handed it back as they finished answering it. It should be acknowledged that the questionnaire does not need a prior piloting because the questions are clear, direct, and precise.

2.2. Description of Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire is classified under the structured type and it consists of 19 close-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and diverse scales such as Likert scales, ranking scales, and semantic differential scales (in this technique, respondents are asked to mark with a tick or an 'x' between tow bipolar adjectives at the extreme). The questions are divided into three sections are as follows:

Section One: General Information (Q1-Q3): it aims to obtain an idea about students' choice of English and how they view the module of 'Written Expression'. This section is devoted to obtain information about the nature of students' choice of studying English language whether it was personal or imposed; which skill(s) challenges them most; and whether 'WE' module is interesting or not.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Section Two: Writing Skill (Q4-Q8): it inquires to explore students' writing difficulties and their preferences concerning feedback; for instance, whether they prefer to be corrected during/after the instruction and whether they prefer written/oral correction or to be marked.

Section Three: Letters/ Marks Grading System (Q9-Q19): it contains questions that seek to probe for students' opinions and attitudes towards letter grades and their importance to develop their writing competencies and to achieve a good quality of writing.

2.3. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

After the administration and the description of the students' questionnaire, the analysis of the gathered data will be introduced.

Section One: General Information

Question One

Is your choice of English:

- a- Personal b- Imposed

Option	N	%
A	46	92
B	4	8
Total	50	100

Table 6: Students' Choice of English

The majority of respondents (92%) chose studying English personally according to their desire. However, only 4 students; representing (08%), are imposed in studying

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

English, because of their parents desire to study English and/or their obtained level did not allow them to choose the specialized branches.

Question Two

Which skill(s) challenges you most?

a- Speaking

b- Writing

c- Reading

d- Listening

Option	N	%
a	20	40
b	10	20
c	04	08
d	05	10
a and b	01	02
a and c	03	06
a and d	02	04
b and c	01	02
c and d	01	02
a and b and c	01	02
a and c and d	01	02
None	01	02
Total	50	100

Table 7: Students' Most Challenging Skill(s)

The most challenging skill for the participants is speaking (40%) in which students are anxious to speak in front of the whole class and are afraid of making

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

mistakes. (20%) of students are facing difficulty with writing skill because it necessitates accuracy and deep thinking. Nevertheless, both of reading and listening are less challenging skills by (08%) and (10%). On the other hand, there are other respondents who are facing difficulties with more than one skill, as speaking and reading representing (06%) and speaking and listening representing (04%); whereas, the rest of the participants choose speaking and writing, writing and reading, reading and listening, speaking and writing and reading, speaking and reading and listening difficulties sharing the same rate (02%). The results determine the degrees of skill(s) difficulty among the respondents.

Question Three

How do you find the module of 'Written Expression'?

a- Very interesting

b- Interesting

c- Not interesting

Option	N	%
a	14	28
b	26	52
c	10	40
Total	50	100

Table 8: Students' Attitude toward the Module of 'Written Expression'

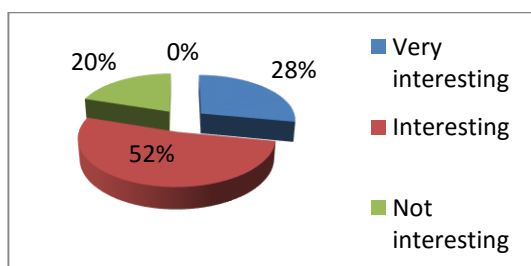


Figure 1: Students' Attitude towards the Module of 'Written Expression'

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

The majority of the respondents (80%) find the module of 'Written Expression' interesting. This percentage is divided to option (a) 'very interesting' with (28%) and option (b) 'interesting' with (52%); it means that students are more motivated and interested in writing. Yet, there are 10 students who find 'Written Expression' not interesting representing (20%). All in all, results demonstrate that students are aware of the importance of writing.

Section Two: Writing Skill

Question Four

Please classify the following in order of writing difficulty from 1 to 6 where 1 is most difficult to you and 6 is the least difficult to you

a- Vocabulary

b- Grammar

c- Spelling

d- Punctuation

e- Generation and organization of ideas

f- Use of transitional words (connectors)

Option	N	%
a	15	30
b	11	22
c	11	22
d	05	10
e	05	10
f	03	06
Total	50	100

Table 9: Students' Areas of Difficulty in Writing

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

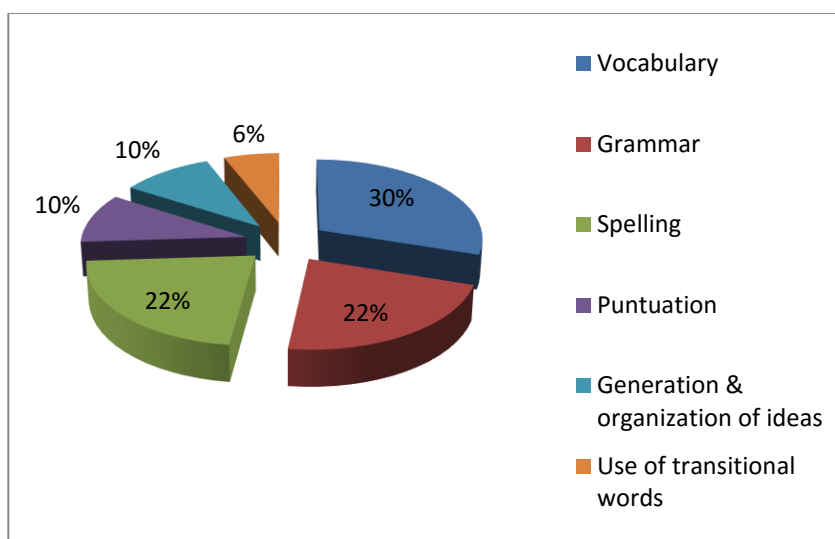


Figure 2: Students' Area(s) of Difficulty in Writing

15 respondents (30%) consider vocabulary as the highest writing difficulty; therefore, writing requires a rich vocabulary otherwise it becomes poor. However, there is a balance between grammar and spelling representing (22%) on one hand, and punctuation and generation and organization of ideas representing (10%) on the other hand as the most difficult area in writing because accuracy and coherence are essential for good production. Finally, (06%) of the participants went for the use of transitional words. Consequently, writing difficulty could be classified according to students' responses as follows: 1- vocabulary, 2- grammar, 3- spelling, 4- punctuation, 5- generation and organization of ideas, 6- use of transitional words.

Question Five

Does your teacher correct your products in the classroom?

a- Yes

b- No

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Option	N	%
a	38	76
b	12	24
Total	50	100

Table 10: Teacher's Correction in the Classroom

The majority of respondents (76%) answer positively. The productions of most of them are corrected continuously by their teacher of 'Written Expression' during the instruction. Nevertheless, (24%) of students answer negatively because they may not participate and show their writings to their teacher. Hence, teachers do their best to provide students with formative feedback in the classroom.

Question Six

When would you prefer to be corrected?

a- During the course

b- At the end of the instructional unit

Option	N	%
a	37	74
b	13	26
Total	50	100

Table 11: Students' Preferences of Correction Time

The most penchant category is 'correction during the course' representing (74%). This helps students to become aware of their mistakes and do not repeat them again during writing. The second category, correction at the end of the instructional unit, comes next with (26%) in which students favor final judgments. Results show that it

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

is better to correct students' products during the course in order to work at ease and follow their progress while writing.

Question Seven

Which type of correction do you prefer?

a- Written correction

b- Oral correction

c- Giving grades/marks

Option	N	%
a	28	56
b	13	26
c	09	18
Total	50	100

Table 12: Students' Preferences of Correction Types

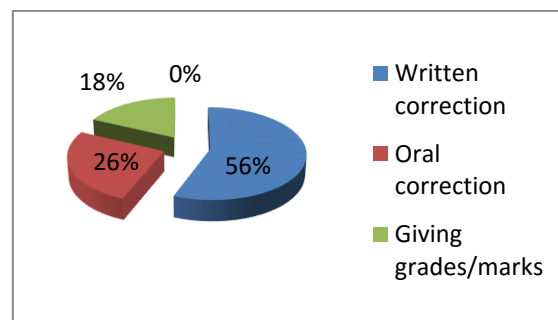


Figure 3: Students' Preferences of Correction Types

Most of students (56%) opt for written correction because it comments on the work (paragraph) confidentially through keeping the privacy of the production without being exposed to classmates. However, (26%) of the respondents prefer oral

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

correction; those students are courageous and like transparency. Only 9 participants opt for giving grades/marks representing (18%).

Question Eight

Does teacher's correction during the course develop your writing?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
a	46	92
b	04	08
Total	50	100

Figure 13: Students' Attitudes towards Teacher's Correction

The majority of respondents (92%) progress in their writing due to their teacher's correction during the instruction; that is to say, learners are involved in learning and are improving in writing. Nonetheless, (08%) of the participants do not progress in their writing as this investigation illustrates; which reflects their demotivation and non-involvement in the writing process. According to the results, teacher's correction during the instruction is beneficial; it makes students more involved and engaged in the writing tasks.

Section Three: Letters/Marks Grading System

Question Nine

How does your teacher of 'Written Expression' evaluate your writing?

a- Scores you

b- Highlights mistakes using the red ink or symbols

c- Both

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Option	N	%
a	7	14
b	18	36
c	25	50
Total	50	100

Table 14: Teacher's Evaluation of Students' Production

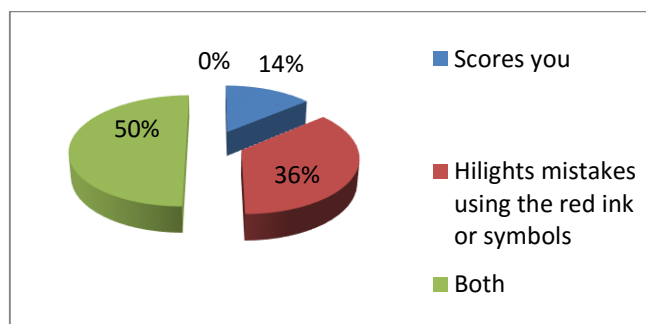


Figure 4: Teacher's Evaluation of Students' Productions

Half of the sample (50%) chose both of scoring and highlighting mistakes using red ink or symbols; whereas, some of the participants (36%) choose the second option highlights mistakes using the red ink or symbols, and the option for scoring method represents (14%). Results demonstrate that the teacher uses different methods of evaluation in assessing students' writing.

Question Ten

When you write, do you take into consideration teacher's comments?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
a	30	60
b	20	40
Total	50	100

Table 15: Students' Attitudes towards Teacher's Comments

This question diagnoses students' consideration of their teacher's comments. Results show that (60%) of the participants take into consideration teacher's comments during writing, because they find them as helping guidance to improve. Whereas, (40%) of surveyed students do not take into consideration their teacher's

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

comments which denotes that they are demotivated and imposed in learning English language or due to the comments of the teacher.

Question Eleven

Red pen makes you feel stressed:

a- Always

b- Sometimes

c- Rarely

d- Never

Option	N	%
a	12	24
b	15	30
c	10	20
d	13	26
Total	50	100

Table 16: Students' Attitudes toward the Red Pen

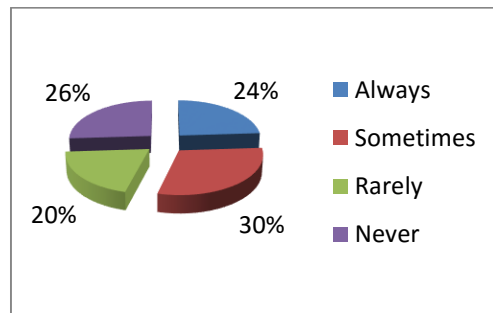


Figure 5: Students' Attitudes towards the Red Pen

Students' psychology had an important role in the learning process. A respectable rate (30%) of participants opt for 'sometimes' and (24%) for 'always' as they feel stressed from using the red pen while correcting their writing because their anxiety and the fear of making mistakes increase on one hand and their self-confidence reduces on the other one. (26%) of the surveyed respondents said that red pen never

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

stresses them, and the rest of students opt for ‘rarely’ representing (20%). In reality, the red ink is still the most dominant in correcting students’ work.

Question Twelve

What do you think of marks?

- Good Bad
- a)Extremely b)Quite c)Slightly d) Neither e)Slightly f)Quite g)Extremely
- Fair Unfair
- Interesting Boring
- Objective Subjective
- Satisfied Unsatisfied
- Reliable Unreliable

In the light of this question, the main purpose of using eight (8) bipolar adjectives at the extreme is to diagnose students’ answers validity whether they are just ticking or answering carefully to the end that to have a clear idea about their opinions about scores. Each two bipolar adjectives will be represented in a table.

The first tow bipolar adjectives to be represented are good/bad.

Option	N	%
a	0	0
b	11	22
c	18	36
d	04	08
e	02	04
f	15	30
g	00	00
Total	50	100

Table 17: Students’ Attitude towards Marks

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

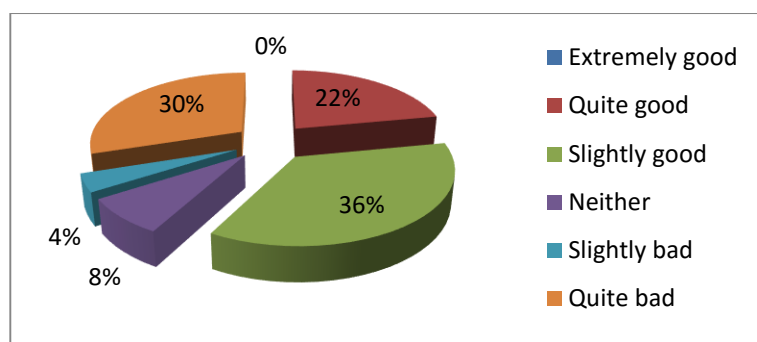


Figure 6: Students' Attitude towards Marks

The obtained results show that (36%) of respondents find that marks are slightly good in contrast to (30%) of students who find them quite bad. The rest of participants opt for 'quite good', 'neither', and 'slightly bad' representing (22%), (08%), and (04%) respectively.

Results of the fairness of scores are shown in the following table.

Option	N	%
a	01	02
b	14	28
c	14	28
d	01	02
e	02	04
f	18	36
g	00	00
Total	50	100

Table 18: Students' Attitudes towards the Fairness of Scores

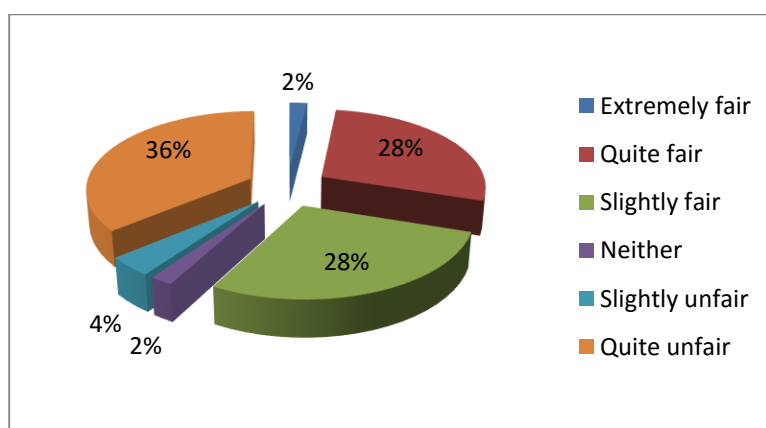


Figure 7: Students' Attitudes towards the Fairness of Scores

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Talking about fairness, (36%) of students consider that marks are quite unfair because they are not satisfied with the obtained scores. A similar number of participants find marks quite fair and slightly fair representing (28%). Only 2 surveyed students opt for 'quite unfair' and just one student opt for 'extremely fair' which means that this student strongly supports numerical grades and she/he is totally satisfied.

The next bipolar adjectives are boring/interesting; findings will be summed up in the following table:

Option	N	%
a	00	00
b	20	40
c	08	16
d	10	20
e	06	12
f	05	10
g	01	02
Total	50	100

Table 19 : Students' Opinions about Marks

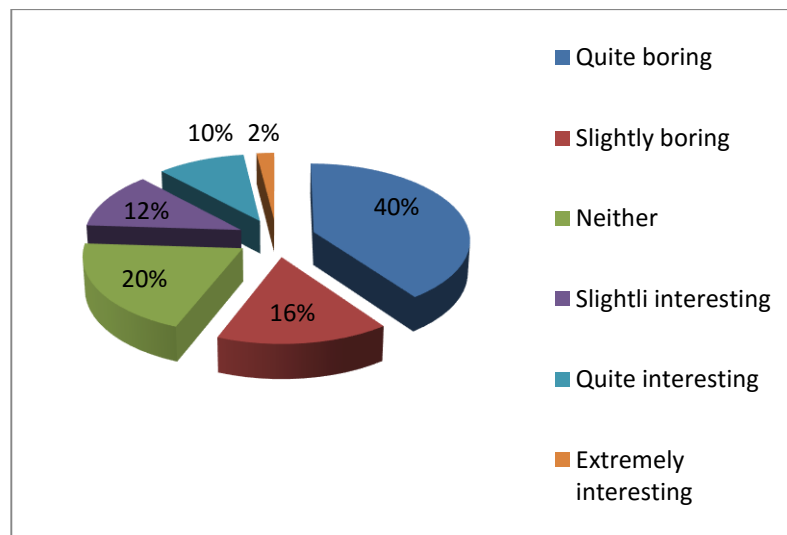


Figure 8: Students' Opinions about Marks

Moving to next bipolar adjectives; boring and interesting, (20%) of the respondents were neutral; neither boring nor interesting. However, (40%) of students

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

choose ‘quite boring’ and (16%) opt for ‘slightly boring’. The minority went to the interesting side in which (12%) respondents opt for ‘slightly interesting’; (10%) of them choose ‘quite interesting’, and only one participant who opt for ‘extremely interesting’. As can be seen, students are bored and lost interest in numerical grades which emphasizes the need for alternative system of evaluation at least on the formative level.

The objectivity/subjectivity of marks; according to students’ responses, will be represented in the following table:

Option	N	%
a	00	00
b	09	18
c	18	36
d	12	24
e	04	08
f	07	14
g	00	00
Total	50	100

Table 20: Students’ Opinions about Objectivity/Subjectivity of Marks

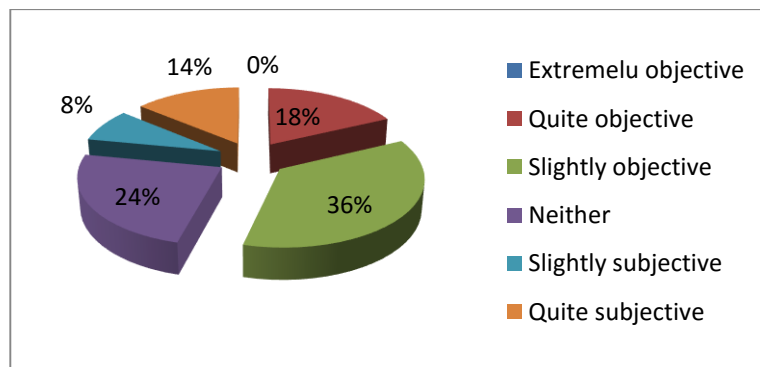


Figure 9: Students' Opinions about Objectivity/Subjectivity of Marks

The next concern is about objectivity and subjectivity of marks. 27 of surveyed respondents went for the objective side in which (36%) of students find that marks are slightly objective and (18%) find them quite objective. Nevertheless, 11 participants went for the opposite side that is subjective divided into (14%) of students who choose ‘quite subjective’ and (08%) who opt for ‘slightly subjective’. The rest of

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

respondents were neutral representing (24%). All answers considered, students' opinions about the objectivity and subjectivity of marks depend on the scores they receive; if the scores are good then they will consider them objective, but if the scores are bad, they will consider them subjective because they are likely to see themselves weak comparing to those who got good marks and think that they are incapable to achieve in their learning.

The following table will sum up students' answers on whether they are satisfied with their marks or not.

Option	N	%
a	00	00
b	04	08
c	17	34
d	03	06
e	07	14
f	19	38
g	00	00
Total	50	100

Table 21: Students' Satisfaction with their Marks

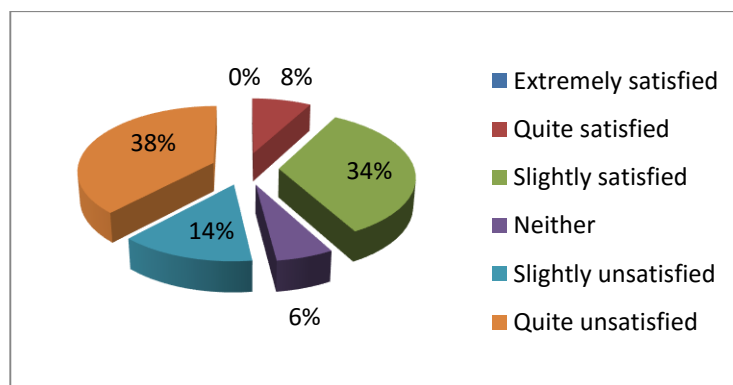


Figure 10: Students' Satisfaction with their Marks

Satisfaction motivates students to progress in their learning process. Not surprisingly, results show that (38%) of respondents are quite unsatisfied with their marks followed by those who are slightly unsatisfied representing (14%) because they are not truly aware of the marking schemes that teachers use, and the obtained marks

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

do not reflect their real levels. It is expected that there are some students who are quite satisfied with (08%). Others are not really satisfied in which they opt for ‘slightly satisfied’ with (34%). However, the rest of participants chose to be neutral; neither satisfied nor unsatisfied representing (06%).

The last bipolar adjectives are reliable/unreliable; students’ opinions about the reliability of marks are summed up in the following table:

Option	N	%
a	00	00
b	09	18
c	14	28
d	06	12
e	07	14
f	14	28
g	00	00
Total	50	100

Table 22: Students’ attitudes towards the Reliability of marks

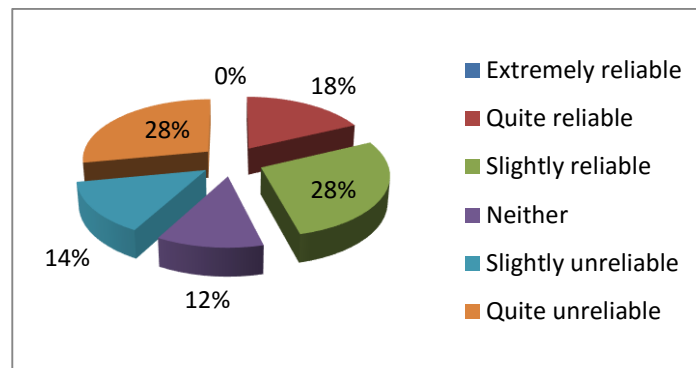


Figure 11: Students' Attitudes towards the Reliability of Marks

An equal number of participants answer closely by opting for ‘slightly reliable’ and ‘quite unreliable’ with the same rate (28%). Indeed, it confirms and approves students’ dissatisfaction with their marks. Whereas 9 respondents choose ‘quite reliable’ representing (18%), (14%) of surveyed students choose ‘quite unreliable’, and the rest of participants are neutral.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

In the final analysis, students' opinions about marks differ from one to another, but the majority show negative attitudes toward scores. Even if there are students who show positive attitudes towards scores, teachers should put more emphasis on this controversial issue of evaluation since it is very important in teaching and learning in general and in developing students' writing competences in particular.

Question Thirteen

Which method of evaluation do you often receive in 'Written Expression'?

a- Letters

b- Marks

Option	N	%
a	25	50
b	25	50
Total	50	100

Table 23: Evaluation's Kind Students Receive in 'Written Expression' Module

Students of the chosen sample (group 8) are usually receiving letters in their formative assessment of writing. The question needs some kind of preciseness concerning the time of evaluation that is during the instruction; otherwise students have received full explanation about the undertaking research, why they are chosen as a sample, and they are allowed for asking clarifications if they need. Accordingly, half of the sample (50%) chooses letters and the second half chooses marks.

Question Fourteen

Do you find any difference between the two methods?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
a	29	58
b	21	42
Total	50	100

Table 24: Students' Opinions about Letters/Marks Difference

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

The participants' answers are approximately close to each other. (58%) of respondents answer positively to the question in which they find a difference between the two methods, while (42%) of the surveyed students answer negatively to the question in which they do not find any difference between them.

Question Fifteen

If yes, in terms of

a- Stress

b- Motivation

c- Satisfaction

Option	N	%
a	03	06
b	12	24
c	05	10
a and b	02	04
b and c	03	06
a and b and c	04	08
Find no difference	21	42
Total	50	100

Table 25: Letters/Marks Differences

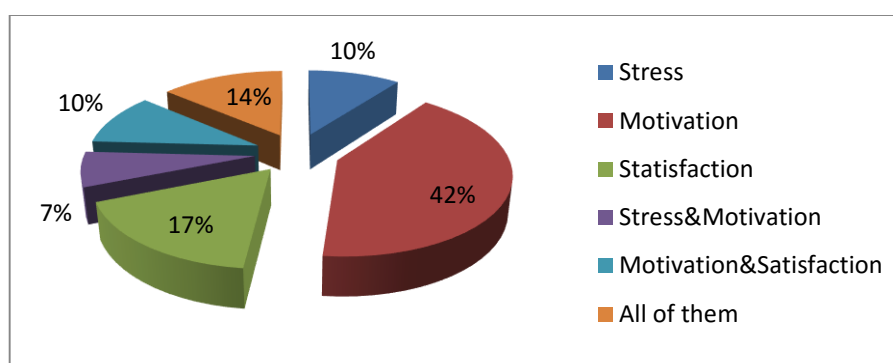


Figure12: Letters/Marks Differences

It should be noted that this is a follow-up question to the previous one with the intention to confirm students' previous question and determine it precisely.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Motivation is the highest rate of responses representing (24%) that represents the main difference between letters and marks. (10%) of respondents opt for 'satisfaction'. However, 4 students choose all of them stress, motivation, and satisfaction with (08%). The same rate of responses among participants (06%) opts for 'stress' and both of 'motivation and satisfaction'. Only two students choose 'stress and motivation' representing (04%). Others who do not answer representing (42%) are those who did not find any difference between the two methods. Results demonstrate that letter grades system has a positive impact on writing skill for students who find difference(s) between the two systems of evaluation.

Question Sixteen

Do you like the experience of letter grades system of evaluation?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
A	35	70
B	15	30
Total	50	100

Table 26: Students' Appreciation of Letter Grades Evaluation System

Most of surveyed students representing the rate of (70%) appreciate the experience of letter grades method of evaluation. Such a result is important because it contributes to promote learning. Nonetheless, (30%) of the respondents do not appreciate this experience because they are unfamiliar with this system or it is not effective for them.

Question Seventeen

Do letter grades help you to be:

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

a- Confident

b- Creative and autonomous (independent in making decisions)

c- Motivated to write better

Option	N	%
A	12	24
B	09	18
C	24	48
a and b	01	02
b and c	02	04
a and b and c	02	04
Total	50	100

Table 27: Letter Grades' Advantages

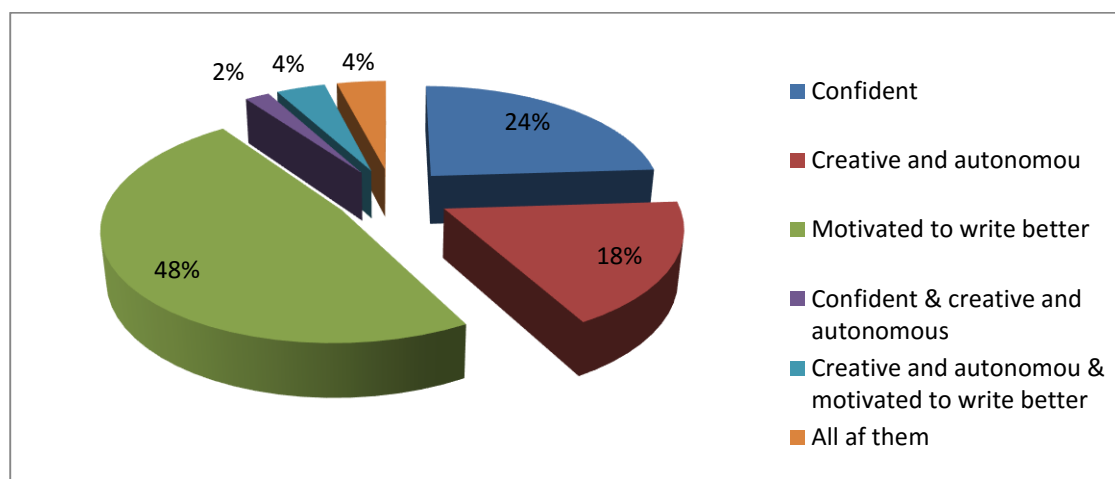


Figure 13: Letter Grades' Advantages

The highest rate of surveyed participants represents (48%) shows that students are motivated to write better. However, (24%) of the students become confident when writing; and (18%) of them become creative and autonomous. The same number of participants answers both of being creative and autonomous and motivated to write better, and all the three representing (04%). Only one student chooses both of

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

confidence and creativity and autonomous. Results prove that letter grades have a positive impact on students' writing ability.

Question Eighteen

To which extent letter grades promote properness in your writing?

a- Very strongly

b- Strongly

c- Weakly

d- Very weakly

Option	N	%
a	10	20
b	29	58
c	09	18
d	02	04
Total	50	100

Table 28: Properness in students' Writing

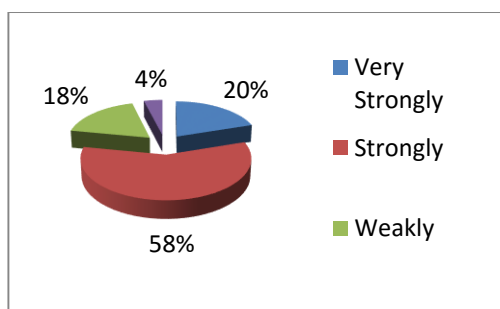


Figure 14: Properness in Students' Writing

According to the obtained results, it is noticeable that the majority of respondents representing (58%) agree that letter grades strongly promote properness in their writing. Others choose very strongly because they like novelty and enjoy the experiment in the class with their teacher representing (20%). (18%) of the participants' writings properness are weakly promoted by the correction via letters;

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

and the lowest rate (04%) of students choose very weakly because they are not comfortable with this evaluation method.

Question Nineteen

Do you like to generalize letter grades system to the other modules?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
a	30	60
b	20	40
Total	50	100

Table 29: Students' Wish to Letter Grades Generalization

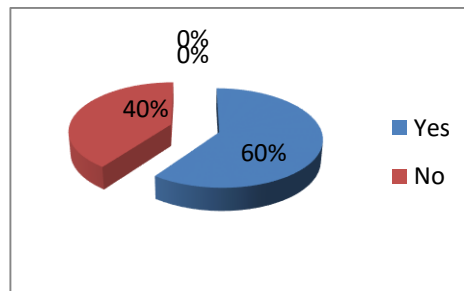


Figure 15: Students' Wish to Letter Grades Generalization

30 students representing (60%) answer positively 'yes' in which they would like to generalize letter grades to the other modules as an alternative to scores. Whereas, (40%) of students answer negatively 'no' because they would like to keep the numerical grades that are easy to understand and make them feel comfortable.

2.4. Discussion of Findings

The overall aim of this study is to examine the effect of letter grades evaluation system on students' written products and decide whether it is an effective assessment method that emphasizes personal improvement. As noted in the literature review,

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

grading is still a controversial issue among academics taking into consideration its effect on students' personality and their level of achievement

The analysis of students' questionnaire revealed that a considerable number of students are willing to the reform of the traditional number grades after the experience of letter grades method that they had in class with their teacher of 'Written Expression' module as they feel that letters encourage them to ameliorate their writing abilities. Starting by the first section, general information, approximately all students have been chosen studying English according to their desire; only few students were imposed to study English. The most challenging skill is speaking which reflects students' psychological factors such as: lack of self-confidence, embarrassment, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and imposition in studying English. Writing comes at the second level of difficulty since it is based on accuracy and deep thinking; embarrassment and anxiety are less influential because writing afford more time-thinking than speaking. Nevertheless, receptive skills; reading and listening, are less challenging in the view of they do not take much effort. It is noticed that language output speaking and writing are the most challenging skills; that is an indicator of their importance as two major means of communication. The mentioned section also demonstrated that most of students find the module of 'WE' interesting which means that students are aware of writing importance in their education in particular and social life in general. This is an important finding in which students should be more motivated and involved by their teachers' help and assistance as indicated by Harmer (2010) that the social, personal and professional reasons are good for getting students to write. Yet, there are students who find 'WE' not interesting due to the lack of reading materials or simply they are not interested with writing; otherwise, writing is necessary to fulfill their educational achievements.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Moving to the second section, most of students face difficulty in having the right and exact words (vocabulary) while writing, then grammar and spelling because grammar contains much of simple and complex rules and spelling where students are mistaken by silent letters in the words. Punctuation and generation and organization of ideas are the third area of difficulty in writing and the use of transitional words is the last one, those areas of difficulty in writing need practice as much as possible. It is totally reasonable since writing requires polished mechanics of grammar and writing. However, students do not need to become grammarians and master perfectly mechanics of writing because they are complex and may mistake even professionals as supported by Starkey (2004, p. 39). Moreover, the majority of students assert that the teacher of 'WE' corrects their writing products in the classroom which means that their teacher does her/his best to provide them with relevant formative feedback in the class during writing. Nevertheless, few students answered negatively 'no' because they may not participate and show their writing to their teacher as they feel anxious or because they are not interested with writing. Here teachers cannot provide all students with feedback due to the over-crowded classes. Additionally, the majority of students indicate that they do prefer to be corrected during instruction since teacher's formative feedback is beneficial in developing their writing deficiencies through which they become aware of their weaknesses and try to work on them. There are three types of evaluation: written, oral, or graded evaluation; learning styles are influential factors that determine which type of correction students prefer. Furthermore, most of students agreed on the importance of their teacher's correction during the course (formative feedback) in developing their writing ability with the hope to become good writers and good communicators. According to Long et al (2011), formative assessment figures out students' strengths and weaknesses; it

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

guidelines future learning and promote students to perform better. From the analysis of students' answers about the writing skill, it is evident to say that students are aware of both importance and complexity of writing skill and the teacher's formative feedback in enhancing their writing proficiency.

The analysis of the third section that concerns both marks/letters grading systems demonstrated that the teacher of 'WE' uses different methods of evaluation in assessing students' writings such as scoring, highlighting mistakes using red ink or symbols, or both of them. It is good for teachers to be eclectic in order to meet the diverse learning needs and styles. Unfortunately, more than one third of students do not take into consideration teacher's comments because these comments are demotivating or students do not like receiving comments. Indeed, comments are fundamental and they help students to improve especially low achievers in order to attribute their performance to the effort they made not to the lack of ability (Black et al, 2004). However, there are students who take into consideration teacher's comments while writing because. It is encouraging to find a respectable number of students who, know the value of teacher's comments in promoting their writing ability. Further, more than half of students feel disturbed and stressed from the red ink that is often used in correcting their papers. In reality, some students' papers are loaded with the red ink especially those that contain a lot of mistakes and gabs including grammar errors, spelling, coherence and cohesion. In this case, teachers may point out students' strengths first to attract their attention, then their weaknesses that they should work on to enhance and prove their writing with the probability of using other colors in addition to the red one. Black et al (2004) also maintain that "feedback that focuses on what needs to be done can encourage all to believe that they can improve" (p. 18). The rest of students do not have any problem with the red pen;

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

it neither interrupts nor stresses them. Students' responses also show that opinions about marks/scores differ according to students' achievements. Accordingly, there are three categories of answers. The first one is where students went for the positive side which contains the following adjectives: good, fair, interesting, objective, satisfied, and reliable. The second category of answers is where students went for the negative side that contains the opposite adjectives of the positive side as follows: bad, unfair, boring, subjective, satisfied, and unreliable. Finally, the category of answers where students chose to be neutral, neither positive nor negative features had been chosen. Black and William (1998) indicate that the impact of receiving a grade may well depend on whether this grade is fundamentally good or bad news (cited in Smith, 2009, p. 319). Students had experienced letter grades method as formative feedback that their teacher provided them with during the instruction in 'WE'. It is important to know that the teacher informed her/his students with the used criteria in this system of evaluation and s/he also distributed a table which contains details about these criteria. So students were well prepared or at least well informed on A-F grading system. Results showed that some students did not find any difference between the two methods, it could be due to the students' focus on learning rather than grading which is a good feature; or to the duration of the experiment (2 semesters) that is not enough to point out any difference especially if they do not participate in class because this later affects the frequency of receiving feedback. However, more than half of students found difference(s) between the two grading systems in terms of motivation; according to Bull (2003) and Gundlach (2005), letter grades are a source of intrinsic motivation for students, satisfaction and stress. It is a logical order which means that those students respond to letter grades positively. Moreover, the majority of students like the experience of trying unfamiliar method of grading where letters are used

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

instead of numbers, because the experience was enjoyable and beneficial in the same time. Nonetheless, few students did not like it. The highest advantage of letter grades as students indicated is ‘motivated to write better’; secondly ‘confident’ and thirdly ‘creative and autonomous’. Hence, A-F grading system helped students to develop their writing abilities. In this respect; according to teachers’ opinionnaire, teachers who had experienced this system agreed that letter grades are effective in promoting students’ writing proficiency. Most of students also asserted that letter grades strongly promote properness in their writing. Yet, there are students whom writings’ properness does not promoted by letter grades. Finally, more than half of students wanted to generalize letter grades evaluation system to other modules as they found it good and beneficial; while others did not want to be generalized. Yet, two semesters are a short period of time; and the alternative method of grading needs more time for piloting. It also needs to be applied on summative evaluation as well for more valid and reliable data.

To conclude with, writing is a complex skill that requires careful correction. The analysis of students’ questionnaire shows that students are aware of the complexity of writing skill and the importance of teacher’s formative feedback in enhancing their writing ability. Results also demonstrate that letter grades have a positive impact on students written products by being motivated to write, confident and autonomous.

3. Teachers’ Opinionnaire

The administration, description, analysis of teachers’ opinionnaire, and the discussion of findings will be covered.

3.1. Administration of Teachers' Opinionnaire

The entire number of administered opinionnaires is 5 (because only few teachers experienced A- F grading) to teachers who teach different modules at MKU of Biskra at the English Section. Three (3) of them have experienced letter grades evaluation system in assessing students' writings; whereas, the others have not. The teachers were very cooperative in that they answered the questions.

3.2. Description of Teachers' Opinionnaire

The opinionnaire consists of 4 questions and 21 statements divided into two sections. The descriptions of sections are as follows:

Section One: General Information: It composes of 4 questions about teachers' experience in teaching 'WE' module: if it is an easy task for second- year university students and how they deal with their mistakes in addition to the relationship between grades and course objectives. This section also includes a question that aims at finding out teachers' reasons for experiencing or not experiencing letter grades in correcting students' productions.

Section Two: Writing Assessment: It consists of 21 statements that were prepared to explore teachers' experience and opinions about letter grades evaluation system. The opinionnaire identifies the importance of grading in students' academic achievement, students/teachers' appreciation of letter grades, and the outcomes of A-F grading experience. The answers were taken in three point scale: agree, neutral, disagree. Opinions of 5 teachers were collected in order to know the impact of this system in enhancing students' writing abilities as perceived by their teachers.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

3.3. Analysis of Teachers' Opinionnaire

A detailed analysis of the two sections of teachers' opinionnaire is introduced below.

Section One: General Information

Question One

Is writing an easy task for second-year university students?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
a	0	0
b	5	100
Total	5	100

Table 30: Teachers' Opinions about Teaching Writing to Second-Year Students

All of the surveyed teachers agree that writing is a difficult task for second-year university students representing (100%); because writing is a complex skill and the time allocated for 'Written Expression' is not enough.

Question Two

Should teachers correct every mistake the students make?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
a	0	0
b	5	100
Total	5	100

Table 31: Teachers' Attitudes towards Correcting All Students' Mistakes

According to the findings, it is noticeable that all teachers accord that not all students' mistakes should be corrected.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

When asked to justify their answers, teachers listed the following points:

- The large number of the students.
- Sometimes, teachers have to turn a blind eye towards certain mistakes in order not to frustrate their students.
- Because there will be nothing left to students to correct and this will hinder their development of their editing strategies.
- That would be time consuming. Moreover, writing is a PROCESS; it takes a long time and a good deal of effort.
- Not all mistakes should be corrected; otherwise students will lose their motivation and become less involved.

These points represent the pedagogical factors that teachers encounter concerning the correction of all students' mistakes.

Question Three

Do you think that scoring system in writing should be strongly based on the course objectives?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
a	4	80
b	1	20
Total	5	100

Table 32: Teachers' Opinions about the Relationship Between Scoring System and Course Objectives

Results show that only one teacher answered that scoring system is separate from course objectives representing (20%). While 4 teachers with (80%) believe that scoring system in writing should be strongly based on course objectives. This later

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

emphasizes that the given grades depend on how much students have reached the goals of the course.

Question Four

Did you experience letter grade system evaluation?

a- Yes

b- No

Option	N	%
A	3	60
B	2	40
Total	5	100

Table 33: Teachers' Experience of Letter Grades

It seems from the obtained results that 3 of the surveyed teachers experience letter grades method in assessing students' written productions. Only 2 teachers (40%) have not experienced it.

-Why?

The reasons of using this method are summed up in what follows:

- Easy way to evaluate written production.
- When I am not quite sure which mark fits best the student work.
- It is more relevant to assess students' productions.

The reasons of not using letter grades are:

- Students are not used to it.
- Because we need to give marks, it has become the basic system of evaluation that all teachers follow.

These reasons explain why teachers have (or have not) experienced A-F grading system.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Section Two: Writing Assessment

In this section, teachers are requested to answer the following statements with agree (A), neutral (N), and disagree (D).

5. Students' writing problems could be freely discussed with their teachers.

Option	N	%
A	05	100
N	00	00
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 34: Students' Possibility of Discussing Writing Problems with their Teachers

All the surveyed teachers (100%) agreed that students could freely discuss their areas of difficulty in writing with their teachers. So teachers play their role guides in order to help their students work on their writing deficiencies and develop their potentials and abilities in writing.

6. The grade assigned to students is very important in their academic achievement.

Option	N	%
A	05	100
N	00	00
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 35: The Importance of Grades in Students' Academic Achievement

Results show that all teachers (100%) agreed on the importance of the assigned grades to students' academic achievement, because grades serve as one of selective criteria for higher educational achievement and employment.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

7. The grade assigned to students will affect their writing ability.

Option	N	%
A	04	80
N	00	00
D	01	20
Total	05	100

Table 36: The Effect of Grades on Students' Writing

According to the finding, 4 teachers agreed that grades affect students' writing abilities. Only one teacher (20%) disagreed. Since grades are a source of motivation and anxiety as well, they may affect students' writing ability positively or negatively.

8. Compared to scores/marks, letter grades reduce stress and anxiety.

Option	N	%
A	03	60
N	01	20
D	01	20
Total	05	100

Table 37: Letter Grades' Reduction of Stress and Motivation

As results show, 3 teachers (60%) agreed that letter grades reduce stress and anxiety comparing to marks. However, one teacher disagreed and other one teacher was neutral representing the same rate (20%).

9. Letter grades are more objective than numerical ones.

Option	N	%
A	01	20
N	01	20
D	03	60
Total	05	100

Table 38: The Objectivity of Letter Grades

Objectivity is an essential characteristic of grades. Only one teacher agreed that letter grades are more objective than numerical ones. Nonetheless, 3 teachers

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

(60%) disagreed; that mean that, both of systems could be objective or subjective. Just one teacher answered 'neutral'; perhaps s/he is not knowledgeable or well informed with this alternative grading system.

10. They are effective in promoting students writing proficiency.

Option	N	%
A	03	60
N	01	20
D	01	20
Total	05	100

Table 39: The Effectiveness of Letter Grades in Promoting Students' Writing Proficiency

It is seen from the obtained results that 3of the surveyed teachers (60%) agreed that letter grades are effective in promoting students' writing proficiency. One of the two rest teachers answered 'neutral' and the other 'disagree'.

11. They motivate students intrinsically.

Option	N	%
A	03	60
N	02	40
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 40: The Impact of Letter Grades

Results show that 3 of teachers agreed that A-F grading motivates students intrinsically; while 2 teachers were neutral.

12. They help students to work on their weaknesses and encourage them to reach the mastery of the writing skill.

Option	N	%
A	03	60
N	02	40
D	00	00
Total	05	100

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Table 41: The Role of Letter Grades in Developing Students' Writing Ability

Three teachers representing (60%) agreed on the role of letter grades in helping students to know their weaknesses and progress in their writing. 2 teachers answered 'neutral'.

13. They develop students' self-esteem and autonomy.

Option	N	%
A	03	60
N	02	40
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 42: The Role of Letter Grades in Developing Students' Self-Esteem and Autonomy

According to the finding, 3 of surveyed teachers agreed that letters develop students' self-esteem and autonomy. However, 2 teachers (40%) were neutral.

14. Grading students on an A, B, C, D, and F motivates students to do their best during writing.

Option	N	%
A	02	40
N	03	60
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 43: The Role of A-F Grading in Motivating Students

It is noticed from the obtained results that 2 respondents (40%) agreed that letter grades prompt students to think hard and do their best while writing. Other respondents answered 'neutral' representing (60%).

15. Letter grades experience with learners was frustrating.

Option	N	%
A	00	00
N	03	60
D	02	40
Total	05	100

Table 44: The Frustration of Letter Grades Experience

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Results show that 3 of the surveyed teachers answered 'neutral'; while 2 disagreed on the disappointment of the experience because it was encouraging.

16. Some of students were displeased.

Option	N	%
A	00	00
N	03	60
D	02	40
Total	05	100

Table 45: Students' Displeasure from Letter Grades

The obtained results show that 3 teachers were neutral about students' annoyance from letter grades. However 2 teachers disagreed because students were pleased.

17. The real feelings of students were not shared with you.

Option	N	%
A	00	00
N	05	100
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 46: The Ambiguity of Students' Real Feelings

According to the finding, it is noticed that all teachers (100%) were neutral. Teachers who experienced the system did not know whether their students shared their real feelings sincerely or not.

18. During giving feedback, there was a hesitancy to use unfamiliar method of assessment.

Option	N	%
A	00	0
N	03	60
D	02	40
Total	05	100

Table 47: Teachers' Hesitancy during Giving Letter Grades

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Results show that 3 of the respondents (60%) answered 'neutral'. (40%) of respondents answered 'disagree' because it was a sort of formative feedback so there was no hesitancy while providing their students with this grades (letters).

19. Students were not adequately prepared for letter grades method.

Option	N	%
A	00	00
N	03	60
D	02	40
Total	05	100

Table 48: Students' Preparation for A-F Grading

The obtained results demonstrate that 3 surveyed teachers were neutral about the adequate preparation of students for letter grades. However, 2 teachers disagreed. One of them added 'in the past yes': students were not tolerably prepared for A-F grading which means that s/he used to evaluate his/her students' writing via letters. This later makes the problem of inadequate preparation of students disappeared.

20. The personalities of students were conflicting with the alternative method of scoring.

Option	N	%
A	00	00
N	05	100
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 49: The Conflict of Students' Personalities with the alternative method

All the surveyed respondents answered 'neutral' to the conflict of students' personalities with the alternative method of evaluation.

21. If the use of a particular assessment method (letter grades) was not successful, it would not be tried again.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Option	N	%
A	00	00
N	05	100
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 50: the Reutilization of Unsuccessful Method of Assessment

Results show that all teachers answered ‘neutral’ to the reutilization unsuccessful method of evaluation; otherwise, it is clear that any new experience would add more to their professional experience even if it was not successful.

22. Students feel more relaxed and at ease when receiving their grades in form of letters.

Option	N	%
A	03	60
N	02	40
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 51: Students’ Feelings while Receiving Letter Grades

As results show, 3 of the surveyed respondents agreed that students’ feel more relaxed and at ease while receiving their grades in a form of letters; this reflects the positive effect of letter grades on students’ psychology. (40%) of teachers were neutral.

23. Students appreciate the experience of this alternative method of assessment that they had in class.

Option	N	%
A	00	00
N	05	100
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 52: Students’ Appreciation of the Experience of Letter Grades

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

All the teachers answered 'neutral' to the students' appreciation of letter grades experience. Perhaps teachers who experienced it did not ask their students about their opinions about such grading system.

24. Using letter grades system was enjoyable experience.

Option	N	%
A	02	40
N	03	60
D	00	00
Total	05	100

Table 53: Teachers' Joy with the Experience

According to results, 2 surveyed teachers agreed that they enjoyed the experience of evaluating their students' writing using letters; while 3 teachers were neutral.

25. Next year, letter grades would be used/tried.

Option	N	%
A	04	80
N	00	00
D	01	20
Total	05	100

Table 54: The Possibility of Using A-F Grading in the Future

Results show that 4 teachers (80%) agreed on the idea of using or trying (for those who did not experience it yet) A-F grading next year. Only one teacher did not agree because it is not the official system of grading.

3.4. Discussion of Findings

Teaching and learning could not be achieved without assessment. Parnell (1973, p. 2698) emphasized that

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Measurement is the hand-maiden of instruction. Without measurement, there cannot be evaluation. Without evaluation, there cannot be feedback. Without feedback, there cannot be good knowledge of results. Without knowledge of results, there cannot be systematic improvement in learning (cited in Mehrens & Lehmann, 1991, p. 6).

Thus students' ability to learn particularly to write could not be improved until it is evaluated carefully and systematically by their teachers.

The analysis of teachers' opinionnaire revealed that teachers who had experienced letters grading system in assessing the written products of their students show positive attitudes towards this system in enhancing and developing students' writing ability. The first section was about general information demonstrates that all teachers stated that writing is a difficult skill for second-year university students due to some pedagogical factors such as the given time for 'WE' module (three hours per-week), the used approach in teaching writing, and the level of students. Moreover, most of teachers believe that scoring system in writing should be strongly based on the course objectives. Hence, the given grade to a piece of work depends on how much a student has reached the goals of the course. As indicated by Schwartz (n.d), "tests should be designed with primary course objectives in mind" (p. 1). The obtained results also showed that teachers who experience this system assert that A-F grading is easy and relevant to evaluate written production and it is useful when the exact mark which fits best the student's work cannot be decided. Take for example B- (70-72) (see table 03), when the teacher is uncertain about whether a specific piece of writing deserves an 70, 71, or 72; he may give a B- instead; and the student will understand that his writing is good but there are some deficiencies. It is good to search

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

for an alternative assessment method for the purpose of promoting students to perform better.

Moving to the analysis of the second section that is about writing assessment, all teachers agreed that grades are important in students' academic achievement and they affect their writing abilities. Grades are a source of both motivation and stress (anxiety), so their influence on writing ability depends on students' personality. Compared to scores/marks, teachers who had experienced letter grades agreed on the positive outcomes of it. Letter grades:

- ✓ Reduce stress and anxiety.
- ✓ Are effective in promoting students' writing.
- ✓ Motivate students intrinsically.
- ✓ Help students work on their weaknesses and encourage them to reach the mastery of writing skill.
- ✓ Develop students' self-esteem and autonomy.
- ✓ Make students feel more relaxed when receiving their grades in form of letters.

2 teachers were neutral because they have not experienced this system. These findings support the results of the implementation of letter grades in Tribhuvan University in Nepal in which they resulted that letter grades are a source of intrinsic motivation, ensure the quality of curricular process and its product and also give clear indication about the quality of students' performance. In addition, they argued to implement A-F grading to higher educational level believing that it increases the power of generalization of an academic or training program which is important for this era of globalization ("None to Claim Their Bones," 2016). Moving to objectivity of the

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

system, most of teachers disagreed on the view of letter grades are more objective than number grades. In reality, the objectivity of assessment is another controversial issue in which researchers, instructors and practitioners are still searching for an effective and objective method of assessment whether quantitative or descriptive one. Talking about the experience; from the teachers' side, just one teacher disagreed with the view of letter grades experience was frustrating and the rest were neutral. Also, only one teacher claimed that there was hesitancy while giving unfamiliar grade; while 2 teachers disagreed which means that there was no hesitancy while using letters in evaluating their students products because they used to assess with them. Further, teachers agreed that letter grades experience was enjoyable. It is an encouraging finding that opens the door for further piloting and research on the validity and reliability of this system in addition to its contribution to the process of teaching and learning. Moving to the students' side, the inadequate preparation of students for letter grades was a reason for the misunderstanding between students and teachers' feedback. Moreover, all teachers answered 'neutral' to the ambiguity of students' feelings and the conflict of students' personalities with the alternative scoring method. For teachers who have experienced letter grades, they do not know whether students shared their real feelings to them or not. Consequently, they also answered 'neutral' to students' appreciation of letter grades experience. However, there are some teachers who agreed that there are students who were pleased with it. Finally, most of teachers agreed that letter grades system will be used next year which paves the way for the reforms of our grading system if would be.

Summing up, assessment is a vital part in the process of education, and writing is one of the most required skills in every matter of education. Letter grades are considered as a successful sort of assessment that develops students learning. The

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

analysis of teachers' opinionnaire demonstrated that teachers who have experienced A-F grading agreed that this system has a positive impact on students' writing ability in which they become good writers through being motivated intrinsically and being autonomous. Even there are only three respondents who have experienced letter grades system; they agreed in many common points and their responses were almost the same.

4. Pedagogical Recommendations

In the light of the aforementioned results, it is important to highlight some interesting points to be considered in assessing students' written products using A-F grading as guidelines for teachers and students too.

The following recommendations are addressed to teachers:

- Teachers need to pursuit all what concerns A-F grading.
- Teachers should carefully establish rigorous and attainable criteria concerning the evaluation of writing skill via letters.
- The criteria should be well-designed and explicit for easy and better understanding.
- A-F grading plan and criteria should be communicated to students at the beginning of the semester; these later should not be changed without acknowledging and giving a complete explanation to students.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

The application of the three last recommendations encourages students to study effectively and minimizes their complaints about grading because teachers have already communicated and clarified how each student is going to be evaluated under this alternative grading (A-F grading).

- Also, teachers should be careful of the unintended consequences of using letter grades that have the possibility of deriving bad behavior or unwanted results.
- While correcting students' writing assignment, teachers should read them in relation to the listed A-F criteria focusing on each feature of these criteria. As teachers are re-read the students' writings, they should circle each appropriate section for each criteria listed as shown in the following picture. In the last step, teachers should give a final letter grade that fits each student's writing.

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Basic Writing Rubric					
Feature	4 Strong	3 Developing	2 Emerging	1 Beginning	Score
Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a clear focus Uses descriptive language Provides relevant information Communicates creative ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops a focus Uses some descriptive language Details support idea Communicates original ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attempts focus Ideas not fully developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lacks focus and development 	
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a strong beginning, middle and end Demonstrates an orderly flow of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts an adequate introduction and ending Evidence of logical sequencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some evidence of a beginning, middle and end Sequencing is attempted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no organization Relies on single idea 	
Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses effective language Uses high-level vocabulary use of sentence variety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse word choice Uses descriptive words sentence variety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited word choice basic sentence structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No sense of sentence structure 	
Conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few or no errors in: grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some errors in: grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has some difficulty in: grammar, spelling, capitalization, punctuation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no evidence of correct grammar, spelling, capitalization or punctuation 	
Legibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to read Properly spaced Proper letter formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Readable with some spacing/ forming errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to read due to spacing/ forming letter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No evidence of spacing/ forming letter 	

Figure 16: Example of How to Use A-F Grading Criteria in Evaluating Students’

Writing. Retrieved from (<https://www.thoughtco.com/writing-rubric-2081370>)

The next recommendation is devoted to students. They should overcome their hindering challenges such as: lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and anxiety so that they can participate and interact with their teachers so that the opportunity of receiving letter grades during the instruction increases.

These are some practical recommendations that could be used concerning the implementation of letter grades system of evaluation of students’ written products.

The following table represents a sample criteria for evaluation of the paragraph:

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

Categories of Performance	Beginner (1)	Basic (2)	Intermediate (3)	Advanced (4)
Topic sentence/ main idea	No evidence of a main idea. The paragraph lacks clarity and cohesion.	Topic sentence is present but poorly written. The main idea is not entirely clear.	Topic sentence is complete. The main idea is clearly stated.	Topic sentence is strong and clearly states the main idea. Stimulates interest.
Body/supporting sentences (3-5 related sentences)	Random ideas are hard to follow. Less than 3 complete sentences.	Limited details to establish interest in the topic. Short, choppy sentences that lack flow	Body contains 3+ sentences. Mostly related details. Not all sentences are complete and focused.	Consistent development of main idea. Creates interest through details and varied sentence structure.
Concluding sentence	There is no concluding sentence that connects to a main idea.	The sentence is incomplete and does not sum up the paragraph.	The sentence is complete and adequately sums up the paragraph.	The sentence is complete and restates the main idea effectively.
Organization/fluency	Paragraph lacks a clear focus. Confusing order of ideas	Limited details. Shows effort to create order using simple language to express ideas.	Appropriate choice of words. More care needed to create fluency.	Well-organized with clear topic, body and conclusion. Flows logically. Consistent focus on topic.
Mechanics/ word choice/ presentation	Many errors in grammar and spelling. Run-ons and lack of punctuation. Limited new vocabulary. Disorganized.	More than 5 errors in spelling and grammar. Words not always used correctly. Needs revision.	Less than 5 errors in spelling and grammar. Shows variety of words.	Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. Uses descriptive language. Neat final draft.

Table 55: Sample Criteria for Evaluation of the Paragraph. Retrieved from [https://saskliteracy.ca/pdf links/CircleOfLearning_rubric_for_well_written_paragraph.pdf](https://saskliteracy.ca/pdf_links/CircleOfLearning_rubric_for_well_written_paragraph.pdf)

Conclusion

This chapter deals with the analysis of both students' questionnaire and teachers' opinionnaire in addition to some suggested recommendations as guidelines for them

CHAPTER III: DATA ANALYSIS

with the hope to contribute in the enhancement of the writing process and its evaluation.

The analysis of students' questionnaire demonstrated that students are aware of the importance of the writing skill and its complexity; and the role of their teacher's formative feedback as an effective ingredient in the progression of their writing process. As it is known, marks are the commonest grades that students used to receive. According to students, the experience used by their teacher of the alternative grading 'letter grades' as formative assessment in 'WE' module has a positive impact on their psychology and their ability to write through being intrinsically motivated, confident, creative and autonomous. These results are supported by teachers who have experienced A-F grading in assessing their students' written products in which they agreed on the aforementioned outcomes of letter grades evaluation system.

As can be seen, results of both students 'questionnaire and teachers' opinionnaire revealed that letter grades have a positive impact on students' writing ability.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Assessment and instruction are interwoven; the right combination of them results a good level of education. Performing better the four language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading) is what teachers and students intended to reach. Writing, as one of the most required skill in every matter of education and social/professional life as well, needs much focus and interest. Consequently, writing assessments should be valid, fair, and appropriate to the purpose for which they are designed. As an alternative to number grades, letter grades are more relevant and suitable for correcting students' written products.

The present study was designed to answer research question: how would letter grades assessment system affects EFL learners' writing skill if compared to traditional grading? Taking into consideration all what concern A-F grading, it is hypothesized that letter grades would have a positive impact on EFL students' writing skill if they are properly used. Tow data gathering tools were used in order to answer research question and examine the hypothesis: a structured questionnaire for second-year LMD students of English and an opinionnaire for 5 teachers of English too.

It is concluded from the obtained conclusions from the analysis of both students' questionnaire and teachers' opinionnaire that writing is a complex skill that is not easy for second-year university students of English to master. Furthermore, letter grades help students to develop their writing ability through becoming more motivated, confident, and creative. On the basis of the data collected and analyzed throughout this research, it is concluded that research hypothesis is confirmed because students responded positively to letter grades system which encourages them to write better and decreases their stress and anxiety. To apply A-F grading appropriately,

GENERAL CONCLUSION

teachers are recommended to establish special rigorous criteria for letter grades, clearly communicate them to students, and use them while evaluating their students' writing.

The present study investigated the impact of letter grades on students' writing. It is meant to be as a kind of proposal concerning the future procedure in grading Algerian students as an alternative to numerical marks. Further studies may replicate the study in other ways and reinforce it involving a large sample.

REFERENCES

List of References

- Abdellatif Mami, N. (2013). Teaching English under the LMD reform: The Algerian experience. *International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*, 7(4), 910-913.
- Anderson, L. W. (2003). *Classroom assessment: Enhancing the quality of teacher decision making*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Angelo, T., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques a handbook for college teachers*. Jossey-Bass A Wiley Imprint, San Francisco, CA. Pp 427.
- Bellalem, F. (2008). *An exploration of foreign language teachers' beliefs about curriculum innovation in Algeria: A socio-political perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, University of London).
- Benmati, K. L. (2008). *Is the Algerian educational system weakening? An investigation of higher school curriculum* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Constantine).
- Black et al., P. (2004). *Working inside the black box: Assessment for learning in the classroom*. *Phi Delta Kappa International*, 86(1), 8-21.
- Black, P. J., & William, D. (1998). *Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*. London: King's College London School of Education.
- Bowden, J. A. (1993). *Implication for higher education of competency-based approach to education and training*. Australia: Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
- Brown, H. D. (1994). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Engle Wood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall Regents.

- Bull, B. (2013, April 10). *5 Common reasons for the importance of letter grades*. Retrieved October 22, 2016, from <http://etale.org/main/2013/04/10/5-common-reasons-for-the-importance-of-letter-grades/>
- Chelli, S. (2012). *The effects of the competency-based approach on learners writing achievement* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Constantine).
- Clark et al., I. L. (2003). *Concepts in composition theory and practice in the teaching of writing*. Mahwah, New Jersey: LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES.
- Competency-based approaches* | International Bureau of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/topics/competency-based-approaches>
- Cuq, J. P., & Gruca, I. (2006). *Cours de didactique du français langue étrangère et seconde*. Grenoble: presse université de Grenoble.
- Discreet Point vs. Integrative Test | Linguistics | Grammar. (2012, March 7). Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/doc/84369488/Discreet-Point-vs-Integrative-Test>
- Edmunds, J., & Serve Center at University of North Carolina at Greensboro. (2006). *How to Assess Student Performance in History: Going Beyond Multiple-Choice Tests*.
- Elikai, F., & Schuhmann, P. W. (2010). An examination of the impact of grading policies on students' achievement. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 25(4), 677-693. doi:10.2308/iace.2010.25.4.677
- Grading System in Algeria. (n.d.). *Foreign Credits*. Retrieved from <http://www.classbase.com/Countries/Algeria/Grading-System>
- Grading Systems*. (2015, June 22). Retrieved from https://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/ED_3-5_Grading_Systems35364.pdf
- Gundlach, M. (2015, October 2). Letter Grades vs. Rubrics: The Pros & Cons of Each Grading System from a Teacher's Perspective. Retrieved October 21, 2016, from <http://www.brightubeducation.com/student-assessment-tools/18251-letter-grading-vs-rubrics/>
- Guskey, T. R. (1994). Making the grade: What benefits students? *Educational Leadership*, 52(2), 14-20.
- Hamadouch, M. (2010). *Developing the writing skill through increasing learners' awareness of the writing process* (Master's thesis, University of Constantine).

- Hamp-Lyons, L., & Condon, W. (2000). *Assessing the portfolio: Principles for practice, theory, and research*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Harmer, J. (2010). *How to teach English*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.
- Hickman, R. (2013). *Cambridge handbook of educational abbreviations and terms with a glossary of educational research terms* (6th ed.). UK: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.
- Idri, N. (2005). *The LMD system experience as a struggle between the educational development and reform: An analytical study of the Endeavour of the academic year 2004/2005 in Bejaia University with suggested solution. Recontres Internationales sur le Dispositif LMD-Problèmes et perspectives 4-5 Del, Université de Bejaia*. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED504547>
- Introduction to issues in language assessment and terminology. (n.d.). Retrieved January 10, 2017, from <https://www.press.umich.edu/pdf/0472032011-intro.pdf>
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1996). *Meaningful and manageable assessment through cooperative learning*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (n.d.). Cooperative learning. *encyclopedia of school psychology*. doi:10.4135/9781412952491.n63
- Lázaro, L. A. (1996). *Acquisition and assessment of communicative skills: Practical issues in the english classroom*. Alcalá de Henares (Madrid: Universidad Alcalá de Henares).
- Linn, R. L., & Miller, M. D. (2005). *Measurement and assessment in teaching* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Lipnevich, A. A., & Smith, J. K. (2008). *Response to assessment feedback: The effects of grades, praise, and source of information*. New Zealand: ETS, Princeton.
- List of books and articles about Grades and Grading | Online Research Library: Questia*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 22, 2016, from <https://www.questia.com/library/education/curriculum-and-instruction/testing-and-assessment/grades-and-grading>
- Long et al. (2011). *The psychology of education* (2nd ed.). Hoboken: Taylor & Francis.

- Lozach, A. (2013, October 15). *La notation et l'évaluation des élèves : vers une révolution ?* / *L'ÉCOLE DE DEMAIN*. Retrieved September 4, 2016, from <https://ecolededemain.wordpress.com/2013/10/15/la-notation-et-levaluation-des-eleves-vers-une-revolution/>
- Luitel, L., & Poudel, D. P. (2016, February 22). *Letter grading system: Implication and its impacts in higher education*. Retrieved from <http://cerid.org/uploaded/file/Proceeding%20of%20the%20national%20seminar.pdf>
- Mehrens, W. A., & Lehmann, I. J. (1991). *Measurement and evaluation in education and psychology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Moreno, M. A. (2017, January 7). *The Disadvantages of a Letter Grading System / Synonym*. Retrieved February 3, 2017, from http://www.ehow.com/list_5935940_disadvantages-letter-grading-system.html
- Mussaawy, S. A. (2009). *Assessment practices: Students' and teachers' perception of classroom assessment* (Master's thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst).
- Oribador, P. (2009). Norm-referenced v. criterion-referenced tests. *Curriculum Evaluation*. Retrieved from <http://curriculumevaluation09.blogspot.com/2009/07/norm-referenced-test-v-criterion.html>
- Osterlind, S. J., & Wang, Z. (n.d.). Item Response Theory in Measurement, Assessment, and Evaluation for Higher Education. *Handbook on Measurement, Assessment, and Evaluation in Higher Education*. doi:10.4324/9780203142189.ch11
- Testing, assessment, measurement and evaluation definition*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.slideshare.net/norazmi3003/testing-assessment-measurement-and-evaluation-definition>
- Park, T. (n.d.). *Scoring Procedures for Assessing Writing*. Retrieved February 21, 2017, from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.494.4632&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Popham, J. W. (1975). *Educational evaluation*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

- Rediehs, L. (n.d.). *The problem with traditional grading*. Retrieved February 3, 2017, from http://it.stlawu.edu/~lrediehs/grading_files/problem.htm
- Rubric for a well-written paragraph (Level 2)* (n.d.). Retrieved from https://saskliteracy.ca/pdf_links/CircleOfLearning_rubric_for_well_written_paragraph.pdf
- Schwartz. (n.d.). *Matching assessments to learning outcomes*. Retrieved from <http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/resources/handouts/examslearningoutcomes.pdf>
- Starkey, L. B. (2004). *How to write great essays*. New York: LearningExpress.
- Stosky, S. (1983). Research on reading/writing relationships: A synthesis and suggested directions. *Language Arts*, 60, 627-642.
- Tavares, R. R. (n.d.). The connection between reading and writing: theoretical foundations and some techniques. *Laboratorio Clinico de Leitura - UFSC*, 57-66.
- Trrible, L. (1996). *Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wales. (2010). *Guidance on the teaching of writing skill: INSET opportunities for teachers of all subjects across the curriculum at key stages 2 and 3*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.
- Walvoord, B. E., & Anderson, V. J. (1998). *Effective grading: A tool for learning and assessment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weigle, S. C. (2009). *Assessing writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wikström, C. (2005). *Criterion-referenced measurement for educational evaluation and selection*. Umeå: Department of Educational Measurement, Umeå University.
- Willam, D., & Thompson, M. (2008). *Integrating assessment with learning: What will it take to make it work?* New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Appendix 01:

Students' Questionnaire

University of Biskra
Department Of English
Second year LMD Students

Students' questionnaire

Dear Student,

You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire to express your attitudes towards the letter grades (A, A-, B+, C...), numerical grades (marks/scores), and the writing skill. Your answer will be very helpful for the research project we are undertaking. We hope that you will answer with full attention and interest.

Please, mark ($\sqrt{\quad}$) the appropriate box(es) to answer the questions.

May I thank you in advance for your cooperation and the time devoted to answer the questionnaire.

Section One: General Information

1. Is your choice of English

a- Personal b- Imposed

2. Which skill challenges you most?

a- Speaking b- Writing
c- Reading d- Listening

3. How do you find the module of 'Written Expression'?

a- Very interesting
b- Interesting
c- Not interesting

Section Two: Writing Skill

4. Please classify the following in order of writing difficulty from 1 to 6 where 1 is most difficult to you and 6 is the least difficult to you

a- Vocabulary
b- Grammar
c- Spelling
d- Punctuation
e- Generation and organization of ideas
f- Use of transitional words (connectors)

5. Does your teacher correct your writing products in the classroom?

Yes No

6. When would you prefer to be corrected?

a- During the course
b- At the end of the instructional unit

7. Which type of correction would you prefer?

a- Written correction
b- Oral correction
c- Giving grades/marks

8. Does teacher's correction during the course develop your writing?

Yes No

Section Three: Letters/Marks Grading System

9. How does your teacher of 'Written Expression' evaluate your writing?

- a- Scores you
- b- Highlights mistakes using the red ink or symbols
- c- Both

10. When you write, do you take into consideration teacher's comments?

Yes No

11. Red pen makes you feel stressed:

- a- Always
- b- Sometimes
- c- Rarely
- d- Never

12. What do you think of marks?

Good	.	.	.	.	.	Bad
Extremely	Quite	Slightly	Neither	Slightly	Quite	Extremely
Fair	.	.	.	.	.	Unfair
Interesting	.	.	.	.	.	Boring
Objective	.	.	.	.	.	Subjective
Satisfied	.	.	.	.	.	Unsatisfied
Reliable	.	.	.	.	.	Unreliable

13. Which method of evaluation do you often receive in 'Written Expression'?

a- Letters b- Marks

14. Do you find any difference between the two methods?

a- Yes b- No

15. If yes, in terms of

- a- Stress
- b- Motivation
- c- Satisfaction

16. Do you like the experience of letter grades system of evaluation?

a- Yes b- No

17. Do letter grades help you to be:

- a- Confident
- b- Creative and autonomous (independent in making decisions)
- c- Motivated to write better

18. To which extent letter grades promote properness in your writing?

- a- Very strongly
- b- Strongly
- c- Weakly
- d- Very weakly

19. Do you like to generalize letter grades system to the other modules?

a- Yes b- No

Thank You

Appendix 02

Teachers' Opinionnaire

University of Biskra
Department Of English
Miss. Meriem ABBOU

Teachers' opinionnaire

Dear teachers,

You are kindly requested to fill in this opinionnaire to express your opinions towards the letter grades (A, A-, B+, C...), numerical grades (marks/scores), and the writing skill.

Please, mark ($\sqrt{\quad}$) the appropriate box(es) and give full answer on the broken lines when it is needed to answer the questions.

May I thank you in advance for your cooperation and the time devoted to answer the opinionnaire.

Section One: General Information

1. Is writing an easy task for second-year university students?

Yes

No

2. Should teachers correct every mistake the students make?

Yes

No

Would you please justify your answer

.....

.....

3. Do you think that scoring system in writing should be strongly based on the course objectives?

Yes

No

4. Did you experience letter grade system evaluation?

Yes

No

Why?

.....

.....

.....

Section Two: Writing Assessment

Please, read each statement and decide if you agree (A), neutral (N), or disagree (D). In each blank, you may mark your opinion.

5. Students' writing problems could be freely discussed with their teacher.
6. The grade assigned to students is very important in their academic achievement.
7. The grade assigned to students will affect their writing abilities.
8. Compared to scores/marks, letter grades reduce stress and anxiety.
9. Letter grades are more objective than numerical.
10. They are effective in promoting students writing proficiency.
11. They motivate students intrinsically.
12. They help students to work on their weaknesses and encourage them to reach the mastery of the writing skill.
13. They develop students' self-esteem and autonomy.
14. Grading students on an A, B, C, D, and F motivates students to do their best during writing.
15. Letter grades experience with learners was frustrating.
16. Some of students were displeased.
17. The real feelings of students were not shared with you.
18. During giving the feedback, there was a hesitancy to use unfamiliar method of assessment.
19. Students were not adequately prepared for letter grades method.
20. The personalities of students were conflicting with the alternative method of scoring.
21. If the use of a particular assessment method (letter grades) was not successful, it would not be tried again.
22. Students feel more relaxed and at ease when receiving their grades in form of letters.
23. Students appreciate the experience of this alternative method of assessment that they had in class.
24. Using letter grades system was an enjoyable experience.
25. Next year, letter grades would be used /tried.

Thank You

Résumé

Le présent travail de recherche tend à démontrer l'impact positif de l'évaluation littérale sur les compétences scripturales des étudiants. Notre question de recherche tourne autour de l'insatisfaction permanente des étudiants vis-à-vis des notes obtenus durant les examens ou ils réagissent négativement comparativement au système de notation adopté par la tutelle. Nous tenons à signaler également que les épreuves écrites sont généralement considérés comme subjectives, chose qui met les étudiants non- confiants et méfiants quand il s'agit de tester leurs compétences scripturales. L'hypothèse retenue est que l'évaluation littérale pourrait avoir un impact positif sur les compétences scripturales des étudiants d'ALE (Anglais Langue Etrangère) dans la mesure où elle est appliquée à bon escient. Dans le but d'examiner l'hypothèse émise, un questionnaire destiné aux étudiants de la 2^{ème} année au nombre de 50 étudiants, ainsi qu'un opinionnaire destiné aux enseignants au nombre de 5, ont été distribué au sein de la faculté des langues étrangères dans le département d'Anglais de l'université de Biskra. Les résultats obtenus révèlent que les étudiants répondent positivement à l'évaluation littérale et cela on la considérant comme un feedback que leur enseignante respective en module d'expression écrite a appliqué. Et ce car l'évaluation par lettre (A-F) les aident à développer leurs compétences d'écritures du coup ils deviennent plus motivés, moins stressés et plus confiants Cette dissertation recommande que les enseignants doivent être reconnaissables sur tout en ce qui concerne l'évaluation littérale et devraient également établir des critères rigoureux, réalisables et explicites pour une application et une compréhension faciles. Pour les étudiants, ils devraient participer et interagir avec leurs enseignants afin que l'opportunité de recevoir des feedback positif augmente; par conséquent, leurs compétences de réflexion et d'écriture seront améliorées.