



English Language Teachers' Use of Writing Scoring Techniques at Gaza High Schools

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Abstract: Background: Although assessment is fundamental to the process of learning and teaching English as a foreign language writing, a few studies have addressed this research area in the Palestinian settings, including universities and schools. **Objective:** The present study aimed to provide in-depth-data about English writing scoring techniques at Gaza high schools. **Method:** The researcher used the descriptive method and qualitative instruments in this study. In February and March, 2023 the researcher administered a qualitative questionnaire to 60 students and conducted five focus-group interviews with 20 teachers. Then, four school supervisors were individually interviewed in this study. The researcher transcribed the interviews data in Arabic, then translated the transcribed materials into English. Moreover, the interviews were coded and organized into many categories. The participants' written responses to the questionnaire were reviewed, coded, and organized into a number of themes. For the interviews and questionnaire data credibility and reliability to be ensured, another researcher reviewed and coded the materials, and there was a satisfactory degree of consistency between the two researchers. **Results:** Findings showed that while the 12th grade teachers used holistic method for assessing the students' written essays focusing on some specific features, such as the necessity of inclusion of an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph the 10th and 11th grade teachers used to utilize random scoring techniques due to their lack of training and knowledge in this area. **Recommendations:** The researcher provided relevant recommendations to Palestinian Ministry of Education, faculties of education at Gaza universities, and Gaza English as a foreign language teachers.

Keywords: English Writing Teachers, Gaza, Scoring Techniques.

توظيف معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية لأساليب تصحيح الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية بالمدارس العليا بغزة

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المخلص: خلفية البحث: على الرغم من أهمية التقييم لعملية تعلم وتعليم مهارة الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية تناولت القليل من الدراسات الميدانية هذه المنطقة البحثية في فلسطين، **الهدف:** هدفت الدراسة الحالية إلى تقديم بيانات معمقة عن أساليب تصحيح الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية بالمدارس العليا بغزة، **المنهج:** استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الوصفي وأدوات كيفية في هذه الدراسة، وقد طبقت الباحثة استبيان كفي على 60 طالب وطالبة واجرت خمس مقابلات جماعية مع 20 معلم ومعلمة ومقابلات فردية مع أربعة مشرفين في شهري فبراير و مارس 2023. قامت الباحثة بتفريغ وتدوين بيانات المقابلات باللغة العربية، وترجمتها إلى اللغة الإنجليزية، كما تم ترميز البيانات وتنظيمها في عدة محاور، وكذلك تم مراجعة استجابات المشاركين للاستبيان وترميزها وتنظيمها في عدة محاور، وللتأكد من ثبات البيانات قام باحث آخر بتحليل البيانات وكانت نسبة الاتفاق بين الباحثين مرضية. **النتائج:** أشارت النتائج إلى أنه بينما استخدم معلمو الصف الثاني عشر الأسلوب الكلي في تقييم المقالات الكتابية للطلبة بالتركيز على بعض المعايير الخاصة مثل ضرورة أن تشمل كتابة المقال فقرات المقدمة والتفصيل والختام، استخدم معلمو الصفوف العاشر والحادي عشر أساليب تصحيح عشوائية وذلك لنقص التدريب والمعرفة بهذا الشأن. **التوصيات:** قدمت الباحثة توصيات هامة لوزارة التربية والتعليم بفلسطين وكليات التربية بجامعات غزة ومعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بغزة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية، غزة، أساليب التصحيح.

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Introduction

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical framework in this study discusses Foreign Language (FL) writing assessment types (i.e., indirect and direct scoring techniques). It also introduces notes about the use of effective rubrics in FL writing assessment.

Writing Assessment: Writing assessment is an essential part in many international tests, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System test (IELTS). Crusan (2010) views that assessment is fundamental to the process of learning and teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL) writing. Hyland (2003) also provides that evaluating learners' performance has a positive role in developing their writing skills. In fact, it is considered as one of the biggest problems encountering FL writing teachers (Matsuda, Ortmeier-Hooper, & Matsuda, 2009). For the teachers to evaluate the students' writing performance, they need to be patient and conscious of writing assessment methods (Crusan, 2010), and the criteria used in assessing students writing should also be shared with students (Lee, 2017). Below are the types of FL writing scoring techniques.

Indirect Assessment (Indirect Scoring Techniques): There are two types of EFL/ESL written performance assessment i.e., Indirect assessment and direct assessment. Indirect method means that the students' abilities are measured through the observation of specific discrete bits of knowledge about writing i.e., multiple-choice questions and editing passages for errors in punctuation, usage, and grammar (Farrall, 2012). In indirect tests, students are required to recognize writing components rather than to demonstrate their abilities in producing compositions or scripts (Bukta, 2013). Although indirect tests do not measure

language production they have many advantages, such as objective measurement, high statistical reliability, easy administering and marking procedures (Hyland, 2003).

Direct Assessment (Direct Scoring Techniques): Unlike indirect tests, direct methods focus on language production. Direct testing implies that the learners must consider a set of instructions and produce a piece of composition. Each text must be rated by at least two writing teachers (Selvilla-Pavon, Martinez-Saez, & Siqueira, 2011), and reliable scoring can be established by an agreement between two raters of 75 per cent or more (Hyland, 2003). Liach (2011) refers to four relevant direct assessment scoring methods which differ on two important grounds i.e., whether they give a single score or a multiple score and whether they measure writing ability in general or specified tasks in particular. The four scoring methods include holistic scoring, analytic scoring, scoring based on primary traits, and scoring based on multiple traits.

In holistic scoring, compositions are collected from students usually responding to a certain question. Raters usually meet together for training and scoring the written texts. Holistic scoring requires agreement between raters (Ortiz, 1992). Additionally, holistic method involves rating texts impressionistically, considering their overall features without providing separate scores on specified features (Shaw & Weir, 2007). Although this technique of scoring is efficient in terms of cost and time (Hamp-Lyons, 2016), it depends on a single score and single scores cannot provide adequate information about the writing aspects. Furthermore, a single score is difficult to interpret in terms of what each rater is centring on when giving the score (Liach, 2011). Some raters give more attention to grammatical competence while others may focus on syntactic complexity. Moreover, holistic scales are unable to capture learners'

weaknesses and strengths in writing (Hamp-Lyons, 2016).

Analytic method, on the other hand, provides useful information about learners' performance in that it gives detailed assessment ratings of the script features, including content, grammar, vocabulary, organization, and mechanics of writing (Kkese, 2020) through distinguishing different levels of mastery (very good, average, poor) and every level is well-defined. Thus analytic scoring considers a list of elements, as each element is assessed separately prior to assigning a single score (Hamp-Lyons, 2016). A main drawback of the analytic method is the difficulty in providing clear-cut definition of each level. Moreover, this type of scoring is time-consuming since much time is needed for designing the scale and paying attention to all writing features while scoring (Liach, 2011). An example of the analytic scoring rubrics is (Jacobs, Zingraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981).

Primary-trait and multiple-trait scoring methods are employed when employing a rating scale designed for a specific writing assignment. The aim of such scoring methods is to develop criteria for successful writing in a specific genre or context, and teachers centre on a narrow range of textual features (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). In primary-trait scoring, a focus is placed on a specified aspect of the writing task, such as effective argument and reference to sources (Liach, 2011). A scoring guide must be designed for every writing task since it evaluates a specific type of writing ability rather than general writing competence (Kkese, 2020)

In multiple-trait scoring, compositions are scored for many aspects like ability of summarizing a course text and considering sides of an argument. It requires providing separate scores for different writing features (Liach, 2011). A main disadvantage of

multiple-trait scoring scales is that such scales are very time-consuming and difficult to develop (Knoch, 2009).

Considering the above, it may be argued that all types of EFL writing assessment are beneficial. Each type has its advantages and drawbacks. For instance while the holistic scoring technique is time-consuming the analytic method gives detailed assessment ratings of the composition features, including grammar, vocabulary, content, organization, and mechanics of writing. In fact, EFL teachers may be advised to employ a variety of types of writing scoring techniques so as to get benefit from their advantages. In other words, a teacher may make use of the holistic method for assessing some writing tasks and the analytic techniques for evaluating other scripts.

The Use of Rubrics in EFL Writing Assessment: Rubric is a guide having certain criteria. Rubrics in a test can improve reliability, validity, and consistency of a test. Examples of scales that depend on rubrics are the (TOEFL) test, the ESL composition (Jacobs, Zingraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981), and the diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment (DELNA) (Mohammad & Kamali, 2020).

Mohammad and Kamali also provide that rubrics have many benefits on learners' writing when involving students in the assessment process, and rubrics are divided into three categories:

- Generic vs. task specific category which focuses on many tasks or one.
- Primary-trait vs. multiple-trait rubrics where various features of specific features are evaluated.
- Holistic vs. analytic which is the most common type.

Key features of Effective Rubrics: According to Abdul Aziz and Martya (2025), effective rubrics are of key characteristics:

- Clear criteria as each language aspect should be clearly determined and defined (e.g., content, cohesion and coherence etc.)
- Descriptive performance levels. All levels (e.g., excellent, very good, good, fair) should include specific descriptors.
- Rubrics should be shared with students. For young pupils or low-proficiency learners bilingual or visual rubrics could help.
- Rubrics should match objectives, for instance, in case of focusing on idea development it should be core criterion.

Previous Studies: The previous studies in this study focused on many issues i.e., EFL/ESL teacher assessment literacy, teachers' and students' perceptions of EFL/ESL writing assessment, holistic vs. analytic scoring in EFL/ESL writing, and EFL/ESL students' perceptions of corrective written feedback.

EFL/ESL Teacher Assessment Literacy: The studies related to this category are concerned with EFL teachers' knowledge and use of writing grading techniques. For example, Cho (2008) examined the rating techniques of essay writing used by English faculty instructors at a college in Korea. Five teachers were asked to rate seven compositions and to write their comments on such texts. Results showed that the language use attracted a very high proportion of comments (47%), and while half of the teachers' comments on rhetorical organization were positive, their notes on other features were negative. Jawad, Omer, and Ahmed (2016) also investigated whether English teachers at Raparin University employed writing grading instructions. Administering a questionnaire to 12 teachers, results concluded that the participants were dubious and reluctant on using writing grading criteria. Valizadeh (2019) explored 152 Turkish EFL teachers' writing assessment literacy and their training needs in writing assessment. Results of a questionnaire used in

this study revealed that a majority of the participants viewed that they needed to receive training courses related to this area.

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of EFL/ESL Writing Assessment: Other relevant studies were related to EFL/ESL teachers' and students' perceptions of writing assessment and rating techniques. Aldukhayel (2017) examined Saudi EFL students' views on the clarity of scoring rubrics employed in assessing their writing. The study participants were 281 male and female Saudi EFL university students. The questionnaire data revealed that the participants did not know why and how the rubrics were used. Likewise, Alamri and Adawi (2021) explored 104 Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives towards the use of writing scoring rubrics. Utilizing closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires, the study concluded that the participants found writing grading techniques useful to both instructors and learners. Nguyen and Truong (2021) examined 60 Vietnamese EFL high school teachers' perceptions of classroom writing assessment. The study collected its data from a questionnaire and individual in-depth interviews. Results showed that the teachers emphasized the necessity of summative assessment purposes of scoring students' writings. The study also indicated that while the teachers did not highly value writing, they seemed to have minimal knowledge of alternative assessment.

Additionally, two studies of Veloo, Abd Aziz, and Aizan Yaacob (2018) and Jonsson, Balan, and Hartell (2021) centred on EFL/ESL teachers' attitudes towards specific writing grading methods. Veloo, Abd Aziz, and Aizan Yaacob (2018) identified Malaysian ESL teachers' views on three types of scoring methods, including holistic, analytical, and primary traits. The study employed the qualitative method, and the participants were 10 ESL teachers selected from 12 high schools

in Malaysia. The teachers were trained on how to utilize the three types of scoring techniques. At the end of the the training period, the researcher interviewed a few teachers to get their perspectives of the three scoring techniques. Findings reported that the majority of participants preferred the holistic scoring method to the other two methods since holistic method could save their time. Jonsson, Balan, and Hartell (2021) explored EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of writing assessment methods. The sample of the study consisted of 74 EFL teachers who experienced analytic and holistic scoring. The teachers were asked to grade writing tasks of some students within a week and to send all students' grades accompanied by justifications. Results indicated that the teachers preferred analytic grading to holistic grading.

Holistic vs. Analytic Scoring in EFL/ESL Writing: A study of Alotibi and Alshakhi (2022) investigated the factors that affected EFL Saudi university instructors' rating decisions while employing holistic and analytic assessment methods. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 EFL teachers from different nationalities. The study concluded that the students' low English achievement level, time limits, and heavy workload could negatively affect the rating practices.

Furthermore, a study of Hosseini and Mowlaie (2016) examined the impact of analytic and holistic assessment methods on 40 Iranian EFL intermediate learners' writing competence. Findings showed that both analytic and holistic techniques positively influenced the participants' writing performance. The study also concluded that the group, which received analytic scoring outperformed the the other group, which received holistic scoring.

EFL/ESL Students' Perceptions of Corrective Written Feedback: The two studies of Soler (2015) Zahroh, Mujiyanto, and Saleh (2020) were concerned with EFL/ESL students' perspectives of their teachers' written corrective feedback (formative assessment). Soler (2015) investigated EFL high school students' perceptions of written correction. Employing two questionnaires, results indicated that the participants viewed error correction as an important factor that could contribute to their writing proficiency. Zahroh, Mujiyanto, and Saleh (2020) also examined the attitudes of 50 Indonesian EFL university students towards the teachers' corrective written feedback. Three instruments were utilized in the study: a questionnaire, a writing test, and an interview. The study concluded that the participants had positive views on the written feedback given by their English language teachers.

Commentary: It is noteworthy that the researcher considered research methods and instruments included in the studies above. While most studies (e.g., Aldukhyel, 2017; Cho, 2008; Jawad, Omer, & Ahmed, 2016) used the descriptive method, some studies (e.g., Hosseini & Mowlaie, 2016) employed the experimental approach. Additionally, some studies (e.g., Aldukhayel, 2017; Jawad, Omer, & Ahmed, 2016, Valizadeh, 2019) utilized questionnaires, and other studies (e.g., Alotibi & Alshakhi, 2022; Nguyen & Truong, 2021) used qualitative instruments like semi-structure interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

For getting in-depth data about Gaza EFL high school teachers' use of writing scoring techniques, the present study employed qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire. In fact, the above studies assisted the researcher in designing the present study instruments and developing their items.

Moreover, the previous studies involved participants with different L1 cultures i.e., Saudi, Iranian, Indonesian, Vietnamese, Turkish, Malaysian, and Korean. None of the previous studies probed EFL writing scoring methods in the Palestinian context. Therefore, the present study aimed at providing in-depth-data about Gaza high school teachers' use of English writing scoring techniques and the students' views on such methods.

Statement of the Problem: Through her 18-years experience as an academic instructor of EFL pre-service teachers at two universities in Gaza, the researcher noticed the EFL high school students' complaints about their teachers' methods of scoring writing. Thus, the present study aimed to provide in-depth-data about Gaza high school teachers' use of English writing scoring techniques through the following aims and questions:

Research Aims: The study aimed at

- Identifying the writing scoring techniques employed by Gaza EFL high school teachers.
- Recognizing Gaza high school students' views on their EFL teachers' writing scoring techniques.

Research Questions: What are writing scoring techniques employed by Gaza EFL high school teachers? How do Gaza high school students view the EFL teachers' writing scoring techniques?

Significance of Research: This study can be significant for the following reasons:

- The study provides FL researchers with a theoretical background on FL writing assessment techniques.
- The study may be useful for assessment developers, FL university instructors, and supervisors in that it could assist them in training in-service and pre-service teachers on using a variety of effective writing assessment techniques.

- It could be beneficial to Gaza EFL teachers as it may help them recognize their problems with writing assessment and overcome such problems.

Research Key Terms: Writing

For Hyland (2019), 'writing' is a coherent arrangement of words, phrases, and sentences structured according to a system of rules. Furthermore, Jozsef (2001) views that 'writing' involves the development of a design idea and mental representations of knowledge about different subjects. Hammad (2015) refers to 'writing' as a process of generating ideas and using linguistic items and cohesive ties. Hammad (2016) also defines 'writing' as a mental process that requires knowledge of grammar, lexis, and logical devices, and it involves brainstorming, drafting, and revising.

The present study adopts the definition of Hammad (2016), since it is a comprehensive definition which focuses on writing components (grammar, lexis, content, and organization devices).

Scoring Technique: 'Scoring' means deciding on the number of points someone obtains in a test (Cambridge University Press, 2023), and 'technique' is defined as a way of doing something that needs skill or thought (Cambridge University Press, 2023). The researcher in this study focused on the techniques Gaza high stage teachers employed in rating the students' compositions, such as holistic and analytic methods.

High School Teachers: 'High school teachers' are the instructors who teach English language to the last three grades in the Palestinian schooling period (10th 11th, and 12th graders).

Method: The study utilized the descriptive and qualitative methods to introduce in-depth data about English writing scoring techniques employed by Gaza high school teachers. According to Bauer and Brazer (2012),

qualitative research aims at providing "a detailed exploration or understanding of a phenomenon"(p. 211).

Participants: A total of 20 teachers, 60 students, and four supervisors participated in the study. All teachers and students were selected from four high schools that were randomly chosen from the West and East of Gaza schools. The researcher considered the students' proficiency level (high-proficiency-students, intermediate-proficiency students, and low-proficiency students), gender (males and females), and the grades they were belonging to (10th, 11th, and 12th grades). The 20 teachers were males and females teaching English to 10th, 11th, and 12th graders in the four schools. Moreover, the researcher interviewed four male and female school supervisors.

Instruments: The researcher in this study gathered the data from three qualitative instruments, including a focus-group semi-structured interview, an individual semi-structured interview, and a qualitative questionnaire. The two semi-structured interviews were utilized to get in-depth data about Gaza high school teachers' use of English writing scoring methods. The purpose of the qualitative questionnaire was examining Gaza high school students' views on the writing rating techniques used by teachers. Reviewing the related literature (e.g. Liach, 2011; Shaw & Weir, 2007; Veloo, Abd Aziz, & Aizan Yaacob , 2018) and writing the three instruments, the researcher checked the content validity of the instruments through showing them to a group of specialists and taking their comments into consideration. The experts examined the instruments (i.e., the qualitative questionnaire, the focus-group semi-structured interview, and the individual semi-structured interview) were five instructors teaching English language teaching courses at Gaza universities.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures:

First, the researcher got a written consent from the administrations of the Ministry of Education in Gaza. The researcher agreed with most schools principals beforehand on suitable times for administering the study instruments. The study instruments were employed in February and March, 2023. First, the researcher administered a qualitative questionnaire to 60 students and conducted five focus-group interviews with 20 teachers. Then, four school supervisors were individually interviewed in this study. Each interview lasted 30 minutes and was audio-recorded. It is worth mentioning that the researcher asked the participants to use Arabic so as to help them express their viewpoints freely and easily.

As for analysing the interviews data, the researcher utilized the qualitative data analysis steps given by Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtler (2006). The teacher's interview data were fully transcribed in Arabic, then the researcher translated the transcribed material into English. Moreover, the interviews were coded and organized into four major categories: the 12th grade teachers' use of holistic scoring method focusing on specific features (inclusion of an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph, well-written and organized ideas, proper ideas, and appropriate use of spelling and punctuation), the 10th and 11th grade teachers' lack of training on using a writing scoring rubrics model, the 10th and 11th grade teachers' lack of knowledge about writing assessment, and teachers' neglect of grammatical and lexical errors. To establish the teacher's interview data credibility and reliability, another researcher reviewed and coded the the interview material, and the two researchers agreed on 85% of the coded data.

Similar to the steps of analysing the teacher's interview, the supervisor's interview data were fully transcribed in Arabic and translated into English by the researcher. The data was coded

and organized into four main themes: reliability in scoring final exams writing samples of the 12th graders (Tawjihi exams), lack of reliability in rating the 10th and 11th graders' written texts, the 12th grade teachers' use of holistic scoring method focusing on specific features (inclusion of an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph, proper content, well-organized ideas, and appropriate use of spelling and punctuation), and lack of pre-service teacher training courses related to English writing assessment. For ensuring the interview data credibility and reliability another researcher reviewed and coded the supervisor's interview, and the two researchers agreed on 85% of the coded data

Regarding the qualitative questionnaire data, the researcher utilized the rubrics mentioned in Gillham, (2000). The participants' written responses to the questionnaire were reviewed, coded, and organized into the following themes: lack of details about students' weaknesses in writing, subjectivity in rating the 10th and 11th grade students' writing samples, students' preference of analytic scoring method. Another researcher reviewed and coded the questionnaire material, and the two researchers agreed on 85% of the coded data. Therefore, the data credibility and reliability was ensured

Results: This section presents the results obtained in this study. First, it introduces Gaza high school teachers' use of English writing scoring techniques as reported by the teachers and their supervisors, followed by a description for the students' views on such grading methods.

Results of First Research Question: The first research question was "What are writing scoring techniques employed by Gaza EFL high school teachers"? Results of the interviews with the supervisors and teachers showed that the 12th grade teachers used holistic method of

evaluation for assessing the students' written essays. When employing the holistic technique they focused on some specific features, such as the necessity of inclusion of an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. They also affirmed the importance of content, coherence and cohesion, spelling, and punctuation. Furthermore, the 12th grade teachers utilized a scoring technique that helped in achieving a high degree of reliability i.e., grading each text by two or three raters.

As for the 10th and 11th grade teachers, the interviews revealed that most of them randomly utilized the holistic method of evaluation focusing on the evaluation of writing paragraphs rather than essays. Each teacher used to rate his/her students' through considering certain points like the inclusion of a correct topic sentence, suitable use of supporting details, appropriate use of spelling and punctuation, proper use of ideas, and good organization of ideas. Additionally, they did not employ any techniques for achieving scoring reliability due to their lack of training and knowledge in this area. Below is a detailed description of the status.

Results of the Supervisor's Interview: All supervisors interviewed in this study affirmed that Palestinian 12th grade teachers employed clear scoring rubrics (i.e., the holistic technique focusing on some specific features, such as the necessity of including an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. Importance of content, coherence and cohesion, spelling, and punctuation was also affirmed. Furthermore, the 12th grade teachers utilized a scoring technique that helped in achieving a high degree of reliability i.e., grading each text by two or three raters. It is essential to mention here that such clear rating rubrics were given to the teachers by Palestinian examination department.

Participant 4 (male, 30 years of experience): "Indeed, the Palestinian examination department provides the 12th grade teachers as well as supervisors with a scoring rubrics model. All of us should commit to such rubrics. According to this model, two teachers should independently assign two single scores to each writing sample. The teachers should also focus on certain criteria like the inclusion of an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. Additionally, content, organization of ideas, spelling, and punctuation should be considered."

As mentioned in the previous and following excerpts, a high degree of reliability was established when scoring 12th graders' writing samples in the final exams (Tawjihi exams) through grading each text by two or three raters.

Participant 1 (male, 17-years of experience): "Each of the 12th graders' writing papers in the final exams should be rated by two teachers, and if there is a noticeable difference between the two raters' scores of the same text (exceeding two points), the composition should be scored by a third rater (the supervisor). For example, a teacher rated a text as eight out of 10 and another teacher rated the same composition as five out of 10, in this case the paper should be rated by one of the supervisors. I think that such procedure can help us avoid subjectivity in writing scoring."

As for the scoring methods of the 10th and 11th graders' written texts, the supervisors reported that neither they nor the teachers were provided with any instructions, that is why most such teachers randomly utilized writing assessment techniques. In fact they employed the holistic method of evaluation focusing on assessing writing paragraphs rather than essays. Each teacher used to rate his/her students' through considering certain points like the inclusion of a correct topic sentence, suitable use of supporting details, appropriate use of

spelling and punctuation, proper use of ideas and good organization of ideas. The interview analysis also showed that 10th and 11th teachers do not establish any kind of reliability when rating the students' written texts.

Participant 1 (male, 17-years of experience): "No, the Ministry of Education does not send us any rubrics related to assessing writing samples of the 10th and 11th graders."

Participant 3 (female, 28 years of experience): "Each composition is usually rated by only one teacher, as every 11th and 10th grade teacher should score his/her students' writing samples. The 11th and 10th grade teachers do not utilize the method used in grading 12th graders' final exams writing papers. You know tawjihi exams are different from any other exams."

Furthermore, the supervisor's interview data showed that though the Palestinian examination department sent certain instructions for scoring the 12th graders' written texts a few teachers needed time to get familiar with such rubrics.

Participant 2 (female, 14 years of experience): "Sometimes, I found that the rating rubrics sent by the Ministry of Education were not considered by a few teachers. I asked them about this problem, and they told me that they were still not familiarized with such rubrics. They did not study writing scoring techniques in the university."

As noted in the quotes, some teachers did not have adequate knowledge about EFL writing assessment methods due to lack of pre-service training courses related to this issue.

Participant 3 (female, 28 years of experience): "Unfortunately, some teachers graduated from universities without having enough information about the assessment techniques of English language skills. The pre-service teacher training programs at Gaza universities focus on English language teaching

strategies rather than English language scoring methods."

Results of Teacher's Interview: Congruent with the supervisor's interview data, the teacher's reports revealed that while Palestinian 12th grade teachers employed clear scoring rubrics (i.e., the holistic technique focusing on some specific features, such as the necessity of inclusion of an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph) provided by Palestinian examination department, the 10th and 11th grade teachers were not given any rating instructions. The 12th grade teacher reported that holistic scoring method focusing on specific features was employed for grading the students' writing samples. The following quotes illustrate this theme.

Participant 4 (a 12th grade teacher): "We rate students' compositions impressionistically considering certain specific rubrics provided by the Ministry of Education, such as the inclusion of an introductory paragraph, proper use of supporting detailed paragraphs, suitable use of ideas, good organization of ideas, and appropriate use of punctuation and spelling."

Participant 6 (a 12th grade teacher): "I look at each composition as a whole. I do not give a separate score for each criterion since I have to judge a large number of written texts."

Unlike the 12th grade teachers, the 10th and 11th grade teachers improvised assessing EFL writing since they were not given any writing rating instructions. Some teachers complained that they did not even have adequate knowledge about English writing scoring methods.

Participant 7 (an 11th grade teacher): "I know nothing about the scoring techniques you are talking about. I have not been trained on using such rubrics. What I do is that I read each composition so quickly, and give a score. I assess the students' use of topic sentences and

supporting details. I also look at ideas and how they are arranged."

It seems that most 10th and 11th grade teachers utilized the holistic method of evaluation focusing on the evaluation of writing paragraphs rather than essays. Each teacher used to rate his/her students' compositions impressionistically, focusing on certain specific features, including the inclusion of a correct topic sentence, suitable use of supporting details, appropriate use of spelling and punctuation, proper use of ideas and good organization of ideas.

Participant 1 (an 11th grade teacher): "I usually give a single score for each composition, with the existence of some criteria in my mind like well-written topic sentences, supporting details, relevant and well-organized ideas, and correct use of punctuation and spelling."

The teacher's interview analysis also showed that most teachers did not place any emphasis on the students' grammatical errors.

Participant 9 (a 12th grade teacher): "I usually ignore the students' grammatical errors, because students commit a lot of grammatical mistakes".

Participant 8 (a 10th grade teacher): "The students will lose a lot of points in case of considering grammar and vocabulary errors."

Results of Second Research Question: The second research question was "How do Gaza high school students view the EFL teachers' writing scoring techniques"? For answering the question the researcher administered a qualitative questionnaire to 60 students. The questionnaire data revealed that most 10th and 11th grade students were unsatisfied with the writing scoring techniques employed by their teachers since they could not provide any details about the students' writing weaknesses.

Participant 10 (a 10th female grader): "The teacher always gives us a single score on the

whole composition. I need to know my writing problematic areas, for example grammar, vocabulary, ideas, etc."

Participant 12 (an 11th male grader): "How can I develop my writing performance in case of not receiving any corrective feedback on my monthly compositions?"

Participant 1 (a 10th male grader): "We take many writing tests (monthly tests), but the teacher never discussed our writing errors. He always gives a single score for the whole text without referring to points of weaknesses in my writing. The only thing my teacher pays attention to is spelling errors."

More than half of the students reported that the teachers tended to place a heavy focus on spelling mistakes at the expense of other language errors.

Participant 20 (a 10th female grader): "Once I got three out of six and the only underlined error is a misspelled word! Three points on a misspelled word!"

Participant 26 (a 12th male grader): The only underlined errors are spelling mistakes.

Additionally, most 10th and 11th grade students indicated that the techniques the teachers used in rating their compositions lacked objectivity.

Participant 4 (a 10th female grader): "Once I and my classmate expected the writing topic that would be included in one of the monthly tests. We prepared the same text, and wrote it in the exam paper. I got two out of six and my classmate got five out of six, and both texts are identical!"

It is worth mentioning that most students expressed their preference of analytic scoring method since it could provide details about their weaknesses.

Participant 30 (a 12th male grader): "I wish our teachers could objectively judge our writing papers, and I prefer to be provided with

a score on each writing area in my composition, including grammar, spelling, ideas, and consequently I can recognize all my writing weaknesses."

Discussion and Implications

The teacher's and supervisor's interviews data in this study revealed that the 12th grade teachers used holistic method for assessing the students' written essays. When employing the holistic technique they focused on some specific features, such as the necessity of including an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. Unlike the 10th and 11th grade teachers they were provided with clear scoring rubrics by Palestinian examination department. Results also reported that the 10th and 11th grade teachers utilized random techniques of writing assessment as they complained about the lack of training and knowledge in this area. In line with this result, Aldukhayel (2017) indicated that Saudi EFL students were not familiar with why and how the teachers used writing scoring rubrics. Valizadeh (2019) also concluded that Turkish EFL teachers needed to receive training courses related to this area. Jawad, Omer, and Ahmed (2016) reported that Iraqi university students are dubious and reluctant on using EFL writing grading criteria. According to Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) and Howell (2014), scoring rubrics are useful for raters, and can serve for feedback and revision purposes. Summers (2000) also states that creating clear criteria is essential for establishing consistency and objectivity in writing assessment. Thus, the Ministry of Education in Palestine is recommended to provide the 10th and 11th grade teachers with suitable writing rating rubrics and train them on using such instructions.

Furthermore, the supervisor's interview analysis showed that Gaza EFL high stage teachers graduated from universities without having adequate knowledge about assessment

and rating techniques of English language skills, including writing. Related to this result, Farmasari, *et al.* (2023) indicated that EFL pre-service teachers' were unsatisfied with language assessment literacy. According to Crusan (2010), writing assessment is fundamental to the process of teaching and learning FL writing, and it is one of the most important tasks for which teachers are responsible. Weng and Shen (2022) also view that EFL pre-service teachers need to receive courses related to language assessment since they may conduct evaluation tasks early in their careers. Consequently, the researcher recommends that English pre-service teacher training programs at Gaza universities should focus on teaching assessment and rating methods of English language skills (e.g. writing skills).

Moreover, findings showed that most 12th grade teachers had positive views on holistic method due to the large number of writing samples they have to assess. Congruent with this result, Veloo, Abd Aziz, and Aizan Yaacob (2018) reported that Malaysian ESL teachers preferred the holistic scoring method to the other two methods since holistic method could save their time. However, Jonsson, Balan, and Hartell (2021) showed that EFL teachers preferred analytic grading to holistic grading since it could provide details about students' writing errors.

Unlike the teachers in this study, most students preferred analytic scoring to holistic scoring in that analytic method could introduce details about their problematic areas in writing. In fact, the students were unsatisfied with the rating methods employed by their teachers since such techniques did not provide them with appropriate feedback on their writing performance. In this concern, the two studies of Soler (2015) Zahroh, Mujiyanto, and Saleh (2020) indicated that the EFL students viewed error correction as an important factor that

could contribute to their writing proficiency. Moreover, Hosseini and Mowlaie (2016) reported also that Iranian EFL intermediate learners who received analytic scoring outperformed the students who received holistic rating. Moreover, Hamp-Lyons (2016) views that while holistic scales are unable to capture learners' weaknesses and strengths in writing, analytic techniques consider a list of elements, as each element is assessed separately prior to assigning a single score. Lee (2017) also provides that the criteria used in assessing students writing should also be shared with students. Abdul Aziz and Martya (2025) also state that analytic rubrics are beneficial since they give learners detailed data on area for growth. Considering the above views, Gaza high stage students are advised to employ the analytic approach in scoring some monthly tests so that students could receive more details about their writing weaknesses. Additionally, EFL teachers in Gaza high schools can encourage and train high achievers of English to give a detailed feedback on their classmates' writing performance in some writing classes. According to Farrah (2012), peer feedback is a worthwhile experience in that it helps in enhancing EFL learners' critical thinking, confidence, and motivation.

Another result was that most teachers did not place emphasis on the students' grammatical and lexical errors when scoring the students' written texts due to the large number of such types of errors. In this respect, Turnbull, (2003) emphasises the importance of linguistic knowledge (grammatical and lexical knowledge) for linguistic performance (writing and speaking). Furthermore Pawlak (2014) claims that the EFL teacher's error correction should include the use of grammar, lexis, appropriate content and suitable organization of ideas. Additionally, some famous writing scoring rubrics devote much attention to vocabulary and language use. Examples of such

rubrics are the TOEFL iBT independent writing rubrics (ETS, 2022) and the ESL composition (Jacobs, Zingraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981). Therefore, Gaza high stage teachers are strongly recommended to focus on the students' linguistic errors (grammatical and vocabulary errors) when rating the students' compositions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that while the 12th grade teachers employed clear scoring rubrics provided by Palestinian examination department (holistic method focusing on specific features like inclusion of an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph, proper content and organization of ideas, and appropriate use of spelling and punctuation), the 10th and 11th grade teachers were not given any rating instructions. The teacher's and supervisor's interviews data revealed that the 10th and 11th grade teachers lacked knowledge and training on using writing scoring methods. Additionally, the student's questionnaire showed the students' complaints about the teachers' rating techniques, such as lack of details about students' weaknesses in writing and subjectivity in rating students' written texts. Based on the conclusion and the discussion above, the researcher summarized the study recommendations as following:

- Ministry of Education in Palestine is recommended to provide the 10th and 11th grade teachers with suitable writing rating rubrics and train them on using such instructions.
- The researcher recommends that English pre-service teacher training programs at Gaza universities should focus on teaching assessment and rating methods of English language skills (e.g. writing skills).
- Gaza high stage students are advised to employ the analytic approach in scoring

some monthly tests so that students could receive more details about their writing weaknesses.

- Gaza high stage teachers are strongly recommended to focus on the students' linguistic errors (grammatical and vocabulary errors) when rating the students' compositions.

Research Limitations

- The study focused on English writing scoring techniques.
- Since the study is qualitative, the number of the participants was limited (i.e., 20 teachers, 60 students, and four supervisors) and the instruments were qualitative (i.e., a focus-group semi-structured interview, an individual semi-structured interview, and a qualitative questionnaire).
- The study was carried out in only the West and East of Gaza schools.
- The researcher collected the study data in February and March, 2023.

Declarations

- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** The researcher got a written consent from the Ministry of Education in Gaza for administering the study instruments.
- **Availability of Data and Materials:** All data and materials employed in this study are available in consistency with research ethics and institutional guidelines.
- **Author Contribution:** Enas Abdullah Hammad conducted the present study: writing the theoretical framework, reviewing the related studies, designing the study instruments and administering them to the participants, transcribing the interviews data in Arabic and translating them into English, reviewing the questionnaire data, coding the interviews and questionnaire data, and organizing them into themes. She

also reported results and introduced the discussion and recommendations related to it.

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