

Writing Assessment in Undergraduate EFL Courses: A Document Analysis of Examination Papers at Elmergib University, Libya

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Abstract

This study presents an empirical document analysis of assessment practices in undergraduate English writing courses at Elmergib University, Libya. The study adopted a document analysis design in which authentic undergraduate examination papers were systematically coded using qualitative content analysis and then analysed using descriptive quantitative techniques. A corpus of 9 examination papers spanning second to fourth year levels was analysed using a purpose designed coding framework. Fifty-nine discrete assessment tasks were identified, coded, and subjected to descriptive statistical analysis across seven variables: task type, writing skill assessed, academic level, examination type, Bloom's revised taxonomy level, response format, and mark allocation. The results revealed that extended production tasks were the most common type of assessment, accounting for 45.8% of all tasks. Higher-order creative writing tasks (Create) 23.7% were also common, although the examination papers continued to include lower-order metalinguistic knowledge tasks. Paraphrasing, Paragraph Structure Knowledge, Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic), and Cohesion/Coherence were the most frequently assessed skills, with each making up 10.2% of the assessment tasks. Overall, the examination papers gave limited attention to some important aspects of academic writing, particularly at the fourth-year level, where source integration, evidence synthesis, and other advanced academic writing skills appeared less often. The findings have important implications for improving writing assessment and curriculum design in EFL higher education, particularly in similar undergraduate EFL programmes.

Keywords: writing assessment, document analysis, Bloom's Taxonomy, EFL, Libya, undergraduate English writing, examination design

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة ممارسات التقويم في مقررات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب مرحلة البكالوريوس بجامعة المرقب في ليبيا، وذلك من خلال تحليل وثائقي منهجي لامتحانات المقررات. تم تحليل مجموعة من (9) أوراق امتحان تغطي مستويات السنوات الدراسية (الثانية والثالثة والرابعة) وذلك باستخدام إطار ترميز مصمم لهذا الغرض. خضعت أوراق الامتحانات لعملية تصنيف منهجية وفق أسلوب تحليل المحتوى النوعي، ثم أخضعت نتائجها للتحليل الكمي الوصفي. تم تحديد (59) مهمة تقييم منفصلة وتميزها وإخضاعها للتحليل الإحصائي الوصفي عبر (7) متغيرات: (نوع المهمة التقويمية، ومهارة الكتابة التي تم تقييمها، والمستوى الدراسي، ونوع الامتحان، والمستوى المعرفي وفق التصنيف المنقح لبloom، ونمط الاستجابة، وتوزيع الدرجات). أظهرت النتائج أن مهام الإنتاج الكتابي المطول كانت الأكثر شيوعاً، حيث مثلت (45.8%) من إجمالي المهام، مع تركيز ملحوظ على المهام التي تقع في مستوى الإبداع (Create) ضمن تصنيف بلوم المنقح بنسبة (23.7%)، إلى جانب اعتماد ملحوظ على مهام المعرفة اللغوية التحليلية ذات المستويات المعرفية الدنيا. وقد تصدرت قائمة المهارات الأكثر تقييماً كلٌّ من: إعادة الصياغة، ومعرفة بنية الفقرة، والمعرفة الكتابية (التحليلية اللغوية)، والتماسك والترابط النصي، وقد تساوت هذه المهارات الأربع في نسبة حضورها إذ بلغت كل منها (10%) من مجموع المهام. كما كشفت نتائج الدراسة محدودية تمثيل مهارات الكتابة الأكاديمية المتقدمة في مجمل أوراق الامتحانات التي تم تحليلها، وكان ذلك أكثر وضوحاً على مستوى السنة الدراسية الرابعة، حيث افتقرت أوراق الامتحانات إلى مهام التوليف النقدي وكتابة النصوص القائمة على المصادر. تقدم نتائج هذه الدراسة دلالات مهمة لتطوير ممارسات تقويم الكتابة وتصميم المناهج في برامج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في التعليم العالي، ولا سيما في برامج البكالوريوس المماثلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تقويم الكتابة، تحليل الوثائق، تصنيف بلوم، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، ليبيا، الكتابة الإنجليزية الجامعية، تصميم الامتحانات.

1. Introduction

Writing assessment plays an important role in language education because it shapes what is taught, how students learn, and how writing ability is evaluated. In higher education, assessment does more than measure students' achievement. It also communicates what knowledge and skills universities expect students to develop. Examination papers are particularly important because they translate course objectives into assessment tasks, influence teaching and learning through washback (Cheng, 2005; Wall, 2005), and provide evidence of students' writing performance (Hughes, 2003). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programme, writing assessment is especially important because writing is a complex skill. Students need more than grammatical accuracy. They are expected to organise ideas clearly, develop arguments, think critically, and communicate effectively in academic contexts (Weigle, 2002; Hyland, 2019). Current research views academic writing as much more than producing grammatically correct texts. It also involves using sources appropriately, building logical arguments, and writing according to the expectations of different academic disciplines (Hyland, 2022; Crusan, 2023). Recent studies also argue that writing assessment should measure students' ability to construct meaning, synthesise information, and communicate effectively in authentic academic situations rather than simply reproduce what they have learned (González, et al., 2017; Hyland, 2023; Nguyen & Phan, 2020). As a result, writing assessment is increasingly seen to support students' academic development as well as evaluate their performance. Although ideas about

writing assessment have developed considerably, relatively little research has examined authentic university examination papers. Most studies have focused on students' written performance, assessment criteria, rating scales, or teachers' assessment practices (Weigle, 2002; Green, 2014; Crusan, 2023). The smaller number of studies that have analysed examination papers point to a common pattern. Writing assessments often focus on a limited range of genres and language skills while giving less attention to source integration, critical evaluation, and other forms of authentic academic writing (Ahmed, 2018; Gebril, 2017; Ruegg & Sugiyama, 2013). This suggests that what examinations assess may not always reflect current views of academic writing. The Libyan context remains particularly under-researched. Most studies on educational assessment have focused on schools, classroom assessment, or teachers' beliefs (Nimehchisalem & Abdalla, 2020; Shneb, 2018; Mohamed, 2019). These studies show that assessment plays an important role in education and identify challenges in applying contemporary assessment principles. However, they provide little evidence about assessment practices in higher education. Structural constraints — including large class sizes and limited instructional time — further compound these challenges in Libyan university writing instruction (Alharam & Daboba, 2025). To the best of the author's knowledge, no published study has systematically examined undergraduate English writing examination papers in Libyan universities. As a result, there is still little evidence about the types of assessment tasks students complete, the writing skills that receive the greatest attention, the cognitive demands of examination tasks, or how closely university examinations reflect current frameworks of academic writing competence. This gap is important for several reasons. First, examination papers influence both teaching and learning through their washback effect (Cheng, 2005). Second, analysing examination papers provides direct evidence of the writing abilities that a programme values and the extent to which assessment reflects intended learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Kane, 2013). Third, universities increasingly expect graduates to communicate effectively in academic and professional settings. Writing assessment should therefore reflect important academic literacy skills such as critical thinking, source integration, evidence synthesis, and discipline-specific communication (Hyland, 2022; Knoch & Chapelle, 2021). To address this gap, this study adopted a document analysis design using authentic undergraduate English writing examination papers from the 2025–2026 academic year at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Elmergib University, Libya. The examination papers were systematically coded using qualitative content analysis and then analysed using descriptive quantitative techniques. The analysis focused on assessment task types, writing skills, response formats, cognitive demand based on Bloom's revised taxonomy, academic levels, examination types, and mark allocation. This approach provides empirical evidence of how writing competence is assessed within the undergraduate writing curriculum. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of assessment tasks appear in the examination corpus?
2. Which writing skills are assessed, and how are they distributed across academic levels and examination types?
3. What is the distribution of cognitive demand across the corpus as classified by Bloom's revised taxonomy?
4. How are marks allocated across writing skills and task types?
5. To what extent does the examination corpus align with contemporary frameworks of academic writing competence?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Evolving Construct of Academic Writing

Views of academic writing have changed considerably over the past few decades. Early research focused mainly on language accuracy, including grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure (Jacobs et al., 1981; Weigle, 2002). Today, academic writing is understood as a much broader skill. It involves organising and developing ideas, using sources effectively, building clear arguments, and writing in ways that meet the expectations of different academic disciplines (Hyland, 2019; González, et al., 2017). This broader view has important implications for writing assessment. If writing involves multiple skills, then assessments that focus mainly on grammar or controlled writing tasks provide only a partial picture of students' writing ability. Hyland (2022) argues that effective writing assessment should evaluate students' ability to develop ideas, use rhetorical strategies, and work with source texts in meaningful ways. Similarly, Crusan (2023) maintains that assessment should reflect the full range of skills that academic writers use rather than reducing writing to a set of separate language features. Overall, recent research supports a more comprehensive view of writing assessment. Students should be assessed not only on language accuracy but also on their ability to communicate ideas clearly, engage with sources, and write effectively for academic purposes. This broader understanding provides the foundation for examining whether university writing examinations assess the full range of competencies expected in contemporary higher education.

2.2 Writing Assessment in EFL and Arab-World Contexts

Writing assessment in EFL higher education has been studied from different perspectives, including validity, task authenticity, cognitive demand, and the impact of assessment on teaching and learning (Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Kane, 2013; Weigle, 2002). Research consistently shows that assessment influences both what teachers teach and what students learn. When examinations focus mainly on grammar and factual recall, students are more likely to adopt surface learning strategies. In contrast, assessments that require critical thinking, problem solving, and extended writing encourage deeper learning and stronger writing development (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Kane, 2013). Research from the Arab world shows a similar pattern. University writing examinations often focus on controlled writing tasks, paragraph writing, and lower-level cognitive skills, while giving much less attention to source-based writing, critical evaluation, and a wider range of academic genres (Ahmed, 2018; Gebril, 2017). For example, Gebril (2017) found that paragraph-level writing was emphasised much more than extended academic writing. He suggested that this reflects the continued

influence of grammar-translation approaches and a strong focus on language accuracy in assessment. Similar findings have been reported in North African and other EFL contexts (Elabbar, 2011; Ruegg & Sugiyama, 2013). Together, these studies suggest that writing examinations do not always reflect current views of academic writing. Although recent research emphasises the importance of source integration, critical thinking, evidence synthesis, and discipline-specific communication, these skills are often underrepresented in university examinations (Ahmed, 2018; Hyland, 2022; Knoch & Chapelle, 2021). This gap between theory and assessment highlights the need for closer examination of authentic university writing examinations, particularly in under-researched contexts such as Libya.

2.3 Cognitive Demand and Bloom's Revised Taxonomy in Assessment

Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom et al., 1956), later revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), is one of the most widely used frameworks for describing the cognitive demands of assessment tasks. The revised taxonomy includes six levels of thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyse, Evaluate, and Create. These levels move from recalling information to producing original work. In writing assessment, the taxonomy helps show whether examination tasks mainly test what students know or whether they encourage them to apply ideas, analyse information, evaluate arguments, and produce their own written work. Research in EFL contexts has identified similar patterns.

Assaly and Smadi (2015) found that Jordanian EFL textbooks included many more lower-order than higher-order tasks. Likewise, Uysal, et al., (2022) reported that Evaluate and Create tasks appeared much less often than lower-level tasks in Turkish EFL examinations. Together, these studies suggest that EFL assessments still give more attention to tasks that are easier to prepare and mark than to those that develop critical thinking and advanced writing skills (Green, 2014; Shaw & Liu, 1998). For the present study, Bloom's revised taxonomy provides a useful framework for examining the cognitive demands of undergraduate writing examinations. It makes it possible to identify whether assessment focuses mainly on remembering and understanding or whether it also encourages students to apply knowledge, think critically, and produce original academic writing.

2.4 Document Analysis as a Research Method in Assessment

Document analysis is a systematic method for examining documents as sources of research data (Bowen, 2009; Mogalakwe, 2006). In language assessment research, it has been widely used to analyse syllabuses, curricula, test specifications, and examination papers. This approach helps researchers understand how assessment is designed and whether it reflects the learning outcomes and writing abilities that a programme aims to develop (Bachman & Palmer, 2010; Green, 2014). Examination papers are particularly useful for this type of research because they show what students are expected to do in assessment. By analysing examination tasks, researchers can identify the writing skills that are assessed, the level of cognitive demand, the response formats used, and the overall priorities of an assessment system. Document analysis therefore provides direct evidence of how writing competence is assessed in practice. The present study draws on three complementary frameworks. The first is Weigle's (2002) classification of writing task types. The second is Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which is used to classify the cognitive demands of assessment tasks. The third is contemporary research on academic writing competence (Hyland, 2019; Knoch & Chapelle, 2021). These frameworks guided the development of the coding framework used to analyse all examination tasks in the corpus and informed both the qualitative coding and the descriptive quantitative analysis undertaken in this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a document analysis design that combined qualitative content analysis with descriptive quantitative analysis of authentic undergraduate examination papers. Document analysis provides a systematic approach to examining written materials to identify patterns, categories, and meanings within existing documents (Bowen, 2009). In the present study, the examination papers were analysed without researcher intervention through the systematic coding of assessment tasks using a theoretically informed analytical framework. Quantitative analysis was used to describe the distribution of assessment characteristics, whereas qualitative content analysis supported the interpretation of assessment patterns identified in the corpus.

3.2 Data Sources

The corpus comprised nine official undergraduate examination papers collected from the 2025–2026 academic year at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Elmergib University, Libya. The examinations represented two writing courses (Essay Writing and Academic Writing), three academic levels (Second, Third, and Fourth Year), and four examination types (Mid-Term, Final, Re-Sit, and Supplementary). The papers were obtained directly from the department and constituted the complete set of available writing examinations for the 2025–2026 academic year.

3.3 Coding Framework

The assessment task was defined as the unit of analysis. A task was operationally defined as any numbered question or sub-question requiring a distinct student response. A purpose-designed coding framework was developed to classify each assessment task systematically. Each task was coded according to seven analytical dimensions: (1) examination identification (ID), (2) course, (3) academic level, (4) examination type, (5) assessment task type, (6) writing skill assessed, and (7) response format and cognitive demand as classified according to Bloom's revised taxonomy. Additional information including question number, mark allocation, and analytical comments was recorded to support subsequent qualitative content analysis and descriptive quantitative analysis. Bloom's cognitive levels were classified according to the revised taxonomy proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

3.4 Data Analysis

All nine examination papers were read in full before coding commenced. Each assessment task was extracted and entered a coding database using the predefined coding framework. The final corpus comprised 59 discrete assessment tasks, which formed the basis of all subsequent analyses. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and cumulative percentages, were calculated for all categorical variables. Where marks were explicitly stated, total marks were aggregated by writing skill and assessment task type to examine assessment weighting. Tasks for which marks were not reported were included in frequency analyses but excluded from mark-allocation calculations. Following the descriptive quantitative analysis, the coded examination tasks were examined qualitatively to identify recurring assessment patterns, curriculum emphases, and areas of alignment or misalignment with contemporary academic writing frameworks. These qualitative interpretations were used to explain and contextualise the quantitative findings presented in the Findings and Discussion sections. The complete coding database for all (59) assessment tasks is provided in (Appendix A) to enhance transparency and support the replication of the coding procedure.

3.5 Researcher Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

The researcher is a lecturer in the Department of English at Elmergib University, where the examination papers analysed in this study were produced. This position provided access to the examination corpus and a good understanding of the programme context. At the same time, care was taken to minimise potential bias throughout the study. All examination papers were analysed using a predefined coding framework based on established theoretical frameworks, and the same coding procedures were applied consistently across the entire corpus. The study analysed institutional examination papers rather than data from individual participants. No students or staff were directly involved, and no personal or identifiable information was collected. The examination papers were used solely for research purposes, and the findings are reported at programme level rather than evaluating the work of individual instructors.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the empirical document analysis. It begins with the complete coding database and then reports the descriptive analyses of assessment task types, writing skills, academic levels, examination types, cognitive levels, response formats, and marks allocation. All frequencies, percentages, and mark allocations are derived exclusively from the nine examination papers comprising the corpus.

4.1 Distribution of Assessment Task Types

Table 1 presents the distribution of assessment task types identified across the nine examination papers.

Assessment Task Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Paraphrase Production	5	8.5	8.5
Process Paragraph Writing	4	6.8	15.3
Definition/Conceptual	3	5.1	20.4
Multiple-Choice Items	3	5.1	25.5
Sentence Construction	2	3.4	28.9
Descriptive Paragraph Writing	2	3.4	32.3
Comparison/Contrast Paragraph Writing	2	3.4	35.7
Thesis Statement Writing (Process)	2	3.4	39.1
Comparison/Contrast Essay Writing	2	3.4	42.5
Opinion Essay Writing	2	3.4	45.9
Thesis Statement Evaluation	2	3.4	49.3
True/False Items	1	1.7	51.0
Knowledge Listing	1	1.7	52.7
Completion/Cloze	1	1.7	54.4
Short Answer (Reflective)	1	1.7	56.1
Sentence Completion (Connectors)	1	1.7	57.8
Sentence Joining (Connectors)	1	1.7	59.5
Paragraph Error Identification	1	1.7	61.2
Paragraph Writing (Structured)	1	1.7	62.9
Cohesion/Coherence Analysis	1	1.7	64.6
Reporting / Indirect Speech Transformation	1	1.7	66.3
Topic Sentence Writing with Transition Signals	1	1.7	68.0

Assessment Task Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Sentence Completion (Cause-Effect)	1	1.7	69.7
Knowledge Listing / Diagram	1	1.7	71.4
Fill-in-the-Blank (Transition Signals)	1	1.7	73.1
Counter-Argument Writing	1	1.7	74.8
Sentence-Level Error Correction	1	1.7	76.5
Sentence Classification	1	1.7	78.2
Narrative Paragraph Writing	1	1.7	79.9
Paragraph Outline Writing	1	1.7	81.6
Summary Writing	1	1.7	83.3
Identification Task (Topic / Main Idea)	1	1.7	85.0
Topic Sentence Writing	1	1.7	86.7
Definition + Example Production + Knowledge Listing	1	1.7	88.4
Identification Task (Thesis Statement)	1	1.7	90.1
Sentence Construction (Connectors)	1	1.7	91.8
Problem-Solution Writing	1	1.7	93.5
Process Description (Academic Writing)	1	1.7	95.2
Compare-and-Contrast (Metalinguistic)	1	1.7	96.9
Paraphrase + Summary Production	1	1.7	98.6
Cause-Effect Essay Writing	1	1.7	100
Total	59	100.0	

Table 1. Distribution of Assessment Task Types (N = 59)

The examination corpus comprised a wide variety of assessment task types, reflecting the diversity of writing assessment practices across the undergraduate programme. Paraphrase Production was the most frequently occurring task type ($f = 5$, 8.5%), followed by Process Paragraph Writing ($f = 4$, 6.8%). Definition/Conceptual tasks and Multiple-Choice Items each appeared three times (5.1%), while seven task types occurred twice (3.4%). The remaining 30 assessment task types each appeared only once (1.7%), indicating that instructors employed a broad range of assessment formats rather than relying on a small number of recurring question types. Overall, the four most frequent task types accounted for 25.4% of all assessment tasks, whereas the remaining task types collectively represented 74.5%, demonstrating substantial diversity in the assessment activities used across the examination corpus. Taken together, these findings indicate that the examination papers assessed multiple dimensions of undergraduate writing, including writing production, conceptual understanding, text analysis, sentence-level writing, and rhetorical organisation.

4.2 Distribution of Writing Skills Assessed

Table 2 presents the distribution of assessment tasks according to the writing skill assessed, together with the total marks allocated to each skill where marks were explicitly reported.

Writing Skill Assessed	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total Marks Allocated
Paragraph Structure Knowledge	6	10.2	20
Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic)	6	10.2	15
Paraphrasing	6	10.2	32
Cohesion / Coherence	6	10.2	34
Comparison/Contrast Writing	5	8.5	48
Process Writing	4	6.8	20
Academic Writing (Thesis)	4	6.8	36
Topic Sentence Writing	3	5.1	13
Essay Structure Knowledge	3	5.1	16
Descriptive Writing	2	3.4	12

Writing Skill Assessed	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total Marks Allocated
Academic Writing Knowledge	2	3.4	22
Grammar / Sentence-Level Accuracy	2	3.4	NE
Opinion / Argumentative Writing	2	3.4	20
Fact vs Opinion Writing	1	1.7	6
Paragraph Writing (General)	1	1.7	NE
Reporting / Citation	1	1.7	NE
Argumentative Writing	1	1.7	10
Narrative Writing	1	1.7	NE
Summarising	1	1.7	NE
Problem-Solution Writing	1	1.7	9
Cause-Effect Writing	1	1.7	15
Total	59	100.0	

Table 2. Distribution of Marks Allocation by Writing Skill Assessed (N = 59)

The examination corpus assessed 21 distinct writing skill categories, although their distribution varied considerably. Paragraph Structure Knowledge, Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic), Paraphrasing, and Cohesion/Coherence were the most frequently assessed skills, each appearing in six assessment tasks (10.2%). Comparison/Contrast Writing followed with five tasks (8.5%), while Process Writing and Academic Writing (Thesis) each occurred in four tasks (6.8%). Several writing skills appeared less frequently. Topic Sentence Writing and Essay Structure Knowledge each occurred in three assessment tasks (5.1%), whereas Descriptive Writing, Academic Writing Knowledge, Grammar/Sentence-Level Accuracy, and Opinion/Argumentative Writing each appeared in two tasks (3.4%). The remaining eight writing skills were each represented by a single assessment task (1.7%). Where marks were explicitly reported, substantial variation was evident in assessment weighting. Comparison/Contrast Writing received the highest cumulative mark allocation (48 marks), followed by Academic Writing (Thesis) (36 marks), Cohesion/Coherence (34 marks), and Paraphrasing (32 marks). Several skills, including Grammar/Sentence-Level Accuracy, Paragraph Writing (General), Reporting/Citation, Narrative Writing, and Summarising, had no explicit mark allocation because marks were not reported in the corresponding examination papers. Overall, the results indicate that writing assessment covered a broad range of writing skills while assigning different levels of assessment emphasis in terms of both assessment frequency and mark allocation.

4.3 Distribution Across Academic Levels

Table 3. presents the distribution of assessment tasks across the three academic levels represented in the examination corpus.

Academic Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Examination Papers (n)
3rd Year	32	54.2	4
4th Year	16	27.1	3
2nd Year	11	18.6	2
Total	59	100.0	9

Table 3. Distribution of Assessment Tasks Across Academic Levels (N = 59)

The examination corpus was distributed unevenly across the three academic levels. Third-year examination papers contributed the largest number of assessment tasks ($f = 32$, 54.2%), followed by fourth-year papers ($f = 16$, 27.1%) and second-year papers ($f = 11$, 18.6%). The third-year assessment tasks were drawn from four examination papers (EX01, EX02, EX07, and EX08), whereas the fourth- and second-year tasks were derived from three and two examination papers, respectively. Overall, more than half of the assessment tasks analysed in the corpus originated from third-year examinations, reflecting the distribution of the available examination papers included in the study.

4.4 Distribution Across Examination Types

Table 4. presents the distribution of assessment tasks across the six examination types represented in the examination corpus.

Examination Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Examination Papers (n)
Final Examination	21	35.6	3
Re-Sit Examination	13	22.0	2
Mid-Term (First) Examination	9	15.3	1
Mid-Term (Second) Examination	6	10.2	1
Mid-Term Examination	5	8.5	1
Supplementary Examination	5	8.5	1
Total	59	100.0	9

Table 4. Distribution of Assessment Tasks Across Examination Types (N = 59)

Final examinations contributed the largest number of assessment tasks ($f = 21$, 35.6%) across three examination papers. Re-sit examinations accounted for 13 tasks (22.0%) drawn from two papers. The first mid-term examination comprised 9 tasks (15.3%), followed by the second mid-term examination with 6 tasks (10.2%). The remaining mid-term and supplementary examinations each contributed 5 assessment tasks (8.5%) and were represented by one examination paper. Overall, the examination corpus was distributed across six examination types, with final and re-sit examinations accounting for more than half of all assessment tasks analysed.

4.5 Distribution Across Bloom's Revised Taxonomy Levels

Table 5 presents the distribution of assessment tasks across the six levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy.

Bloom's Taxonomy Level	frequency	Percentage (%)	Cognitive Description
Remember	7	11.9	Recall facts and concepts
Understand	12	20.3	Explain ideas or concepts
Apply	14	23.7	Use information in new situations
Analyse	7	11.9	Draw connections; examine structure
Evaluate	5	8.5	Justify or appraise decisions
Create	14	23.7	Produce new or original work
Total	59	100.0	

Table 5. Distribution of Assessment Tasks Across Bloom's Revised Taxonomy Levels (N = 59)

Assessment tasks were identified across all six levels of Bloom's revised taxonomy. The Apply and Create levels were the most frequently represented, each comprising 14 assessment tasks (23.7%), followed by Understand with 12 tasks (20.3%). Remember and Analyse each accounted for 7 tasks (11.9%), whereas Evaluate was the least frequently represented level, with 5 tasks (8.5%). Overall, Remember and Understand together accounted for 32.2% of the assessment tasks, whereas the higher-order cognitive levels (Analyse, Evaluate, and Create) collectively represented 44.1% of the corpus. Apply accounted for the remaining 23.7% of assessment tasks.

4.6 Distribution of Response Formats

Table 6 presents the distribution of assessment tasks according to response format.

Response Format	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Extended Production	27	45.8
Constrained Production	13	22.0
Selected Response	7	11.9
Short Answer	7	11.9
Analytical Response	5	8.5
Total	59	100.0

Table 6. Distribution of Response Formats (N = 59)

Extended Production was the most common response format, accounting for 27 assessment tasks (45.8%). Constrained Production represented 13 tasks (22.0%), while Selected Response and Short Answer formats each accounted for 7 tasks (11.9%). Analytical Response was the least frequently represented format, comprising 5 assessment tasks (8.5%). Overall, the examination corpus incorporated five distinct response formats, with production-based responses accounting for the majority of assessment tasks.

5. Findings

The findings presented below integrate the quantitative patterns identified in the Results with qualitative interpretations derived from the systematic coding and analysis of the examination corpus. Rather than repeating the statistical results, these findings identify the principal assessment patterns evident across the nine undergraduate writing examination papers and address the study's five research questions.

Finding 1: A Limited Number of Writing Skills Receive the Greatest Assessment Emphasis

The examination corpus demonstrates that assessment is concentrated on a relatively small group of writing skills. Paraphrasing, Paragraph Structure Knowledge, Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic), and Cohesion/Coherence were the most frequently assessed skills, with each appearing in 6 of the 59 assessment tasks (10.2%). Together, these findings indicate that undergraduate writing assessment places considerable emphasis on students' understanding of writing organisation, their ability to manipulate source texts, and their knowledge of fundamental writing principles. The qualitative content analysis reinforces this pattern. Paraphrasing was assessed across multiple academic levels and examination types, while related skills such as summarising, reporting/citation, and aspects of academic writing knowledge also required students to reformulate or appropriately use information from source texts. Together, these tasks show that using information from existing texts is an important part of the writing curriculum. By contrast, several writing skills—including Narrative Writing, Problem–Solution Writing, Cause-Effect Writing, General Paragraph Writing, Reporting/Citation, Summarising, and Fact versus Opinion Writing were represented by only a single assessment task. This uneven distribution indicates that although the curriculum assesses a broad range of writing skills, considerably greater assessment attention is devoted to organisational competence, paraphrasing, and textual coherence than to several other rhetorical writing genres.

Finding 2: Writing Assessment Prioritises Extended Written Production but Covers a Limited Range of Academic Genres

The analysis shows that extended written production constitutes the dominant mode of assessment throughout the examination corpus. Almost half of all assessment tasks required students to produce complete paragraphs or essays, demonstrating that writing performance rather than simple knowledge recall forms the principal basis of assessment. Despite this emphasis on extended writing, the range of writing genres represented in the examinations is relatively narrow. Students were regularly required to produce descriptive, process, comparison and contrast, opinion, argumentative, and cause-and-effect texts. However, the corpus contains very few tasks requiring more advanced academic genres such as literature reviews, source-integrated essays, reflective academic writing, research reports, or other forms of discipline-specific academic writing. This pattern suggests that the examination papers conceptualise writing primarily as the production of texts within established rhetorical patterns. Although these genres provide opportunities for students to demonstrate organisation, coherence, and language control, the corpus provides comparatively limited opportunities to assess more advanced forms of academic writing that require the integration, synthesis, and critical use of multiple sources.

Finding 3: The Cognitive Profile of the Examination Corpus Emphasises Application and Text Production Over Evaluation.

Analysis of Bloom's revised taxonomy demonstrates that the examination corpus assesses students across all six cognitive levels. Apply and Create were the most frequently represented categories, each accounting for 14 assessment tasks (23.7%), followed by Understand with 12 tasks (20.3%). Remember and Analyse each accounted for 7 tasks (11.9%), while Evaluate represented the smallest category with 5 assessment tasks (8.5%). These findings indicate that the examinations extend beyond factual recall by requiring students to apply writing knowledge and produce original written texts. The substantial proportion of tasks classified at the Apply and Create levels suggests that productive writing remains the central focus of assessment across the programme. Nevertheless, comparatively few assessment tasks required students to make evaluative judgements about written texts or to engage in sustained critical evaluation of arguments, evidence, or source material. Although analytical and evaluative tasks were present, they appeared less frequently than productive writing tasks, indicating that higher-order evaluative thinking occupies a relatively smaller role within the overall assessment profile.

Finding 4: Assessment Practices Vary Across Academic Levels but Do Not Demonstrate a Fully Progressive Cognitive Sequence

The examination corpus demonstrates clear differences in assessment emphasis across the second-, third-, and fourth-year writing courses. Second-year examinations primarily assess foundational writing abilities, including paragraph organisation, sentence construction, descriptive writing, comparison, outlining, and basic grammatical accuracy. Third-year examinations broaden the range of assessment by introducing opinion essays, process writing, paraphrasing, comparison and contrast writing, and greater attention to writing concepts and rhetorical organisation. Fourth-year examinations place greater emphasis on academic writing, including quotation, paraphrasing, summarising, coherence, counterargument, and extended academic essays. Although this progression suggests increasing expectations for academic writing, the distribution of cognitive demands is not consistently aligned with academic level. Higher-order tasks classified at the Create, Analyse, and Evaluate levels appear in both third- and fourth-year examinations, while some fourth-year papers continue to include relatively low-level knowledge and recognition tasks. Similarly, selected second-year examinations include tasks that require students to produce original written texts rather than simply recall

information. These patterns indicate that increasing academic level is associated with broader writing demands, although the progression in cognitive complexity is not entirely systematic across the examination corpus.

Finding 5: Assessment Weighting Prioritises Extended Writing but Varies in Transparency

The allocation of marks demonstrates that extended writing tasks receive substantially greater assessment weighting than shorter knowledge-based activities. Essays and extended paragraph-writing tasks consistently carry the highest marks within individual examination papers, reflecting the importance placed on students' ability to organise, develop, and communicate ideas through sustained written production. However, the analysis also revealed variation in the reporting of assessment marks. While most final and resit examinations clearly specified the marks assigned to individual questions, a proportion of mid-term and supplementary examinations omitted explicit mark allocations for some tasks. Consequently, approximately one-third of the assessment tasks in the corpus could not be associated with an explicit weighting. Mark allocation did not always match assessment frequency. For example, comparison and contrast writing received the highest total marks even though it appeared less often than several core writing skills. This suggests that some writing skills were given greater emphasis through their mark weighting. This variation reduces the transparency of assessment design and limits direct comparison of assessment emphasis across all examination papers.

Finding 6: Examination Papers Combine Productive Writing with Knowledge-Based Assessment

The examination corpus demonstrates that undergraduate writing assessment is not restricted to the production of paragraphs and essays. Alongside extended writing tasks, students are required to complete activities that assess their knowledge of writing concepts, paragraph organisation, transition signals, thesis statements, paraphrasing techniques, coherence, quotation, and other academic writing conventions. The response-format analysis further shows that assessment incorporates extended production, constrained production, selected-response, short-answer, and analytical-response tasks. This combination indicates that the assessment system evaluates both students' ability to produce written texts and their understanding of the principles that underpin effective academic writing. Rather than relying exclusively on one assessment format, the examination papers employ multiple task types to assess different dimensions of writing competence across the undergraduate programme.

Finding 7: The Examination Corpus Demonstrates Partial Alignment with Academic Writing Competency Frameworks

Taken together, the findings indicate that the examination corpus demonstrates partial alignment with widely recognised academic writing competencies. The examinations consistently assess core writing abilities such as paragraph organisation, textual coherence, paraphrasing, essay development, and the production of extended written texts. These competencies form important components of undergraduate academic writing and are represented throughout the programme. At the same time, the corpus provides comparatively limited evidence of assessment targeting more advanced academic writing competencies. Tasks requiring students to synthesise information from multiple sources, construct source-integrated arguments, write literature reviews, evaluate evidence critically, or produce discipline-specific academic texts occur rarely or are absent from the examination papers analysed. Similarly, evaluative cognitive tasks constitute the smallest category within Bloom's taxonomy. Overall, the assessment system reflects strong coverage of foundational and intermediate writing competencies while providing more limited assessment of advanced academic literacy practices typically associated with upper-level university writing.

6. Discussion

The present study examined writing assessment practices in undergraduate English writing courses at Elmergib University through the analysis of authentic examination papers. By investigating assessment task types, writing skills, cognitive demand, response formats, and marks allocation, the study provides empirical evidence of how writing competence is operationalised within the programme. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to current scholarship on writing assessment, academic literacy, and curriculum alignment.

6.1 Core Writing Skills in Undergraduate Writing Assessment

One of the main findings of this study is that writing assessment focuses on a relatively small group of core writing skills. Although the examination corpus included twenty-one writing skill categories, the greatest emphasis was placed on paraphrasing, paragraph structure, cohesion and coherence, and metalinguistic writing knowledge. This suggests that the programme gives priority to students' ability to organise texts, reformulate information accurately, and demonstrate an understanding of writing conventions.

The strong emphasis on paraphrasing is consistent with its recognised role in academic writing. Paraphrasing requires students to understand source material, retain its meaning, and express ideas in their own words. In doing so, it reflects both language proficiency and academic integrity (Weigle, 2002; Hyland, 2019). Its frequent appearance in the examination papers is therefore appropriate and reflects its importance in undergraduate writing instruction.

At the same time, the findings suggest that other aspects of academic writing receive much less attention. Skills such as summarising, reporting, source integration, problem-solution writing, and narrative writing appeared only occasionally across the corpus. Current research views academic writing as more than the ability to reformulate texts. It also involves synthesising information, constructing arguments, engaging critically with sources, and adapting writing to different disciplinary contexts (Alharam & Daboba, 2025; Hyland, 2022). The limited assessment of these skills suggests that the

examination system provides stronger evidence of students' foundational writing abilities than of their broader academic literacy.

A similar pattern is evident in the assessment of organisational skills. Paragraph structure and cohesion were assessed consistently throughout the corpus, reflecting their importance in producing clear and effective academic texts. Previous research has likewise identified discourse organisation as a key component of writing quality (Hyland, 2019; Weigle, 2002). Assessing these skills therefore contributes positively to the validity of the examination system.

Taken together, these findings show that the examination papers provide strong coverage of the core writing skills expected at undergraduate level. However, they represent a narrower view of academic writing than that reflected in contemporary frameworks, which emphasise not only language and organisation but also source use, critical thinking, and disciplinary communication (González, et al., 2017; Crusan, 2023). Expanding the range of assessed writing skills would provide a more complete picture of students' writing ability and strengthen the overall validity of the assessment system.

6.2 Extended Writing Dominates Assessment, but Academic Genre Coverage Remains Narrow

Another important finding is the strong emphasis on extended writing. Almost half of all assessment tasks required students to write complete paragraphs or essays, showing that the examination system relies mainly on writing performance rather than objective testing. This reflects current approaches to language assessment, which consider extended writing one of the most valid ways to assess writing because it requires students to combine language knowledge, organisation, and rhetorical skills in meaningful communication (Weigle, 2002; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). The emphasis on extended writing is a clear strength of the assessment system. By asking students to produce sustained pieces of writing, the examinations allow them to demonstrate their ability to communicate ideas rather than simply recognise or recall writing concepts. This is consistent with current views that authentic performance tasks provide richer evidence of writing ability than discrete language exercises (Nguyen & Phan, 2020; Crusan, 2023). However, the range of writing genres assessed is relatively limited. Most extended writing tasks focus on descriptive, process, comparison and contrast, opinion, and argumentative writing. While these genres are important for developing writing skills, they represent only part of the academic writing students are expected to produce at university. Current research emphasises that academic writing also involves integrating information from multiple sources, synthesising evidence, constructing research-based arguments, and writing for different disciplinary contexts (Hyland, 2022). These forms of writing are largely absent from the examination corpus. This has important implications because assessment influences both teaching and learning. According to washback theory, what is assessed strongly affects what teachers teach and what students choose to learn (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Cheng, 2005). When examinations focus on a limited range of genres, classroom instruction is likely to do the same. As a result, students may become confident in examination writing but have fewer opportunities to develop the source-based and research-oriented writing skills required in higher education. The limited range of genres also affects how well the examinations represent academic writing as a whole. Current frameworks describe academic writing as a combination of language accuracy, text organisation, source use, critical thinking, and awareness of disciplinary conventions (González, et al., 2017; Hyland, 2022). Assessing only a narrow selection of genres provides only a partial picture of students' writing ability. This does not reduce the value of descriptive, process, or comparison writing, but it suggests that these tasks should be complemented by activities requiring students to evaluate information, integrate sources, and develop evidence-based arguments. Overall, the examination system demonstrates a strong commitment to assessing writing through extended production, which is one of its main strengths. Expanding the range of genres to include source-based essays, literature review tasks, evidence synthesis, and other authentic forms of academic writing would strengthen the assessment framework and better prepare students for the writing demands of university study and future research.

6.3 Cognitive Demand in Writing Assessment

The analysis of Bloom's revised taxonomy shows that the examination papers assess students across all six cognitive levels, with Apply and Create being the most common. This suggests that writing assessment goes beyond testing factual knowledge by requiring students to apply what they have learned and produce extended pieces of writing. Such a profile is consistent with the aims of university writing courses, where students are expected to organise, develop, and communicate ideas rather than simply recall information. The large number of Create-level tasks is particularly encouraging because paragraph and essay writing require students to combine language knowledge, rhetorical skills, and organisation to produce original texts. According to Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), Create represents the highest level of cognitive processing because it involves producing new work from existing knowledge. In this respect, the examination papers provide students with regular opportunities to demonstrate productive writing ability. Similar studies have also found that extended writing tasks often involve higher-order thinking because they require students to use language in meaningful contexts (Kernagaran & Abdullah, 2025). However, the findings also show that not all Create-level tasks require advanced academic thinking. Most writing tasks ask students to write within familiar rhetorical patterns, such as descriptive, process, comparison and contrast, or opinion writing. Although these tasks require original writing, they rarely ask students to integrate information from different sources, evaluate evidence, or develop discipline-specific arguments (Mohamed, 2026; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). As a result, they assess controlled writing rather than the more complex forms of academic writing expected in higher education. This pattern reflects Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) distinction between knowledge telling and knowledge transforming. The examination papers mainly encourage

students to organise and communicate what they already know, while providing fewer opportunities to develop new ideas through critical analysis and evidence-based reasoning. Recent research similarly argues that academic writing should involve evaluating information, synthesising evidence, and constructing knowledge through writing (Hyland, 2022). The relatively small number of Evaluate-level tasks supports this interpretation. Although evaluation is represented in the corpus, it appears much less frequently than Apply and Create. Evaluation requires students to justify decisions, assess evidence, and critique arguments using explicit criteria (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). These skills are central to academic writing, yet they receive comparatively limited attention in the examination papers. Similar patterns have been reported in other EFL contexts, where writing assessment tends to emphasise language production and text organisation more than critical judgement and evidence-based reasoning (Zhang et al. 2025; Crusan, 2023). Taken together, these findings suggest that the examination system successfully promotes productive writing but gives less attention to analytical and evaluative thinking. Expanding opportunities for students to evaluate evidence, synthesise information, and develop source-based arguments would provide a more balanced assessment of academic writing and strengthen alignment with current expectations in higher education.

6.4 Assessment Progression Across Academic Levels

The findings suggest that writing assessment becomes more demanding as students' progress through the undergraduate programme. Second-year examinations focus mainly on foundational writing skills such as sentence construction, paragraph organisation, and basic writing techniques. In contrast, third- and fourth-year examinations introduce more advanced tasks, including paraphrasing, summarising, quotation, counter argument, and essay writing. This progression indicates that the programme recognises writing development as a gradual process in which students build on previously acquired knowledge and skills. This pattern is broadly consistent with the principles of constructive alignment, which emphasise that assessment should develop alongside intended learning outcomes and teaching activities (Biggs & Tang, 2011). As students move through a degree programme, they should be expected to demonstrate increasing independence, deeper understanding, and more advanced writing abilities. In writing education, this progression should move beyond sentence- and paragraph-level writing towards critical thinking, discipline-specific communication, and research-oriented writing. Although such progression is evident, it is not always consistent. Higher-order tasks appear in both third- and fourth-year examinations, while some advanced papers continue to include relatively simple knowledge-based questions. At the same time, second-year students are already required to produce original paragraphs, showing that productive writing is introduced early in the programme. These findings suggest that academic level alone does not consistently determine the cognitive complexity of assessment tasks. A similar pattern was found across the different examination types. Final examinations included more assessment tasks than mid-term examinations, but the main writing skills assessed remained broadly consistent. This suggests that the programme maintained similar assessment priorities across different examination formats. This does not necessarily represent a weakness. Core writing skills such as organisation, coherence, and grammatical accuracy remain important throughout university study and should continue to be assessed at all academic levels. However, recent curriculum research argues that progression should involve not only more writing but also more intellectually demanding writing (Taye & Mengesha, 2024). In this respect, the findings indicate that the relationship between academic level and cognitive demand could be strengthened. The analysis also reveals a shift in the type of knowledge assessed across the programme. Third-year examinations include several metalinguistic questions that ask students to define writing concepts or explain rhetorical terminology, whereas fourth-year examinations place greater emphasis on writing performance. This progression reflects the expectation that students gradually move from learning about writing to demonstrating their writing ability. Nevertheless, integrating conceptual knowledge more directly into authentic writing tasks would provide a more meaningful assessment of writing competence than assessing definitions in isolation (Crusan, 2023; Nguyen & Phan, 2020). Overall, the programme demonstrates a logical progression in writing content and task difficulty, but the increase in cognitive demand is less systematic. A programme-wide assessment framework that clearly maps learning outcomes, writing skills, and cognitive expectations across academic levels would strengthen curriculum coherence and provide students with a clearer pathway for developing as academic writers.

6.5 Assessment Weighting and Transparency

The findings show that extended writing tasks consistently received the highest mark allocations, while knowledge-based and selected-response tasks generally carried fewer marks. This pattern suggests that the assessment system places greater value on students' ability to produce sustained pieces of writing than on their ability to recall writing concepts. Such an approach is consistent with current views of writing assessment, which recognise extended writing as one of the most direct ways of assessing writing ability because it brings together content, organisation, vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical effectiveness within a single task (Weigle, 2002; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). Giving greater weight to extended writing is therefore appropriate. Performance-based tasks provide richer evidence of writing ability than isolated objective questions because they assess several aspects of writing at the same time (Weigle, 2002; Knoch & Chapelle, 2021). The weighting patterns observed in this study suggest that the examination system recognises the complexity of writing and values students' ability to communicate effectively through extended texts. At the same time, the study identified inconsistencies in the reporting of marks. Most final and re-sit examinations clearly stated the marks allocated to each question, whereas several mid-term and supplementary examinations did not. As a result, almost one-third of the assessment tasks had no explicit mark allocation. Although this does not reduce the quality of the assessment tasks themselves, it limits transparency and makes it more difficult for students to understand the relative importance of different parts of an examination. Clear mark allocation is an important aspect of fair assessment. It helps students understand assessment expectations, plan their work more effectively, and interpret examination requirements with

greater confidence. The findings also show that assessment frequency and assessment weighting do not always correspond. Some writing skills appeared frequently but carried relatively few marks, while others appeared less often but received much higher weighting. Considering both frequency and mark allocation therefore provides a more complete understanding of assessment priorities. The findings also show that assessment frequency and mark allocation were not always closely related. For example, comparison and contrast writing received the highest total marks even though it appeared less frequently than several core writing skills. This suggests that some writing tasks were given greater emphasis through mark allocation than through the number of times they appeared in the examinations. Overall, the examination system places appropriate emphasis on extended writing while highlighting the need for greater consistency in the presentation of marks. Developing common departmental guidelines for reporting mark allocations would improve transparency, strengthen assessment fairness, and help students better understand how their writing is evaluated (Mohammed & Alsayah, 2025).

6.6 Multiple Response Formats and Construct Representation

One of the strengths of the examination corpus is the use of different response formats. In addition to extended writing tasks, the examination papers include constrained-production questions, short-answer responses, selected-response items, and analytical tasks. This variety recognises that writing competence involves different types of knowledge and skills and cannot be measured through a single task format. Each response format contributes to the assessment of writing in a different way. Selected-response and short-answer tasks assess students' understanding of writing concepts, while extended writing tasks allow them to apply this knowledge in meaningful communication. Using a combination of formats therefore provides a broader assessment of writing ability than relying on a single type of task (Weigle, 2002; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). This finding is consistent with current approaches to writing assessment, which recommend using varied task types to capture the different dimensions of writing competence (Kernagaran & Abdullah, 2025; Crusan, 2023). Despite this strength, the distribution of response formats is uneven. Extended writing accounts for almost half of all assessment tasks, whereas analytical-response tasks appear much less frequently. While writing assessment should naturally emphasise writing performance, analytical tasks give students opportunities to evaluate texts, identify weaknesses in organisation, and reflect critically on writing. Increasing the use of these tasks would provide a more balanced assessment of higher-order writing skills. The findings also show that response format does not automatically determine cognitive demand. Although most extended writing tasks were classified at the Create level, some short-answer and analytical tasks required students to analyse or evaluate written texts. Likewise, several extended writing tasks followed highly structured formats that limited opportunities for independent critical thinking. This supports the view that cognitive complexity depends on the thinking required by a task rather than on its format alone (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Overall, the use of multiple response formats is a clear strength of the assessment system because it allows different aspects of writing ability to be assessed. Expanding the use of analytical and source-based tasks alongside extended writing would provide a more balanced representation of students' writing competence and strengthen the overall assessment framework.

6.7 Overall Alignment with Academic Writing Competency Frameworks

Taken together, the findings suggest that the undergraduate writing examinations are broadly aligned with the core competencies expected of developing academic writers. Across the examination corpus, consistent emphasis is placed on paragraph organisation, cohesion and coherence, paraphrasing, essay writing, and extended written production. These are widely recognised as essential components of academic writing and therefore represent appropriate areas for assessment in undergraduate EFL programmes (Hyland, 2022; Weigle, 2002). The strong emphasis on extended writing further supports this alignment. By requiring students to produce sustained pieces of writing, the examination papers assess their ability to organise ideas, communicate effectively, and apply writing knowledge in meaningful contexts. This reflects current approaches to writing assessment, which recognise writing performance as one of the most valid indicators of writing ability (Weigle, 2002; Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). At the same time, the analysis identifies several areas where alignment with contemporary academic writing frameworks could be strengthened. Skills such as source integration, evidence synthesis, critical evaluation, and discipline-specific writing receive comparatively little attention. Although the examinations assess a range of cognitive levels, opportunities for students to engage in sustained evaluative reasoning or research-oriented writing remain limited. As a result, the assessment system provides strong coverage of foundational writing skills but a less complete representation of the broader academic literacy expected in higher education.

These findings are consistent with the principles of constructive alignment, which emphasise that assessment should reflect the full range of programme learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). If the programme aims to prepare students for postgraduate study and research, assessment should gradually include more tasks that require students to integrate sources, evaluate evidence, and construct well-supported academic arguments. Such tasks would strengthen the connection between assessment and the writing demands students are likely to encounter beyond undergraduate study. It is also important to recognise the institutional context in which these examinations were developed. In many EFL programmes, formal examinations remain the primary method of assessment because they are practical, familiar, and efficient to administer (Alharam & Daboba, 2025). The assessment profile identified in this study should therefore be viewed as reflecting both educational priorities and institutional realities. Future development should build on the programme's existing strengths rather than replace them. Overall, the examination system provides a coherent framework for assessing undergraduate writing and demonstrates substantial alignment with core writing competencies. At the same

time, expanding the range of assessed academic literacy skills and authentic writing tasks would strengthen alignment with contemporary academic writing frameworks and provide a more comprehensive assessment of students' writing ability.

7. Practical Implications

The findings of this study point to three main implications for writing assessment in undergraduate EFL programmes. Overall, the examination papers provide a strong foundation for assessing core writing skills. However, they also suggest that assessment could better reflect the broader range of writing abilities expected in higher education. Expanding the scope of assessment would provide a more complete picture of students' writing ability and help prepare them for the academic demands they are likely to encounter beyond undergraduate study. One important implication is the need to assess a wider range of academic literacy skills. Although the examination papers consistently focused on paragraph organisation, cohesion, paraphrasing, and extended writing, they gave comparatively little attention to source integration, evidence synthesis, critical evaluation, and discipline-specific writing. Including these skills would provide a more balanced assessment of students' writing and better reflect current views of academic writing in higher education (Hyland, 2022). The findings also highlight the importance of strengthening progression across academic levels. While the examination papers included tasks at different cognitive levels, the increase in complexity from one academic level to the next was not always clear or consistent. Developing an assessment framework that aligns more closely with programme learning outcomes and introduces a gradual increase in cognitive demand would strengthen curriculum coherence and better support students' writing development (Biggs & Tang, 2011). A further implication concerns assessment design and transparency. The use of different response formats is a positive feature of the current assessment system because it allows students to demonstrate different aspects of writing competence. Nevertheless, assessment could be strengthened by reporting mark allocations more consistently and by including more source-based and evaluative writing tasks. These changes would improve transparency while providing a more comprehensive assessment of academic writing (Alharam & Daboba, 2025). Although this study was conducted within a single university, the findings may be relevant to other EFL programmes where writing assessment relies mainly on formal examinations. The patterns identified in this study may help curriculum developers and writing instructors review their own assessment practices and consider whether the range of writing skills, cognitive demands, and assessment tasks adequately reflects the learning outcomes of their programmes. Ultimately, writing assessment should do more than measure students' current performance. It should also help students develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed as academic writers. Broadening the range of assessed competencies, strengthening curriculum alignment, and incorporating more authentic academic writing tasks can support this goal and better prepare students for university study, research, and professional communication.

8. Conclusion

The findings show that the examination corpus provides a good foundation for assessing core writing skills in undergraduate EFL courses. Across the examination papers, assessment focuses mainly on extended writing, paragraph organisation, cohesion and coherence, paraphrasing, and knowledge about writing. Students are also required to respond to different task formats and cognitive levels, showing that the examinations assess more than simple recall of information. Overall, the examination papers cover the main writing skills expected at the undergraduate level. However, the study also highlights some areas that could be improved. Advanced academic writing skills, such as using sources, combining information from different texts, and writing critically, receive much less attention. In addition, the increase in cognitive demand across academic levels is not always consistent, and some examination papers do not clearly state the marks allocated to each task. As a result, the assessment system provides good coverage of basic writing skills but only partly reflects current views of academic writing in higher education. This study makes three main contributions. First, it is one of the few studies to examine authentic university writing examination papers in the Libyan higher education context. Second, it shows that document analysis is a useful method for investigating writing assessment through institutional examination papers. Third, by combining writing skill classification, Bloom's revised taxonomy, response formats and mark allocation in one framework, the study provides an approach that can be used to examine writing assessment in other EFL contexts. The findings also have practical implications for curriculum developers and writing instructors. Including a wider range of academic writing tasks, increasing the use of source-based writing activities, ensuring a clearer progression in cognitive demand across academic levels, and making mark allocation more transparent would improve the assessment system. These changes would strengthen the alignment between assessment, programme learning outcomes, and the academic writing skills that university students are expected to develop. Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused on examination papers from a single department within one university and did not examine classroom assessment, scoring practices, or students' written performance. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within their institutional context. Future research should extend this work by investigating writing assessment across multiple universities, analysing students' written responses, examining assessment rubrics, and exploring how assessment practices influence teaching, learning, and writing development. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that undergraduate writing assessment at Elmergib University is built upon a strong foundation of core writing competencies while revealing opportunities to broaden assessment in line with contemporary models of academic literacy. As expectations of university writing continue to evolve, assessment should increasingly evaluate students' ability to synthesise information, engage critically with evidence, and communicate effectively within academic communities. Strengthening these dimensions would enhance the validity and educational value of writing assessment while better preparing EFL students for the academic, research, and professional demands they are likely to encounter beyond undergraduate study.

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Appendix A

Complete Coding Database of Assessment Tasks:

The appendix presents the complete coding database for the **59 assessment tasks** analysed in this study. Each assessment task represents one unit of analysis and was coded according to the analytical framework described in Section 3.

Table A1. Complete Coding Database of Assessment Tasks (N = 59)

Exam ID	Course	Level	Exam Type	Q No.	Marks	Task Type	Skill Assessed	Response Format	Bloom's Level	Comment/Notes
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q1	NE	True/False Items	Paragraph Structure Knowledge	Selected Response	Remember	3 T/F statements on paragraph writing conventions
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q2	NE	Sentence Construction	Topic Sentence Writing	Constrained Production	Apply	Write topic sentences for 3 given topics
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q3	NE	Definition/Conceptual	Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic)	Short Answer	Remember	Define: topic sentence, process paragraphs, transitions
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q4	NE	Paraphrase Production	Paraphrasing	Extended Production	Understand	Paraphrase 2 separate paragraphs
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q5	NE	Knowledge Listing	Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic)	Short Answer	Remember	List 3 paraphrasing techniques
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q6	NE	Descriptive Paragraph Writing	Descriptive Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write descriptive paragraph on a city park
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q7	NE	Process Paragraph Writing	Process Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write process paragraph: how to book a hotel room
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q8	NE	Completion/Cloze	Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic)	Constrained Production	Understand	Complete 4 sentence starters about paraphrase characteristics
EX01	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (First)	Q9	NE	Short Answer (Reflective)	Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic)	Short Answer	Understand	Explain why writers use peer editing
EX02	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (Second)	Q1	4	Sentence Completion (Connectors)	Cohesion / Coherence	Constrained Production	Apply	Fill blanks with comparison connectors (similar to, as...as, both...and, likewise, neither...nor)
EX02	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (Second)	Q2	6	Sentence Construction	Fact vs Opinion Writing	Extended Production	Apply	Write 3 fact sentences and 3 opinion sentences
EX02	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (Second)	Q3	5	Paraphrase Production	Paraphrasing	Extended Production	Understand	Paraphrase a paragraph about travel
EX02	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (Second)	Q4	5	Process Paragraph Writing	Process Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write process paragraph: how to prepare for a final exam
EX02	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (Second)	Q5	3	Sentence Joining (Connectors)	Cohesion / Coherence	Constrained Production	Apply	Join ideas using cause-effect connectors (so,

Exam ID	Course	Level	Exam Type	Q No.	Marks	Task Type	Skill Assessed	Response Format	Bloom's Level	Comment/Notes
										because) with correct punctuation
EX02	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Mid-Term (Second)	Q6	5	Comparison/Contrast Paragraph Writing	Comparison/Contrast Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write comparison/contrast paragraph: small town vs big city
EX03	Writing (4th Year)	4th Year	Mid-Term	QA	NE	Paragraph Error Identification	Paragraph Structure Knowledge	Analytical Response	Analyse	Identify structural errors (missing TS, CS, supporting sentences, unity) in 2 paragraphs
EX03	Writing (4th Year)	4th Year	Mid-Term	QB	NE	Paragraph Writing (Structured)	Paragraph Writing (General)	Extended Production	Create	Write 150-word paragraph with clear TS, supporting sentences, CS on a chosen topic
EX03	Writing (4th Year)	4th Year	Mid-Term	QC	NE	Multiple-Choice Items	Paragraph Structure Knowledge	Selected Response	Analyse	3 MCQ sets: identify sentence lacking unity; select best concluding sentence; select sentence for coherence
EX03	Writing (4th Year)	4th Year	Mid-Term	QD	NE	Cohesion/Coherence Analysis	Cohesion / Coherence	Analytical Response	Analyse	Identify and explain coherence techniques (transition signals, key nouns/synonyms) in a given paragraph
EX03	Writing (4th Year)	4th Year	Mid-Term	QE	NE	Reporting / Indirect Speech Transformation	Reporting / Citation	Constrained Production	Apply	Transform 5 direct quotations into indirect quotations using reporting verbs
EX04	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Final Exam	Q1	9	Topic Sentence Writing with Transition Signals	Topic Sentence Writing	Constrained Production	Apply	Write topic sentences for 3 body paragraphs of a given thesis statement, including transition signals
EX04	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Final Exam	Q2	12	Descriptive Paragraph Writing	Descriptive Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write descriptive paragraph (80 words) on a chosen topic
EX04	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Final Exam	Q3	10	Multiple-Choice Items	Paragraph Structure Knowledge	Selected Response	Understand	5 MCQs on paragraph structure, transition signals, logical division, cause/effect, concluding sentences

Exam ID	Course	Level	Exam Type	Q No.	Marks	Task Type	Skill Assessed	Response Format	Bloom's Level	Comment/Notes
EX04	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Final Exam	Q4	10	Comparison/Contrast Paragraph Writing	Comparison/Contrast Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write 50-60-word comparison/contrast paragraph using at least 2 contrast signals
EX04	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Final Exam	Q5	10	Sentence Completion (Cause-Effect)	Cohesion / Coherence	Constrained Production	Apply	Complete 5 sentences using cause-effect conjunctions logically
EX04	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Final Exam	Q6	9	Knowledge Listing / Diagram	Essay Structure Knowledge	Short Answer	Remember	Name the three parts of an essay and draw a simple diagram/outline
EX05	Academic Writing	4th Year	Final Exam	Q1	12	Multiple-Choice Items	Academic Writing Knowledge	Selected Response	Understand	6 MCQs on point-by-point organisation, counter-argument, biography, summary/paraphrase distinction, logical structure
EX05	Academic Writing	4th Year	Final Exam	Q2	7	Fill-in-the-Blank (Transition Signals)	Cohesion / Coherence	Constrained Production	Apply	Fill 7 blanks with cause-effect transition signals in a connected passage
EX05	Academic Writing	4th Year	Final Exam	Q3	10	Counter-Argument Writing	Argumentative Writing	Extended Production	Evaluate	Add opposing views to 2 argumentative thesis statements
EX05	Academic Writing	4th Year	Final Exam	Q4	8	Thesis Statement Writing (Process)	Academic Writing (Thesis)	Constrained Production	Apply	Write thesis statements for 4 process essay topics
EX05	Academic Writing	4th Year	Final Exam	Q5	15	Comparison/Contrast Essay Writing	Comparison/Contrast Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write 220-250 word comparison/contrast essay using point-by-point or block organisation
EX05	Academic Writing	4th Year	Final Exam	Q6	8	Paraphrase Production	Paraphrasing	Extended Production	Understand	Paraphrase a source passage from Time magazine in own words
EX06	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Supplementary Exam	QA	NE	Sentence-Level Error Correction	Grammar / Sentence-Level Accuracy	Analytical Response	Analyse	Identify and correct sentence fragments and run-on sentences in a paragraph; adjust punctuation and capitalisation

Exam ID	Course	Level	Exam Type	Q No.	Marks	Task Type	Skill Assessed	Response Format	Bloom's Level	Comment/Notes
EX06	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Supplementary Exam	QB	NE	Sentence Classification	Grammar / Sentence-Level Accuracy	Selected Response	Remember	Classify 8 sentences as compound or not (Yes/No)
EX06	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Supplementary Exam	QC	NE	Narrative Paragraph Writing	Narrative Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write 60-word narrative from culture using time order signals and coordinating conjunctions
EX06	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Supplementary Exam	QD	NE	Paragraph Outline Writing	Paragraph Structure Knowledge	Constrained Production	Apply	Write outline for three-part paragraph structure on a chosen topic
EX06	Writing (2nd Year)	2nd Year	Supplementary Exam	QE	NE	Summary Writing	Summarising	Extended Production	Understand	Write 30-word summary of a paragraph about Leptis Magna
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q1	10	Opinion Essay Writing	Opinion / Argumentative Writing	Extended Production	Evaluate	Write opinion essay on one of 2 topics (right to die / school uniforms)
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q2	10	Identification Task (Topic / Main Idea)	Paragraph Structure Knowledge	Analytical Response	Analyse	Circle topic, underline main idea for 5 sentences
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q3	4	Topic Sentence Writing	Topic Sentence Writing	Constrained Production	Apply	Write topic sentences for 2 given topics
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q4	5	Paraphrase Production	Paraphrasing	Extended Production	Understand	Paraphrase a passage about World Englishes
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q5	5	Definition/Conceptual	Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic)	Short Answer	Remember	Define transitions and provide two examples
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q6	8	Definition + Example Production + Knowledge Listing	Comparison/Contrast Writing	Extended Production	Apply	Define comparison paragraph, write an example, list 5 comparison words/phrases
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q7	3	Identification Task (Thesis Statement)	Essay Structure Knowledge	Analytical Response	Analyse	Underline thesis statement and circle topic in a given introduction paragraph
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q8	5	Thesis Statement Evaluation	Academic Writing (Thesis)	Selected Response	Evaluate	Classify 5 thesis statements as Strong, Fact Only, or No Clear Opinion

Exam ID	Course	Level	Exam Type	Q No.	Marks	Task Type	Skill Assessed	Response Format	Bloom's Level	Comment/Notes
EX07	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Final Exam	Q9	10	Process Paragraph Writing	Process Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write process paragraph: how to give a successful oral presentation
EX08	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q1	10	Opinion Essay Writing	Opinion / Argumentative Writing	Extended Production	Evaluate	Write opinion essay on one of 2 topics (right to die / college attendance)
EX08	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q2	10	Sentence Construction (Connectors)	Cohesion / Coherence	Constrained Production	Apply	Use each of 5 comparison/contrast connectors in a complete meaningful sentence
EX08	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q3	4	Definition/Conceptual	Essay Structure Knowledge	Short Answer	Remember	Define essay and explain its three main parts
EX08	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q4	4	Paraphrase Production	Paraphrasing	Extended Production	Understand	Paraphrase a passage about travelling
EX08	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q5	9	Problem-Solution Writing	Problem-Solution Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write one solution for 3 given topic sentences using solution phrases
EX08	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q6	8	Thesis Statement Evaluation	Academic Writing (Thesis)	Selected Response	Evaluate	Classify 4 thesis statements as Strong, Fact Only, or No Clear Opinion
EX08	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q7	5	Process Paragraph Writing	Process Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write process paragraph: how to stay fit without a gym
EX08	Essay Writing	3rd Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q8	10	Comparison/Contrast Essay Writing	Comparison/Contrast Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write comparison/contrast essay: city vs countryside
EX09	Academic Writing	4th Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q1	15	Thesis Statement Writing (Process)	Academic Writing (Thesis)	Constrained Production	Apply	Write process essay thesis statements for 2 of 4 given topics
EX09	Academic Writing	4th Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q2	10	Process Description (Academic Writing)	Academic Writing Knowledge	Extended Production	Understand	Explain the process of academic writing briefly

Exam ID	Course	Level	Exam Type	Q No.	Marks	Task Type	Skill Assessed	Response Format	Bloom's Level	Comment/Notes
EX09	Academic Writing	4th Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q3	10	Compare-and-Contrast (Metalinguistic)	Writing Knowledge (Metalinguistic)	Short Answer	Analyse	Explain differences between paraphrasing and summarising
EX09	Academic Writing	4th Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q4	10	Paraphrase + Summary Production	Paraphrasing	Extended Production	Understand	Rewrite a quotation in two ways: paraphrase and summary
EX09	Academic Writing	4th Year	Re-Sit Exam	Q5	15	Cause-Effect Essay Writing	Cause-Effect Writing	Extended Production	Create	Write 3-6 paragraph cause-effect essay on a chosen thesis statement

Table A1. Complete Coding Database of Assessment Tasks (N = 59)