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A Comparison Of The Effectiveness Of Multiple-Choice And Essay Writing Exams In Writing Competency Assessment

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Abstract

This research aimed to 1. study the effectiveness of multiple choice exams when used to assess writing skills compared to essay writing exams, 2. construct a multiple choice exam that can be used to assess students' writing competency effectively, and 3. provide guidelines for English instructors in constructing and using multiple choice exams for writing classes. The subjects of the study were 79 third-year students who were studying English as their minor subject at the Faculty of Arts, Silpakorn University in 2021 and taking the writing course 412221 Reading and Writing. Two types of exams were used in the study: a multiple choice exam and an essay writing exam. A cause & effect essay was used in both multiple choice and essay writing exams. The 30-item multiple choice exam covered essay elements and organization, grammar points and vocabulary. As for the essay writing exam, students were instructed to write one essay on one of the four given topics.

Results showed that the students performed better in the multiple choice exam, scoring an average of 21.0253 points while in the essay writing exam, the students received 19.3418 points. Looking at each area of assessment individually, students achieved a marginally better performance in the grammar and vocabulary topics of the multiple choice exam, while they received a slightly higher score in the essay elements of the essay writing exam. However, except for the vocabulary part, the difference in the score of the remaining parts was not statistically significant. In addition, the difficulty index mean comparison showed that both types of exam were of comparable difficulty and the discrimination index of the multiple choice exam and essay writing exam were comparable with no statistical significance, 0.2743 and 0.2848 respectively.

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One contributing factor to this may be the use of the essay writing exam analytic rubric, as mistakes other than what were included in the analytic rubrics were not recorded. Furthermore, the analytic rubrics had a fixed maximum points that could be deducted.

The results suggest that multiple choice exams, if constructed well and cover all the topics that are taught in class, can be used as a tool in evaluating writing competency and can have comparable effectiveness to essay writing exams. Multiple choice exams can shorten time spent on marking, improve efficiency and reduce boredom, which could affect reliability in marking and grading.

Keywords: assessment, effectiveness, essay writing exam, multiple choice exam, writing competency