

How to assess extended essays: EAP classroom experience

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Abstract

This article reports on a study of the role of assessment and feedback in writing extended essays. It first outlines the course and teaching methods, then looks at the results of the assessment of 131 essays, with two sample essays analyzed in detail and, finally, it provides comments on students' perception of the criteria specifically developed for the course and subject teachers' opinions about the results of essay writing in a Sociology exam.

Keywords: assessment, feedback, extended essays, tertiary level, EAP, course development.

1 Introduction

Writing has become 'the most crucial of the skills in an academic context'. In Western universities, it is 'required for entry to academic study and for progression through all stages' (Alexander, Argent & Spencer, 2008, p. 178). Academic writing is also one of the main ways to be assessed in higher education. Even though it is not true for many universities in Russia, in some of them (the Higher School of Economics is a case in point), subject teachers use an 'open answer' technique, which is the written form of an exam.

In general, the skill of academic writing or essay writing is rather difficult to obtain. It usually requires a step-by-step acquisition. Extended essay writing is an even more challenging skill because it implies that students are not only knowledgeable on the subject, but that they possess an ability to analyze, to develop argument and include reasoning in their essays; and that they know how to structure the text and write it in an appropriate style and accurately. Extended essay writing is writing for a particular purpose according to the particular requirements of the course. And one of the major requirements is following a specific structure for this kind of essay text structure.

Mastery of the skill of writing extended essays can help students to develop their logic of thinking and critical thinking, and of argument; to express their own ideas better and display knowledge of the subject. The format of an extended essay, once acquired, can also help them to write essays in subjects other than English, course papers and even diploma work.

This paper aims to present the programme of the course, the teaching methodology, and to discuss the results of assessment and comments of students and subject teachers.

2 Course description and objectives

The programme of extended essay writing takes place in the second year of study at the International College of Economics and Finance (ICEF), which is a Faculty of the National Research University Higher School of Economics. The purpose of this

programme is to equip students with the skills necessary for conducting research and producing a piece of extended writing in their own subject-specific area. The course involves an integrated approach, with a particular focus on the writing and research skills necessary for such a task. The course is designed to encourage critical thinking and get students to be evaluative in their approach to writing. The main objectives of this course are: to enable students to produce an extended piece of writing in their own subject area within the academic conventions of higher education in the West; to develop students' discursive skills to communicate effectively in writing; and to develop critical thinking skills and learner autonomy. The general input takes the form of two hours per fortnight in each group (12 hours in each semester), with an English teacher working in close cooperation with subject teachers to develop the skills required. The final exam in the form of an achievement test (1,700 words) shows the mastery of the syllabus and students' ability to write an extended essay and to use resources in their work.

3 Teaching methodology

It is stated in the syllabus that writing skills development occurs through the process of students completing their project (English language syllabus, second year). At each stage of writing, students are expected to generate ideas, organize them, evaluate what they are writing and critically assess what they have written. The course strongly emphasizes the importance of the end product. Some researchers (Jackson, Meyer & Parkinson, 2006) suggest an academic essay involves 'a written response to a focused question' (p. 267); others – see it as 'documented essay'. We look upon an extended essay as project work which shows students' understanding of the field, their ability to provide evidence, apply concepts and theories, interpret them and give their own opinion. Each of the six classes in the first semester is devoted to a particular topic:

Class 1: Essay title analysis

Class 2: Essay structure: Introduction

Class 3: Essay structure: Main part: paragraph development

Class 4: Writing summaries and abstracts. Avoiding plagiarism

Class 5: Essay structure: Conclusion

Class 6: Bibliography. Grammar points

Each class in the course is accompanied by a lot of practice. Essay titles include *To what extent do you agree ...?*, *Discuss ...*, *Compare ...*, *Evaluate ...*, *Explain ...* issues. While analyzing them, students are taught to compare and contrast, explain the differences, give reasons and definitions. Essay structure is explained and students are recommended to follow the particular structure: context – thesis – argument – scope of answer for the Introduction; evidence – context – comment – for Main part development; summary – summary of argument,

thesis restatement – limitations and further research – for the Conclusion. (Mounsey, 2002, p. 37). How to prepare a bibliography and the format used for publishing articles in Great Britain is explained. Students are taught what ‘plagiarism’ is and are advised to always identify the source. With a lot of practice, students realize they obtain the skill of writing extended essays.

Students are encouraged to understand the subject matter of the course, get involved in doing tasks and home assignments and apply this knowledge in practice, writing essays in Sociology, Philosophy, Economics and Banking. The learning process enables students to continue learning once they leave university and start working.

4 Assessment and scoring

As already indicated, the pattern of assessment adopted by ICEF is an achievement test, a combination of formative and summative assessment employing criterion-referenced scales in the final exam, showing students’ strengths and weaknesses and their progress made on the course. Since students were provided with the necessary knowledge, had enough practice in analyzing titles and writing introductions, conclusions and developing paragraphs in the main part of the essay, in their final exam they are expected to demonstrate the obtained skill of writing extended essays.

Different approaches to scoring exist. *The criterion-referenced practice* implies that ‘the quality of each essay is judged against explicitly stated criteria, often in terms of what a student can do’ (Hyland, 2008, p. 102). Criterion-referenced techniques therefore link naturally with the principles of EAP. In reference to the type of scoring to be used, holistic or analytic procedures are worth mentioning. *Holistic scoring* ‘offers a general impression of the text based on a single, integrated score’ (ibid.). ‘It has an advantage of being very rapid. Experienced scorers can judge a one-page piece of writing in just a couple of minutes or even less’ (Hughes, 2003, p. 98). Some researchers note that the main disadvantage of it is that it ‘assumes that a particular level of grammatical ability will always be associated with a particular level of lexical ability’ (Hughes, 2003, p. 100). The 15-year experience of teaching at ICEF proves that it is not always true: students with good grammar almost always have a good language bank. *Analytic scoring* ‘requires a separate score for each of a number of aspects of a task’ (ibid.). The advantages of this type of scoring are quite obvious: they reflect uneven development of skills in individuals. It also seems to be more reliable since it has a number of scores. In some analytic schemes (for instance, John Anderson’s (found in Harris, 1968)), each component is given equal weight. In other schemes (such as Jacobs et al., 1981), the weight is decided by the tester (for example, grammatical accuracy might be given greater weight than accuracy of spelling). The analytic scale is used worldwide. The one introduced by Jacobs et al. (ibid.) is used, as reported, at college level in North America. It has five components: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. ‘Content’ in this scheme is given the greatest weight and ‘mechanics’ – the least, which is relevant for upper-intermediate to advanced level learners, but would not be appropriate for elementary-level learners. The main disadvantage of the analytic method of scoring is the fact that it is time-consuming, and even with practice and experience, assessment takes longer than with the holistic method.

The choice of the approach basically depends on the circumstances and the purpose of assessment. Neither of the schemes mentioned – without certain modification and adaptation

– turned out to be appropriate for ICEF students. The main reason is the fact that writing extended essays is a very particular skill. It implies that students are not only knowledgeable on the subject, but that they possess an ability to analyze, develop argument and include reasoning in their essays; that they know how to structure a lengthy text and write it in the appropriate register. At university level, accuracy must also be taken into account.

4.1 Criteria

The above-mentioned areas of language knowledge (content, text organization, register and vocabulary, and accuracy) formed the basis for the development of the type of scoring which is based on holistic features. The reason for choosing this type of scoring was evident: the marking of 131 extended essays ought to be rather quick. In order to realize this task fully, some specific criteria for marking extended essays and scales were developed. A marking criteria scale when a single score is given (from 10 to 0) based on an overall impression is summarized in Table 1. There was also a specific requirement for the length (approximately 1,700 words).

Table 1: The marking criteria for assessment of extended essays

10	knowledgeable, well-organized, appropriate register, sophisticated vocabulary, no errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation
9	knowledgeable, well-organized, appropriate register, rather sophisticated vocabulary, a few errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation
8	rather knowledgeable, well-organized, appropriate register, rather sophisticated vocabulary, a few errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation
7	some knowledge of the subject, quite appropriate text organization, quite appropriate register, adequate range of vocabulary, occasional errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation
6	some knowledge of the subject, faults in text organization and paragraphing, quite appropriate register, occasional errors of grammar, spelling punctuation
5	rather limited knowledge of the subject, rather poor text organization, faults in paragraphing, quite frequent errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation
4	limited knowledge of the subject (a compilation), poor text organization, faulty paragraphing and register, limited range of vocabulary, frequent errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation
3	very limited knowledge of the subject, poor text organization, no idea of paragraphing, faulty register, very limited range of vocabulary, frequent errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation
2	almost no knowledge of the subject, very poor text organization, no idea of paragraphing, faulty register, very limited range of vocabulary, inaccurate
1	no knowledge of the subject, no idea of text organization and paragraphing, no idea of register, very limited range of vocabulary, inaccurate
0	plagiarized

The criteria were put on the students' website, to which they all had access.

5 Results and discussion

Weigle (2002) points out that 'the ability to write effectively is becoming increasingly important in our global community, and instruction in writing is thus assuming an increasing role in both second- and foreign language education' (p. 1). During the course, students were provided with the necessary knowledge of how to write extended essays and the required template for an essay (Mounsey, 2002, p. 101; McMillan & Weyers, 2007, p. 89). They also had enough practice. The title for the final essay was suggested by a Sociology teacher.

5.1 Assessment grades and analysis

Out of 131 essays, three students obtained the highest result – a 10; five students achieved an 8; nine students – a 7; and five students – a 6. The rest of the students obtained lower marks. The most 'popular' mark was 4, which means that extended essay writing skills were not obtained, and the essays submitted were just a compilation of materials from different sources, sometimes not even identified. There were 55 students of this kind. Eight students obtained a 3 and three students – a 2. These students have no idea of how to write essays at all. If we compare these results with last year's, out of 122 students, four obtained a 10, ten students – a 9; twenty eight students – an 8; no student got a mark less than a 6.

The reason for such low results this year seems to be bad attendance in groups. Last year, out of 35 students in a group, 28 to 30 attended all six classes. This year, the attendance in all three groups was reduced by approximately 30%. Many students attended only two or three classes. They tended to be overconfident after the status of the exam had been changed from 'an exam' to 'a test'; others did not attend for no apparent reason.

Those students who had attended all classes obtained high results in extended essay writing. Students with an 8 and a 10 result demonstrated knowledge of the subject and a well-developed argument. The text structure in their essays was well organized, and those with a 10 followed the recommended template of an essay. This helped them to develop paragraphs easily, give reasoning and present an argument. They also showed good knowledge of professional vocabulary, and presented their essays in an appropriate register. The difference between an 8 and a 10 score was mainly in accuracy: those with an 8 made mistakes in articles, prepositions and tenses.

5.2 Feedback

Feedback in the second year is aimed at both awarding a grade for writing and evaluating students' writing. It focuses on the areas listed above of language knowledge (content, text organization, register and vocabulary, and accuracy) which, in other words, is 'task achievement and how language and organisation contribute to these. Positive feedback should be given first so that students can see in which areas they are progressing' (Alexander, Argent & Spencer, 2008, p. 213). Negative feedback covers all areas of language knowledge which turn out to be faulty.

5.3 Sample essays

We will now look at two students' extended essays, and analyze and assess them according to the suggested criteria (the first essay is shortened to one paragraph development in the main part).

The extended essay question was *Is Sociology a science?*

First essay:

Sociology is similar to the debates: every person connected to it has his own point of view concerning different subjects which he can in most cases justify. In other words, every person acts to some extent subjectively, that is not detached from his personal feelings, to concepts or ideas described in the sociological discipline. However, this raises a problem since it becomes not easy to decide whether sociology is a collection of subjective ideas regarding different social issues or a formal academic discipline that ought to be studied as natural sciences such as biology or physics. It is crucially important to identify the essence of sociological discipline since depending on it different approaches to studying and analysing it shall be used. Although the term science must be defined in order to understand which criteria for the choice and justification of the possible solutions to this problem shall be applied. A science is a systematic action that results in a verifiable knowledge about reality. Therefore, in order to justify the claim that sociology is an academic discipline or to refute it the question of whether or not sociology provides verifiable knowledge about reality must be answered. However, there is no unique consensus achieved by sociologists regarding this problem since people connected to sociology have different basis for their justification, which are ontological and epistemological assumptions of their researches or theories. There are numerous examples of sociologists who develop their answers to the question of whether or not sociology is a science. For instance, Margaret Thatcher, who claimed in the interview to the *Woman's Own* magazine that 'there is no such thing as society' (Keay, 1987, p. 9) that means that she fully denied the subject of sociology stating that there cannot be any scientific part in this discipline, or Marxists, who regarded sociology as a rubbish and, therefore, claimed that no objective knowledge connected to it can be retrieved and that sociology cannot be considered and studied as an academic discipline such as psychology or chemistry. This essay, however, will be devoted to giving support to the claim that sociological knowledge can be considered as verified knowledge about reality and justifying that sociology can be considered as a science.

First of all, the opinion of one of the most influential sociologists of the Enlightenment period Emile Durkheim shall be discussed. He was the first sociologist who succeeded in establishment of sociology as an academic discipline through defining social facts. As philosopher and contemporary of Durkheim Lucien Levy-Bruhl noted in his book 'History of Modern Philosophy in France':

'Durkheim <...> endeavored to treat the facts of moral life after the method used in the positive sciences – that is <...> to find out in what way they are capable of becoming objects of scientific study, and to this end, to discover in them some objective element which will admit of exact determination or <...> of measurement. If the definition of the "social fact" was sufficiently exact, the greatest difficulty would be overcome and social science could then progress rapidly.' (Levy-Bruhl, 1899, p. 464)

In this passage, Lucien Levy-Bruhl tried to show that Durkheim succeeded in identifying social facts as the main object of the

sociological study. In order to do that Durkheim proved that there are two important features of social facts that are the idea that they are external, in other words, experienced not by one person but by a group of people, and constraining, that is limiting our actions. Apart from that, Durkheim claimed that social facts shall be explained. However, this explanation can only be valid if it is made through other social facts. Therefore, as was noticed by Lucien Levy-Bruhl, in the opinion of Durkheim, only in case when facts of the social life are defined through the methods of empirical investigation of other social facts sociology can be named a science.

...

To sum up, the problem of whether or not sociology is a science raised a lot of debates among scholars. The majority of famous sociologists, whose claims were based on different concepts, tried to present their own view regarding this question. This essay showed that sociology can be considered as an academic discipline that ought to be treated in the corresponding way. Sociology can and must be viewed as a science due to the following reasons: first, the method of empirical investigation of both August Comte and Emile Durkheim can be applied to investigate various social phenomena and facts and may be verified in the contemporary life; second, the analysis of people's actions in society proposed by Max Weber is a commonly used method of tracking the development processes of societies and social interaction between people at the micro-level. These claims can be used as a strong counterargument to the claims that sociology is not an academic discipline proposed, for instance, by Karl Marx, who considered it as rubbish and a non-science. Although, it is only a brief overview of the ideas and theories proposed by the most famous sociologists, there are so many complicated opinions of both modern and past scholars regarding this question that they need to be investigated with more profound and deliberate research. What can be done further in order to find a more precise and justified answer in regard to the question of whether or not sociology can be considered as a science is to analyze not only works of the most famous researchers but also of the contemporaries and to investigate in a more explicit way the ideas of the greatest sociologists mentioned in this essay.

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Second essay:

To answer it, ones need to define, what is "sociology" and "science", thus to make everything clear. Sociology is a study of society, which uses empirical methods and critical analysis to develop knowledge about society. As an independent subject sociology was first identified by Augustus Comte, french philosopher of science, only in 1838. Science, how it is defined today, is aggregation of knowledge, gathered through testable explanations, like experiments, and which covers truth about laws the studied subject follow. The notion of science in today's people's mind is something very sophisticated, and is mostly used to describe natural sciences, like mathematics, chemistry, biology, physics. But there are other branches of science, not all sciences are natural. It should be said, that sociology has everything to be called "science" and be considered this way.

Proving sociology to be scientific is not an easy thing to do. Recalling the definition of science, it must include some laws, which the studied subject follows under certain conditions. Though society does not have any numerical limitations the range of it can be vague. Sociology is not about the individual, but about the society as an individual. As a science, it has to prove cause-and-effect relationship. For this purpose, sociology can use statistics, which is a data for sociology to work with, and make conclusions using logic and critical thinking, which are required in every science, there can be recalled other proofs for sociology being a science. Knowing how vague and ambiguous events can be, sociologists have to make assumptions about the society.

Science requires objective knowledge. And so thought Max Weber. He said, that sociological investigations require strict and very disciplined methods of getting inference from what we observe. That may contradict him being an interpretivist, but it does not. He proposes that an individual or society are different and reflective, which means that they are created by their environment and values, and can not be examined as a soil in a particular region. All of this information has to be included in any research to get as objective data as possible. This may be a complication, which does not fully allow to call sociology a science.

One of the main questions in sociology is reliability of the data, and how do people prove, that they see is real. The problem is getting the data out of people, concerning some questions, that they might not want to share for many reasons, like answer can be not "socially acceptable", or they do not want to deviate from the others in their answers or behavior. Sociologists made a huge success in overcoming these problems, such as different methods of sampling, gathering data.

Anyway sociology should still count as a science, at least due to the mentioned above arguments. For the fact that we can establish causality provided strict and scientific reasoning, thus proving some social laws exist and "society" is bound by it. The methods developed by sociologists over time to study society more precise and trying to eliminate "human" bias had proved to be successful, and thus it is seen, that the data gathered more and more reflects reality and therefore is objective.

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HYPERLINK "<http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/news/science/topics/sociology/index.html>" <http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/news/science/topics/sociology/index.html>

HYPERLINK "<http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/news/science/topics/sociology/index.html>" <http://www.oldandsold.com/articles30/sociology-1.shtml> (D.S.)

5.4 Analysis and impression

As already indicated, the holistic scoring based on the criterion-referenced approach was implemented. Whether the students passed or failed depended on whether they had followed the required criteria.

The general comments on both essays are as follows:

First essay:

1. The author knows the subject well. He can analyze, develop argument and reasoning.
2. The text is well organized: the introduction has the required structure (context, thesis, argument and scope of answer), there is paragraph development in the main part and the conclusion fits the format (summary of context, summary of argument, thesis restatement, limitations and further research). The length is appropriate.
3. There are no stylistic faults, and the vocabulary is sophisticated.
4. There are no serious errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation. There is one systemic mistake in the usage of the modal verb 'shall' which the student treated as a verb which has a less strong meaning than the modal verb 'must'. The mistake does not impede understanding, which is why the mark for accuracy was not reduced.

The obtained result was 10 out of 10, which is quite fair.

Second essay:

The second essay was a complete failure:

1. The author does not know the subject well: there is no analysis, argument and reasoning.
2. The text structure is wrong: a faulty introduction and conclusion, and there is no paragraph development in the main part. Paragraphing is wrong. Too short.
3. A very limited range of vocabulary. Stylistic faults: resembles a compilation of ideas and materials from different websites. No referencing in the text.
4. Errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling and articles.

The general comments on other students' results are as follows.

This academic year's results are worse than last year's, and they are really disappointing. Out of 122 students last year, four obtained a 10, ten students – a 9; an 8 was obtained by twenty eight students. No student got a mark less than a 6. This year, out of 131 students, only three obtained a 10, five students – an 8, and eight students – a 7. Fifty five students got a 4 and twenty students – even less than the passing grade (from 3 to 1). The reason for such low results seems to be low attendance in groups. Last year, out of 35 students on the list in my group, 28 to 30 attended all six lessons. This year, attendance in all three groups reduced by approximately 30%. Many students attended only two or three lessons for no reason at all.

Summarized students' faults in writing extended essays include:

1. no title page
2. wrong structure of either introduction or conclusion
3. no paragraph development in the main part
4. the usage of personal pronoun throughout the essay
5. no referencing in the text or it was done in a wrong way (as in a book or article)

6. the bibliography arranged not on a separate page and not in alphabetical order or according to the rules used in the Russian publication format.

As Grabowski (1996) notes, 'writing, as compared to speaking, can be seen as a more standardised system which must be acquired through special instruction. ... The fact that writing is more standardised than speaking allows for a higher degree of sanctions when people deviate from the standard' (p. 75). Due to absenteeism, the majority of students failed in text structure, which is why some additional criteria for marking text organization were developed later (Table 2).

Table 2: Additional criteria for marking text organization

10	there is thesis in the introduction, clearly developed paragraphs in the main part, enough evidence, thesis restatement in the conclusion, correct referencing in the text, well-arranged bibliography
9	there is thesis in the introduction, almost all paragraphs in the main part are clearly developed, enough evidence, thesis restatement in the conclusion, occasional faults in referencing, well-arranged bibliography
8	there is thesis in the introduction, almost all paragraphs in the main part are clearly developed but not enough evidence, thesis restatement in the conclusion, some faults in referencing, rather well-arranged bibliography
7	there is thesis in the introduction, not enough evidence for paragraph development in the main part, thesis restatement in the conclusion, faults in referencing, some faults in the arrangement of bibliography
6	there is thesis in the introduction, not enough evidence for paragraph development in the main part, thesis restatement in conclusion, faulty referencing and bibliography
5	the thesis in the introduction is not clear, not enough evidence for paragraph development in the main part, no thesis restatement in the conclusion, wrong referencing and bibliography
4	no thesis in the introduction, poor paragraph development in the main part or a compilation, no thesis restatement, wrong referencing and bibliography
3	there is no thesis in the introduction, no paragraph development in the main part, faulty conclusion (short), no referencing in the text, no bibliography
2	introduction not relevant, no paragraph development in the main part, faulty conclusion (short), no references, no bibliography
1	introduction not relevant, no paragraph development in the main part, no conclusion, short, no references, no bibliography
0	the text structure is impossible to identify, no references, no bibliography

These additional criteria will help teachers in future to attract students' attention to the importance of knowledge of this area.

5.5 Research methodology

As Silva (1993) points out, 'writing in a second language tends to be "more constrained, more difficult, and less effective" than

writing in a first language: second-language writers plan less, revise content less, and write less fluently than first-language writers' (p. 668). We admit that many students might have difficulties with writing in a foreign language. Some of them would lack language resources; others would tend to write in the format typical of writing in their first language. Some students would produce 'an incomplete script due to time constraints' (Weigle, 2002, p. 132). But this is the reason why this course was designed: to provide students with knowledge of writing processes in a second language.

5.5.1 Perception of students

A short questionnaire was prepared to reveal students' problems in writing extended essays, and their opinion of the suggested criteria and the format of the final exam. Twenty five students responded. To the first question, 'What was the main difficulty in writing the essay?', half of the respondents answered that they had problems with dealing with a great amount of information and finding appropriate quotes for evidence. Approximately 25% named 'following the required text structure' a problem; and the rest of the students wished they had started writing the essay earlier because time management appeared hard for them. To the second question, 'Did you use the criteria suggested?', almost all respondents admitted that the criteria were helpful in understanding how to write the essay. One student added that this was the reason why he was able to obtain a high result. Before that, he did not know how to write an academic essay by himself. Two students pointed out that the criteria did not work. To the third question, 'What would you add or exclude from the criteria?', 22 students decided that the criteria were fine, and there was no need to change them, but one student suggested adding some bonus points 'for the originality of the arguments used'. The last question concerned possible changes to the format of the exam – 'Would you, if you could, change the format of the final exam?' The majority of students answered in the negative. Some students, in fact, referred to the final extended essay, others – to the final exam in the second year in the form of a presentation. Both groups mentioned that it can help them in their future career and for other subjects.

5.5.2 Opinion of Sociology teachers

According to the second-year syllabus, the purpose of the English course is to equip students with the skills necessary for conducting research and producing a piece of extended writing (project) in their subject-specific area (English language syllabus, second year). Since one of the courses taught in the second year at ICEF is Sociology, it was decided by the International Academic Committee that the final essay of this course would be an extended essay on a sociological topic. It appeared that Sociology teachers had similar problems: low attendance and, as a result, insufficient knowledge of the requirements for writing an essay. Writing an essay in Sociology is different from the English language exam: it is the last part of the exam, which is why some students sacrifice it in order to have more time for other tasks which give them more points. In the final exam, only 35% of students in low groups passed. In high groups, the attendance and the results were more encouraging. The most typical drawbacks were low-quality introduction, which lacked either the thesis or the argument, or the context. Both Sociology teachers agreed that in general, it is very difficult to teach students something if they do not attend classes.

6 Conclusion

Bachman and Palmer (1996) point out that 'the most important consideration in designing and developing a language test is the use for which it is intended, so that the most important quality of a test is its usefulness' (p. 17). As we have seen, the skill of writing extended essays in English is very useful because it is applicable to any other subject. It is very much standardized and helps students to write essays by themselves. The assessment of extended essays is that of an achievement test based on the criterion-referenced approach and holistic scoring. The introduction of additional criteria for text structure can help teachers to highlight the importance of this aspect in essay writing. Further research in assessment procedures can be concerned with the development of additional criteria for other language areas for the purpose of perfecting students' writing ability as professionals for whom performance in a future job depends on effective communication skills. It must also remain 'a positive tool for supporting student learning, helping language learners achieve their personal and professional goals, and promoting more effective communication worldwide' (Weigle, 2002, p. 244).

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