

University Teacher Beliefs on Integrated Writing^(*)

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Abstract

This exploratory study aimed at investigating higher education language teachers' beliefs regarding Reading-to-Write tasks. It primarily focused on task beliefs as well as scoring beliefs. To that end, a questionnaire made up of 13 items was sent to different language teachers working in Egypt at the time of data collection. Also, an interview was held with four experienced writing teachers. Quantitative data were analyzed via SurveyMonkey and interviews were qualitatively analyzed to find common themes and beliefs. Results suggested that there was common trust in Reading-to-Write tasks as a measure of writing abilities with values placed on the students' reading abilities as well as language proficiency since these aspects were stepping-stones towards writing good integrated essays. Results suggested the need to teach such tasks at lower levels to gain better understanding and training in the area of synthesis.

Key Words: Reading-to-Write Tasks, Beliefs, Assessment, Writing Abilities, Reading Abilities, Analytic Rubrics, Content, Integration

المخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة الاستكشافية إلى التحقيق في معتقدات معلمي اللغة في التعليم العالي فيما يتعلق بمهام القراءة للكتابة. ركزت في المقام الأول على المعتقدات العامة حول طبيعة المهمة، وكذلك المعتقدات الخاصة بالتقييم. ولهذه الغاية، تم إرسال استبيان مكون من 13 عنصرًا إلى مدرسي لغات مختلفين يعملون في مصر وقت جمع البيانات. أيضًا، تم إجراء مقابلة

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مع أربعة من معلمي الكتابة ذوي الخبرة. تم تحليل البيانات الكمية عن طريق SurveyMonkey، وتم تحليل المقابلات نوعياً للعثور على الموضوعات والمعتقدات المشتركة. أشارت النتائج إلى وجود ثقة كبيرة في قدرة مهام القراءة للكتابة على مقياس قدرات الطالب الكتابية إلى جانب قدراته على القراءة بالإضافة إلى إتقان اللغة؛ لأن هذه الجوانب بمثابة خطوات أساسية تحقق كتابة مقالات متكاملة جيدة. اقترحت النتائج الحاجة إلى تدريس مثل هذه المهام للطلاب ذوي المستويات الأدنى لاكتساب فهم جيد وتدريب أفضل في مجال التأليف والكتابة المتميزة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهام القراءة للكتابة - المعتقدات - التقييم - قدرات الكتابة - قدرات القراءة - نماذج التحليل (روبريك تحليلي) - المحتوى - التكامل.

Reading-to-Write tasks are one form of assessments that have been used lately in different courses. Such tasks basically involve a reading source that the students read before being asked to write about a topic that is generally related to this reading source. The exact definition of such tasks is:

The term “reading-to-write” can be examined from two perspectives: pedagogical and theoretical. The pedagogical perspective refers to instructional tasks that combine reading and writing for various educational purposes....The reading-to-write construct can be examined from a reading, writing, or constructivist approach depending on the importance given to the literacy.(Asención Delaney, Y., 2008, p.140-141)

This form of writing falls under the category of what is called *Integrated Writing Courses*, which are defined as follows:

Integrated writing tasks are tasks in which test takers are presented with one or more language- rich source texts and are required to produce written compositions that require (1) mining the source texts for ideas, (2) selecting ideas, (3) synthesizing ideas from one or more source texts, (4) transforming the language used in the input, (5) organizing ideas and (6) using stylistic conventions such as connecting ideas and acknowledging sources. The rating scale used to grade such compositions needs

to take account of these features specific to integrated writing tasks (Knoch & Sitajalabhorn 2013, p.306).

Integrated Tasks are believed to offer realistic examples to students. That is because students get exposed to sources and skills which they will likely use either in their future courses or in their lives. Integrated tasks are a specific form of writing or assessment that encourage students to use their critical thinking abilities by giving them a chance to categorize the information they come across in a listening or a reading source or both and be selective in deciding on what they choose to present to the readers and how they choose to present it. Hence, synthesizing information is the core of what “Integrated Tasks” are about, and this is what makes them different from Independent tasks that solely depend on the students’ background information and/ or general knowledge.

Accordingly, teaching independent writing is rather insufficient and limited as it might not be beneficial to students.

In the field of English language and research, Reading-to-Write tasks involve reading prompts that the students are required to read before they write about a certain topic. These have originally been introduced to the world of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to replace the original forms of independent writing tasks or complement them. This was primarily to ensure that ESL/ EFL classes were doing academic courses the favor of teaching students what they were supposed to encounter in their future academic life. It was often noted that the students commonly mentioned that their experience in L2 writing courses differed greatly from what they experienced in content courses that they studied in their majors and areas of specialization, and that necessitated the need to focus on such type of integrated tasks in classes (Cumming, Lai, & Cho, 2016; Grabe & Zhang, 2013; Leki & Carson, 1997; Plakans, 2015; Zhang, 2013).

Leki and Carson (1997) added that that this type of writing helps in raising the bar and generating highly sophisticated pieces of writing that allowed students to integrate their own knowledge with those presented to them in the sources. That is why integrated tasks were

sometimes referred to as *synthesis writing* (Plakans, 2010; Zhang, 2013). Hence, Plakans (2015) explained that this task type was of great value as it simulated real life settings that students were likely to encounter in their university courses. Independent writing tasks then were believed to be rather *artificial* in nature since they were not real and timed-the fact that sets them apart from what happens in real life.

The reason why Integrated Writing Tasks have been gaining popularity is that to many scholars, they offer an authentic form of assessment as they reflect the true essence of what academic writing is all about: utilizing different sources in terms of vocabulary and content, critically thinking about them, and expressing ideas and opinions related to that (Cumming, 2013). To many educators, writing as a skill is not to be looked at independently; in other words, independent writing tasks do not offer authentic forms of production. On the other hand, interdependency addresses and stresses the authenticity of the language assessment, which is an integral aspect towards reaching a valid and reliable form of evaluation (Cumming, 2013).

Since it is believed that Integrated Writing Tasks offer higher levels of authenticity and reliability, these tasks are commonly used today in different high-stakes tests, such as “the College Board’s Advanced Placement Spanish Language exam; the Internet-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (iBT TOEFL); and Diplome d’etudes en language francaise or Diplome approfondi de language francaise (DELFDALF), French proficiency examinations” (Plakans & Gebriel, 2012, p.19); and “Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or Advanced Placement foreign language tests in the US as well as in language classrooms that focus on academic English language development” (Plakans, 2015, p. 159); “the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and the Canadian Academic English Language (CAEL) Assessment use integrated tasks, as do several university-based assessment programs (e.g., Washington State University, the University of Iowa)” (Weigle & Parker, 2012, p. 118)

In discussing the differences between integrated tasks and independent tasks, a major concern that was tackled in literature had to do with how each task was understood by both students and teachers.

According to Plakans (2010), many students did not seem to view the two tasks differently; they couldn't differentiate between the two constructs. In her study, she requested 10 ESL students (undergraduate and graduate) in the US to complete two tasks: one Reading-to-Write task and another Independent Task. While answering the tests, the students were required to verbalize their thoughts. The students were later interviewed as well to understand how they perceived and understood the two tasks. Based on the results, it was clear that some students dealt with the reading source of the integrated task as only an idea provider, whereas others dealt with the source in a more complex manner seeing it as a complex task requiring full understanding of the reading to be able to show ability to synthesize information, use the reading text for support, thereby producing a more coherent essay. She then concluded the need to teach the students the difference between the two tasks and this will be reflected in how they write them. The positive value of instruction was investigated and confirmed by Zhang (2013) who concluded after a series of pre and post-tests that teaching discourse synthesis yielded better results with students. His experimental group proved to have better performance than that of the control group who received no instruction on synthesis.

When discussing the discourse features of each type of task, it was noticed that examinees of the integrated tasks compared to the independent ones tended to be produce shorter, yet more sophisticated and coherent content. The examinees tended to use "a wider range of words, to write longer clauses and more clauses, to write less argumentatively oriented texts, to indicate sources of information other than oneself, and to paraphrase, repeat verbatim, or summarize source information more than to make declarations based on personal knowledge" (Cumming et al., 2005, p. 32). Hence, Cumming et al. reached the conclusion that independent tasks prompted students to write long arguments based on their own input and knowledge, whereas the integrated tasks prompted students to use all their cognitive abilities to judge, choose, and contextualize the information they came across in the sources provided-a similar strategy to the one employed in other academic contexts. The students had to present their ideas in a manner

that reflect understanding of the source both *conceptually* (as in integration and synthesis) and *textually* (as in citation mechanics).

Also, when Integrated Writing Tasks are compared to Independent Writing Tasks, it becomes evident that they solve some issues that students complained about when writing independently; some of these problems included lack of ideas, limited vocabulary and difficulty in deciding on the proper organization of essay writing (Leki & Carson, 1997). Accordingly providing students with a prompt should give all of them the same advantage of having read or listened to the same source and content, and this should ensure giving all students the same background knowledge and schema about the topic about which they are supposed to write about (Weigle, 2004).

This was further confirmed by Abrams (2019) who analyzed the work of some students studying German in a US university over a period of ten weeks. The students completed six tasks-three source based ones and three non source-based ones- and he concluded that providing learners with a source that included ideas helped in minimizing the load the students had in searching for ideas and gave them ample time to focus on the language component. Hence, ‘content-provision’-as he called it-resulted in higher levels of language accuracy and complexity on the level of lexicon and grammar.

It was also noted by Zhang (2017) that language proficiency and accuracy of students improved a great deal when students were taught integrated writing tasks. He said that learning how to write Integrated Tasks and use sources offered results that were close to those offered when giving corrective feedback to students. In his study, students’ performance on integrated tasks was much better than that of the control group (those who took an independent writing task) in post-tests administered after three weeks. In addition, the students’ scores on the language component of the rubric in delayed post-tests administered at week 5 were much higher than those who sat for writing-only tasks. That showed that reading-to-write tasks did play a role in improving students’ language skills in terms of accuracy. Similar results were reached by Plakans, Liao, and Wang (2019) as they noted that reading to write tasks not only improved the *written communication proficiency* but the general *L2 skills* as well.

Since most of the studies focused on students' performance on Integrated Tasks, and to the best knowledge of the researcher, no studies focused on teachers' beliefs on Integrated Tasks or Reading-to-Write tasks in the context of Egyptian universities, the researcher decided to fill this gap in literature and delve deeper into the beliefs of higher education language teachers in Egypt to seek better understanding of their concerns regarding teaching and scoring such type of tasks. The study aimed at answering the following research questions.

RQ1: What are the language teachers' beliefs of Reading-to-Write tasks in Egypt?

- A. What are the general beliefs about the task?
- B. What are the Scoring beliefs about the task?

To answer the research question, a questionnaire made up of 13 items was sent to as many language teachers as could be reached via email. The items were piloted by giving hard copies to different higher education language teachers. Based on the face to face feedback received, the items were made shorter and clearer. For example, some explanatory sentences included between brackets were removed and some technical vocabulary was rephrased to ensure clarity. After the piloting stage was done, all questions were set up on SurveyMonkey and the link to the questionnaire was emailed in April 2019. The questionnaire was sent to all teachers I knew who were teaching or had previously taught at The American University in Cairo (AUC). The questionnaire was also sent to teachers who were working or had previously worked at the British University in Egypt (BUE), Misr International University (MIU), the German University in Cairo (GUC), and Nile University (NU). Those teachers also shared the questionnaire with their current or former colleagues in the university. In total, the questionnaire was sent to over 250 teachers.

However, because of the technical nature of the topic and the fact that not all teachers had the experience of teaching integrated writing tasks, only one hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were returned. After careful revisions, it was clear that there were some incomplete questionnaires as some respondents did not go beyond the general

information section (i.e. demographics). Accordingly, and for the sake of validity and accuracy, 18 responses were discarded. The link to the questionnaire was then resent to some possible respondents in the above-mentioned institutions, but only two more complete answers were received, so the final number of completed questionnaires was 104.

The non-native participants were 84.62%, whereas the percentage of native speakers of English was 15.38%. All respondents were language and writing teachers working in Egypt at the time of data collection with years of experience that range from 0 years to 42 years. As for gender, 92 participants were females and only 12 were males. The majority of participants had 6-20 years of experience.

Added to the questionnaire, interviews were held with four experienced teachers to get their input on Reading-to-Write tasks in the context of EFL writing in Egyptian contexts and below are details about the four interviewees.

Table 1: *Interview Participants Years of Experience*

	Gender	Nationality	Years of Experience
Rater 1	Female	Egyptian	30
Rater 2	Female	Egyptian	34
Rater 3	Female	Egyptian	32
Rater 4	Female	Egyptian	20

The interviews were held after filling the questionnaire. The interviews were rather semi-structured (See Appendix A), letting the participants express their thoughts on the ideas raised in the questionnaire. The interviews were recorded on *Audacity* Software, transcribed word for word, and then qualitatively analyzed and grouped into themes to reach *meaningful* results as will be clarified below. Another researcher helped with the coding of interviews to ensure valid results.

Data derived from the questionnaire were statistically analyzed through SurveyMonkey. The researcher chose to have them reported in percentages as will be clarified below.

Results

In order to answer the research question, data derived from the questionnaire were statistically analyzed through SurveyMonkey. On the other hand, the information received from the interviews were qualitatively analyzed and grouped into themes to reach meaningful results as will be clarified below.

RQ: What are the language teachers' beliefs of Reading-to-Write tasks in Egypt?

1. Beliefs about the task

The first sub-question investigated teachers' beliefs of Reading-to-Write tasks and made use of quantitative from the questionnaire. There were six specific beliefs tested (See Table 2) that the participants expressed their opinions about through answering a 5-point scale where 5 meant Strongly Agree and 1 meant Strongly Disagree. The details are clarified below.

Table 2: *Beliefs regarding Reading-to-Write tasks*

Perception	Agreement Percentages	Disagreement Percentages	Not Sure	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Better measure of writing abilities than independent writing tasks	66.35%	19.25%	14.42%	2.31	1.05
2. Need to keep reading with students while writing	66.34%	25.97%	7.69%	3.44	1.19
3. Highly proficient students in grammar are at an advantage	48.08%	27.88%	24.04%	2.63	1.09
4. Should ONLY be taught to advanced levels	28.85%	63.46%	7.69%	3.38	1.23
5. Better measure of reading abilities than writing abilities	30.77	42.31	26.92%	3.09	0.93
6. Better assessed without a time frame	44.23%	25.97%	29.81%	2.75	1.04

Many participants (66.35%) agreed that Reading-to-Write tasks were a better measure of students' writing abilities than independent writing tasks. Among the reasons provided were the fact that this type of task was more authentic (simulating real life tasks), realistic, and eliminates variability related to topic familiarity on the part of students. Some of the exact words provided by the participants in the open ended questions and comments sections of the questionnaire were the fact that Reading-to-Write tasks *provided a reference for students; they get the students to focus on the writing rather than the content; they give the students the right tone and vocabulary to use ; they eliminate knowledge variance; and they activate the students' schema before writing.* To many participants, Reading-to-Write tasks seemed to be *more authentic as writing without reading is artificial and limits writing abilities.* Hence, Reading-to-Write tasks were a good measure of writing abilities as they allowed for accurate evaluation of students' proficiency level after giving them enough content and information.

Apart from the 66.35% of those who agreed with the task being a good measure of writing abilities, a few participants (19.23%) clearly disagreed with Reading-to-Write tasks being a better measure of writing abilities altogether, and the main reasons provided were that *Students get influenced by what they've read and the terms they have read so it affects their writing vocab and technique; it limits the students' creativity; and students depend on the two articles for ideas which does not show what they are capable of.* Accordingly, the main concern seemed to be focused on how dependent students could get on the reading text, and this coincided with the rate of disagreement with keeping the reading text with the students during exams (25.97%). Those who were against the Reading-to-Write tasks believed that the presence of a source could *encourage plagiarism or influence the students' writing.* Hence, some raters were worried about the negative impact the *source* could have on students' writing

On the contrary, 42.31% of participants believed that the Reading-to-Write tasks were not a better measure of reading abilities since reading was only one aspect in the equation; in addition, this was a test of integration of ideas and sources-not a summary task where reading comprehension was of much value. One of the participants in the questionnaire had this to say about this point:

While being dependent on reading, I don't think it reflects reading skills more than those of writing. One can be a super reader, with no ability to paraphrase, organize, integrate, support an argument... etc. I also believe that in an academic context, there is no point separating reading and writing ability since they are always integrated in the target domain. (Participant # 51)

In fact, only 30.77% thought that these tasks somehow measured reading abilities since *several reading skills are involved in this task, such as summarizing, synthesizing, paraphrasing, quoting and citing.*

Another point worth mentioning is that 48.08% of participants believed that highly proficient students in the language were at an advantage in such type of task since Reading-to-Write tasks required the ability to reflect and paraphrase. One participant in the questionnaire put it as such: *This is true because Reading-to-Write tasks require the ability to summarize, paraphrase and reflect. Hence, proficiency in grammar can be an advantage.* However, a few (27.88%) clearly disagreed with these ideas as they suggested that students might be proficient in the language but lack other important skills, such as critical thinking and the ability to integrate or develop the ideas.

As for the Beliefs related to time frame, (44.23%) believed that there should not be a time frame to allow for better expression of ideas, thus making the writing more authentic; in real life, no one is confined to a specific time frame. However, a few disagreed (25.97%), and their main argument was that the time frame allowed for more focus and more comparable results among students. To the same group of respondents, having no time frame meant having no proper assessment

2. Scoring Beliefs

This section is dedicated to discussing the raters' scoring beliefs of Reading-to-Write tasks as suggested by the information received in the questionnaire and the qualitative data obtained from the interviews. In the questionnaire, participants were requested to choose the answer that best represented their scoring perception (referred to in the questionnaire as 'scoring belief'). They had a Likert scale from 1-5 where the 5 meant 'Strongly Agree' and the 1 meant 'Strongly Disagree'. For the sake of

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reporting the data, the ‘Strongly Agree’ data were added to the ‘Agree’ ones, whereas the ‘Strongly Disagree’ data were added to the ‘Disagree’ ones as clarified in Table 3.

Table 3

Scoring Beliefs

Scoring Belief	Agreement Percentages	Disagreement Percentages	Not Sure	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Reading-to-Write tasks are difficult to score.	29.7	54.4	15.84	3.27	0.94
2. Scoring based on rater’s Scoring based on rater’s intuition results in better agreement with other raters results in better agreement with other raters.	10.89	63.36	25.74	3.67	0.92
3. Scoring the integration of sources is challenging.	53.46	41.58	4.95	2.85	1.17
4. The Reading-to-Write tasks analytic rubric descriptors for each writing feature (e.g. content and vocab) almost always lack clarity.	31.68	48.51	19.80	3.11	1.01
5. Scoring Reading-to-Write tasks needs a lot of teacher training to achieve accuracy and consistency.	89.11	4.95	5.94	1.82	0.75
6. Grammar should be given the highest weight on Reading-to-Write tasks rubric.	12.87	71.29	15.84	3.64	0.89
7. Scoring Reading-to-Write tasks is highly subjective even when using a rubric.	28.71	55.45	15.84	3.26	1.05

When the data were analyzed, a lot of eye-opening aspects pertaining to scoring Reading-to-Write tasks were raised. One of the primary aspects was the value of the rubric used. To exemplify, all participants believed that when using a good, analytic rubric in addition

to a high level of teacher training, there should be no room for subjectivity or lack of consistency since all raters were in agreement with what was expected and how to grade the essays at hand. To clarify, 54.4% of participants believed that Reading-to-Write tasks were not difficult essays to score and the same percentage (55.45%) explained that there would not be an element of subjectivity when using analytic rubrics. This could be explained in light of the detailed descriptors analytic rubrics provided. Each writing feature on the rubric is always explained in a few sentences. Accordingly, it came as no surprise that (48.51%) of participants believed that the writing features on analytic rubrics were almost always clear. This made much sense since 89.11% of participants believed that norming sessions helped in achieving grading consistency. Thus, it was clear that the participants related the ease of grading to the clarity of rubrics which were usually achieved through the norming sessions held before grading.

However, according to the four raters who were interviewed, there might be some differences between scoring beliefs and what happened in reality. To clarify, in the interviews conducted, all four raters mentioned that there were always differences when interpreting the descriptors of any rubric, even the analytic ones that some teachers had been using for years. They also explained that interpreting the rubric had a level of subjectivity to it as raters interpreted the words of rubrics differently even if the wording seemed clear enough.

Since rubric training and re-training usually takes place in norming sessions, the interviewees also expressed their dissatisfaction with how unproductive most norming sessions were. Even though they believed that norming sessions could help in achieving consistency, they explicitly mentioned their frustration with how norming sessions were conducted, held and ended, especially the ones held before grading sessions when there seemed to be a race as to how fast the sessions should end to start the grading process. The interviewees clearly said that the norming sessions were ‘useless’, ‘a waste of time’, and ‘a battle field’ where different teachers simply tried to impose their views on others without any willingness to change their outlook to the matter or the essays they graded. The four raters said that most of the experienced

teachers would not go to a norming session trying to achieve consistency with others; instead, they attended the sessions to explain their points of view and convince others of them.

In the interviews, all raters also agreed that norming sessions were only useful for novice, inexperienced teachers but not for the experienced ones. Two raters suggested having workshops throughout the year instead of having norming sessions before grading exams. The interviewees suggested that such workshops could be more beneficial to raters as the grading would be done using old exam papers, so there would be no pressure on teachers to negotiate ideas or grades trying to reach a consensus. Thus, the interviewees agreed that the main reason leading to the unfruitful atmosphere of norming sessions was the timing of conducting them (right after exams and before grading) when all teachers are anxious about the number of papers they had to grade afterwards and how worried they were about their own students' performance.

The points raised in the interviews in terms of the inconsistency in interpreting rubrics seemed to be more in line with the answers provided by a minority of participants in the questionnaire where 29.7% said that this type of task was difficult to score. A similar percentage of 31.68% of participants believed that the writing features on the analytic rubric could be rather vague and thus highly subjective. The discrepancy between the information obtained from the questionnaire and that of the qualitative data of interviews could reflect a difference in beliefs and practices on the part of teachers. It could also show that some participants were tempted to give ideal answers although the real practice was mostly full of challenges as stated by one of the participants of the questionnaire who said, *'Yes. I tend to be more surprised if I meet two teachers who agree on how to interpret any given rubric than two who do not'*. Some participants explained the discrepancy among raters in light of the different standards raters had and how teachers tended to look at papers and the different criteria and writing features differently.

3. Beliefs on Rubric Features Ranking

In relation to scoring beliefs is a very important issue related to the ranking of rubric criteria (i.e. writing features of the rubric). The

different rankings would suggest the different importance different participants placed on every writing feature. If they ranked integration first, for example, this probably meant that they valued it the most. Likewise, if they ranked it last, then they most probably valued it the least. To provide details about the third section of research, quantitative data derived from the questionnaire and qualitative data derived from the TAPs, interviewees, and written sections of the questionnaire were used as will be clarified below.

When asked to rank some features on the analytic rubric of a Reading-to-Write tasks on a scale from 1-6 on the Questionnaire (1 being the most important and 6 being the least important), participants provided the following ranking. These percentages were calculated by looking into the responses provided through SurveyMonkey as clarified in Table 4.

Table 4: *Summary of Ranking Perceptions*

Perceptions of Weighed Components in Percentages

1. Content= 66.67%
 2. Organization= 40.63%
 3. Integration of Sources= 43.75%
 4. Grammar= 39.58%
 5. Vocabulary= 48.96%
 6. Mechanics= 72.92%
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To see that content was ranked first with 66.67% agreement is rather surprising given the fact that the major difference between Reading-to-Write tasks and independent tasks is the use of sources. However, such beliefs were confirmed in the interviews where teachers said that they highly valued content and organization since these showed how good a student was and how proficient he was when integrating ideas from the source with those of his own.

Discussion

Based on the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire, it was evident that many participants valued Reading-to-Write tasks and

considered them a better measure of writing abilities when compared to independent writing tasks since they offered a more authentic exam setting for students and simulated real-life tasks that they were likely to encounter in future academic courses or in their careers. These results were synonymous to those reached and suggested in previous studies (Crusan, Plakans, & Gebril, 2016; Cumming et al., 2016; Grabe & Zhang, 2013; Leki & Carson, 1997; Plakans, 2015; Zhang, 2013). Since Reading-to-Write tasks provided content for use to all students and ensured everybody had the same starting point, knowledge variance was eliminated, and accurate evaluation of language abilities was most likely to take place. Students would dedicate all their time to focus on their true language competence-rather than ‘waste their time’ searching for ideas, vocabulary, or organizational patterns as previously suggested by Leki and Carson (1997) and Weigle (2004) in discussing differences between Integrated writing and independent writing tasks.

In terms of reading proficiency and ability, it was surprising to see that only a quarter of participants believed the Reading-to-Write tasks were a good measure of reading abilities since this reading comprehension impacted performance. Although reading was not of much value here as it would be for a summary task, a quarter of participants still believed that good integration would never be achieved unless there was full comprehension of the reading texts. If students did not understand the reading of the source provided, they would not be able to do a good job on the level of synthesis-be it quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing. This was in line with Plakans (2010) who concluded that the better readers the students were, the better reading strategies they would employ to achieve good synthesis. These included *more mining strategies* such as *scanning and rereading* as well as *metacognitive and self-regulation strategies*.

Similarly, as noted by Cumming et al. (2005) and Gebril and Plakans (2013), this study concluded that the more proficient the students were and the better able they were to understand the readings, the higher the scores they would receive on these tasks. Students with higher reading abilities could do better synthesis, while students with weaker reading abilities would rely on more copying from the source-thus reflecting poor integration abilities. In this study, the score that the raters

assigned to the three proficiency groups reflected a progressive line of scores; in other words, the scores assigned to the three groups of the three proficiency levels reflected three levels of scores: low, middle, and high corresponding to their levels. It was clear that Plakans and Gebril (2012) were correct in saying that students should have a minimum level of proficiency to understand source texts if they were to show a proper degree of integration and be able to complete Reading-to-Write tasks successfully.

Also, almost half of the participants believed that being highly proficient in the grammatical and syntactic structures was an advantage to students as it offered an enabling factor when it came to understanding the reading source provided or working on discourse synthesis. However, they still believed that *grammar* should not be given the highest weight on the analytic rubric since Reading-to-Write tasks were a much more complex task than independent writing tasks; Reading-to-Write tasks primarily measured the students' critical thinking abilities of integration and synthesis-rather than mere language components. The language component would simply help in clarifying the ideas put forward by the students, but it was not an objective to be measured in Reading-to-Write tasks

As suggested in the interviews, instead of having norming sessions, regular workshops should be held along the year to stress the different criteria on the rubric and ensure full understanding of all of them by all raters. Experts holding norming sessions should consider all raters' experience, biases, and types in providing input and raising the raters' self-awareness towards their own scoring style and behavior. If confusion prevails among raters as to what and how they are assessing writing, a huge 'disservice' would be in play as suggested by Crusan et al. (2016). Ensuring consensus in knowledge and expectations of writing in general and Reading-to-Write tasks in specific could have a positive impact on how raters score such task types and, thus, raise the level of reliability expected in this task. Wang summed this up by saying that with Integrated Writing, *on-going rater monitoring and periodic retraining by clarifying and eliminating rater misconceptions from time to time* was needed (2017, p. 47).

According to the questionnaire, it was clear that more than half of the participants believed that analytic rubrics would minimize any rater discrepancies since subjectivity would be minimized. Barkaoui (2007) believed that lack of training on analytic rubrics would result in lack of consensus in that area. Although all four raters shared the same kind of experience and had been using the same rubric for years, Rater 2 seemed to be always on the low end of the rubric and this could explain a certain rater style or severity on her part—a point that needs further investigation. In the interviews, however, all raters said that they would almost always expect more rater disagreement than rater agreement since raters had their own belief system that they mostly did not want to change, especially when they are experienced raters.

Conclusion

Based on the ideas discussed above, it could be concluded that participants agreed that Reading-to-write tasks were a better measure of writing than independent writing tasks as they offered a more *authentic* form of assessment. They explained that the role of norming sessions was very important in helping reach higher levels of inter-rater agreement provided they were held in a manner that would allow for proper exchange of input in a non-threatening/ non-stressful atmosphere. Only a few were skeptic regarding the value of Reading-to-Write tasks in assessing the students' true proficiency level since they felt the presence of a source could encourage plagiarism. In general, there seemed to be agreement regarding the role students' proficiency played: the more proficient students were in reading and syntax, the better able they were to produce good quality synthesis and integration, and that is why it was recommended that Reading-to-Write tasks be taught at lower levels and not only at advanced levels of writing courses.

Limitations

A major limitation of the study is the limited number of questionnaire participants as well as the limited number of interviewees. For generalizable results, it is advisable to include more participants in the questionnaire and to ensure adding more variables, such as gender. Also, native speakers versus non-native presence could yield interesting results in both the questionnaire and the interview.

Suggestions for Future Research

For future studies, it would be recommended to hold comparable results between native and non-native speakers, males and females, as well as experienced versus inexperienced teachers. This could shed light on aspects that are worthy of looking at during training or norming sessions.

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

- How did you find the questionnaire items?
- Are Reading-to-Write Tasks difficult to score?
- Do you think Reading-to-Write Tasks better represent the students' writing abilities?
- What features of the writing rubric do you find most challenging when grading the Reading-to-Write Tasks?
- So, if we speak about the norming sessions that teachers mostly have before grading a task, do you think they are generally effective?
- How can they be more productive in your opinion?