



## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PORTFOLIO AND ACHIEVEMENT TEST RESULTS IN B1 WRITING

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the comparative effectiveness of portfolio assessment and achievement tests in evaluating B1-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing skills. The research is grounded in contemporary assessment theory, which emphasizes the need to combine formative and summative approaches to achieve valid, reliable, and pedagogically meaningful evaluation outcomes. Portfolio assessment is examined as a process-oriented tool that captures learners' writing development over time, including drafting, revision, reflection, and improvement. In contrast, achievement tests are analyzed as product-oriented instruments designed to measure learners' final performance under standardized conditions. The study was conducted with B1-level EFL learners in an academic setting, where both assessment methods were applied to the same group of students. Quantitative data from test scores and qualitative data from portfolio analysis were used to compare performance outcomes. The findings reveal significant differences between the two assessment types. While achievement tests tend to reflect learners' immediate linguistic accuracy and exam performance, portfolios provide a more comprehensive picture of writing development, including coherence, lexical growth, and error correction trends. Statistical analysis shows that students who performed moderately in achievement tests often demonstrated higher developmental progress in portfolio tasks. The study also identifies key challenges such as teacher workload, time consumption, and subjectivity in portfolio evaluation. However, the results support the integration of both methods for a more balanced assessment system. The research concludes that*

*combining portfolio and achievement testing enhances learner motivation, improves instructional feedback, and provides a more accurate representation of writing competence at the B1 level.*

## **Introduction**

The assessment of writing skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been a central issue in applied linguistics and language pedagogy for decades. Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex language skills due to its cognitive, linguistic, and organizational demands. Unlike receptive skills such as reading or listening, writing requires learners to actively produce language, structure ideas logically, and apply grammatical and lexical knowledge simultaneously. At the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), learners are expected to produce simple connected texts on familiar topics, describe experiences, and express basic opinions with reasonable coherence and accuracy. In many educational contexts, including Uzbekistan, writing assessment has traditionally relied on achievement tests as the primary measurement tool. These tests are typically administered at the end of a unit or semester and are designed to evaluate learners' final performance under controlled conditions. However, research in language assessment suggests that such tests may not fully capture the developmental nature of writing competence. A single timed writing task may reflect momentary performance influenced by stress, time constraints, or topic familiarity rather than actual writing ability. Recent educational reforms in Uzbekistan have emphasized competence-based language teaching and learner-centered assessment approaches. According to reports from the O'zbekiston Respublikasi Vazirlar Mahkamasi and the O'zbekiston Respublikasi Xalq ta'limi vazirligi, there is an increasing demand to modernize assessment systems in foreign language education by incorporating continuous evaluation methods. Despite these reforms, classroom practice still heavily depends on traditional testing systems, where achievement tests dominate final grading decisions. At the same time, international research in language assessment highlights the importance of alternative assessment methods, particularly portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment is considered a formative approach that allows learners to demonstrate their writing development over time. It includes drafts, revisions, feedback, and final versions of written tasks. This method reflects the actual learning process and provides a more comprehensive picture of students' writing competence.

In contrast, achievement tests represent summative assessment tools that measure learners' performance at a specific point in time. While they are useful for standardization and comparison, they often fail to reflect gradual improvement and learning strategies. Studies in EFL contexts have shown that students may perform inconsistently in achievement tests due to anxiety, limited time, or unfamiliar prompts, even if their overall writing ability is improving.

In Uzbekistan's secondary and tertiary education system, teachers often face challenges in balancing these two assessment approaches. Large class sizes, limited instructional time, and lack of standardized portfolio evaluation criteria make it difficult to implement continuous assessment effectively. As a result, writing assessment often becomes test-oriented rather than development-oriented.

Statistical observations from classroom-based assessments in several Uzbek educational institutions indicate that approximately 60–70% of final writing grades are determined by achievement tests, while only a small proportion reflects continuous writing performance. This imbalance raises concerns about the validity of writing assessment practices, particularly at the B1 level, where learners are still developing foundational writing skills.

Another critical issue is the discrepancy between test performance and actual writing development. Preliminary classroom observations show that some learners who score moderately or even poorly in achievement tests demonstrate consistent improvement in portfolio tasks. This suggests that traditional testing alone may underestimate learners' true writing potential.

Theoretical frameworks by scholars such as Brown (2004), Hyland (2019), and Weigle (2002) emphasize that effective writing assessment should combine both formative and summative approaches. This integrated model allows educators to evaluate not only the final product but also the learning process. It also aligns with the principles of validity, reliability, and washback effect in language testing.

Despite growing recognition of these principles, there is still limited empirical research comparing portfolio and achievement test results in the context of B1 EFL learners, particularly in Uzbekistan. Most existing studies focus either on test-based assessment or portfolio implementation separately, without providing a direct comparative analysis of their outcomes.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of portfolio and achievement test results among B1-level EFL learners. It seeks to determine the extent to which these two assessment methods differ in measuring writing competence and to explore whether integrating both approaches provides a more accurate evaluation of learner performance.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to more balanced and effective assessment practices in EFL writing instruction. By identifying the strengths and limitations of both portfolio and achievement testing, the study provides evidence-based recommendations for improving classroom assessment strategies. Ultimately, it aims to support the development of more learner-centered, process-oriented, and pedagogically meaningful evaluation systems in English language education.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-methods research design to compare the effectiveness of portfolio assessment and achievement tests in evaluating B1-level EFL writing skills. The decision to use a mixed-methods approach was based on the assumption that writing competence is both a measurable product and a developmental process. Therefore, relying solely on quantitative or qualitative data would not provide a complete picture of learners' writing ability. The quantitative component focused on numerical test scores, while the qualitative component analyzed writing development through drafts, revisions, and teacher feedback included in student portfolios. The combination of both approaches allowed methodological triangulation, increasing the validity and depth of the findings. The research was conducted with 60 B1-level English language learners from secondary and tertiary educational institutions in Uzbekistan. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on standardized placement test results aligned with CEFR B1 descriptors. The learners were aged between 16 and 22 years and represented typical EFL learners in the Uzbek

educational context, where English is primarily learned in classroom environments with limited real-life exposure. This context is important because writing development in such environments depends heavily on structured instruction and teacher feedback rather than natural language immersion. Data collection was carried out over an eight-week instructional period. At the beginning of the study, students completed a baseline writing task used as a pre-test to determine their initial writing proficiency. During the intervention period, students completed weekly writing tasks that were compiled into individual portfolios. Each writing task went through at least one revision stage based on teacher feedback. At the end of the eight weeks, students completed a final achievement writing test under timed conditions. This structure allowed for direct comparison between continuous developmental assessment and final performance-based evaluation. The achievement test required students to write a 150–180 word essay on familiar topics such as education, personal experiences, and daily routines. The test was designed according to CEFR B1 writing descriptors and assessed four main criteria: task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical accuracy. Each criterion was scored on a five-point analytic scale, resulting in a maximum total score of 20 points. To ensure scoring reliability, two independent raters evaluated all scripts, and inconsistencies were resolved through discussion and moderation. The portfolio assessment included a collection of five writing tasks per student, each consisting of a draft, revised version, and final improved version. In addition, students were required to include brief reflective notes explaining the changes they made and the difficulties they experienced during writing. This reflective component was important for capturing learner awareness and development strategies, which are not observable in achievement tests. Portfolio evaluation used the same analytic rubric as the achievement test, but with additional emphasis on progress between drafts and improvement over time rather than only final output. Quantitative data analysis involved calculating mean scores, standard deviations, and percentage comparisons between achievement test results and portfolio-based performance. The comparison focused on identifying differences in overall writing performance as well as differences in specific components such as grammar, vocabulary use, and coherence. Although inferential statistics such as t-tests were conceptually applied to determine significance of differences, the primary focus remained on comparative descriptive analysis supported by classroom-based evidence. Qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis of portfolio entries. This included identifying common error patterns, tracking improvement in sentence structure, and evaluating the development of coherence across writing drafts. Teacher feedback comments were also analyzed to understand how formative assessment influenced student improvement. In many cases, students showed noticeable progress in organizing ideas and reducing grammatical errors over successive drafts, which was not always reflected in their achievement test scores. To ensure ethical compliance, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation did not affect academic grading. Student identities were anonymized using codes to maintain confidentiality. The study followed standard ethical principles in educational research, including voluntary participation and data protection. This methodology was designed to reflect real classroom conditions rather than artificial experimental settings. The aim was to ensure that the findings would be applicable to actual EFL teaching environments, particularly in contexts similar to Uzbekistan, where assessment

practices are still transitioning from traditional test-based systems to more balanced and formative approaches.

### Results

The results of this study indicate clear differences between portfolio assessment and achievement test outcomes in evaluating B1-level EFL writing skills. Quantitative analysis shows that the average score obtained from the achievement test was 13.2 out of 20, while the average portfolio score reached 16.4 out of 20. This difference suggests that students generally performed better when assessed through continuous and process-oriented methods compared to a single timed writing task. The gap between the two results highlights the influence of assessment type on measured writing performance and confirms that achievement tests alone may not fully reflect learners' actual writing development.

Further statistical comparison reveals differences in score distribution. Achievement test results showed greater variability among students, with a standard deviation of 2.8, whereas portfolio scores demonstrated lower dispersion with a standard deviation of 1.9. This indicates that achievement testing produced more inconsistent results, likely due to time pressure, topic unfamiliarity, and test anxiety. In contrast, portfolio assessment provided a more stable and consistent reflection of learners' abilities, as it captured gradual improvement over time rather than a single performance moment.

Portfolio analysis demonstrated significant development in writing skills throughout the instructional period. At the initial stage, students generally produced short and structurally simple texts with frequent grammatical errors and limited lexical range. As the portfolio process continued, improvement became evident in several key areas. By the middle stage of the study, learners began using more appropriate linking devices such as "because," "however," and "therefore," which improved coherence and logical flow. Sentence structures also became more complex, with increased use of compound sentences.

By the final stage of portfolio development, approximately 70–75% of students showed clear improvement in coherence and organization of ideas. Around 60–65% demonstrated a noticeable reduction in grammatical errors, particularly in subject-verb agreement, tense consistency, and article usage. Vocabulary range also expanded moderately, with students beginning to use topic-specific lexical items more accurately.

In contrast, achievement test performance reflected a more limited picture of writing ability. While some students performed well under timed conditions, others who showed consistent progress in portfolios achieved only average or below-average test scores. This discrepancy suggests that achievement tests may not adequately capture long-term writing development, especially for learners at B1 level who are still building foundational accuracy and fluency. Classroom-based observations further support these findings. Students reported that portfolio writing reduced anxiety and allowed them to focus on improvement rather than final grades. Teacher feedback played a significant role in this process, as repeated corrections and guided revisions helped learners identify and eliminate recurring errors. However, the process was time-consuming and required significant teacher involvement, which may limit its practicality in large classes. Overall, the results demonstrate that portfolio assessment provides a more comprehensive and development-oriented picture of B1 writing skills, while achievement tests primarily measure short-term performance under pressure. The

combination of both methods offers a more balanced evaluation system, capturing both learner progress and final proficiency levels.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that portfolio assessment and achievement tests measure B1-level EFL writing skills in fundamentally different but complementary ways. The comparative analysis revealed that students achieved higher average performance in portfolio assessment ( $M = 16.4/20$ ) compared to achievement tests ( $M = 13.2/20$ ), indicating that continuous, process-oriented evaluation captures a broader range of writing development than single-session testing. The difference in standard deviation values ( $SD = 1.9$  for portfolios and  $SD = 2.8$  for achievement tests) further confirms that portfolio assessment produces more stable and consistent representations of learner ability, while achievement tests are more influenced by situational factors such as time pressure, anxiety, and topic familiarity. One of the most significant outcomes of this study is the clear evidence of developmental progress in student writing over time. Portfolio analysis demonstrated that approximately 70–75% of learners improved their coherence and text organization, while around 60–65% reduced recurring grammatical errors such as subject-verb agreement, tense inconsistency, and article misuse. These improvements were not fully reflected in achievement test results, where student performance remained relatively static, highlighting a gap between observed learning development and test-based measurement. A practical example observed in classroom data showed that several students who scored only moderate results in the final achievement test had demonstrated continuous improvement across portfolio drafts, particularly in argument structure and lexical development. This discrepancy confirms that achievement tests alone cannot fully represent writing competence at the B1 level, especially in contexts where learners are still developing accuracy and fluency simultaneously.

The study also confirmed that portfolio assessment has a strong positive impact on learner motivation and reflective learning. Students reported increased awareness of their own errors and writing strategies due to continuous feedback cycles. Teacher interventions played a critical role in this process, especially when feedback was specific, corrective, and development-oriented. However, it was also observed that portfolio implementation significantly increases teacher workload and requires systematic planning, clear rubrics, and time allocation strategies to remain effective.

From a pedagogical perspective, the integration of both assessment types offers the most balanced approach. Portfolio assessment ensures developmental tracking and formative feedback, while achievement tests provide standardized benchmarking and accountability. The combination of these methods aligns with modern assessment theory, which emphasizes validity, reliability, and positive washback effects in language learning.

In the context of Uzbek EFL education, where traditional testing still dominates assessment practices, the findings highlight the need for gradual integration of portfolio-based evaluation into existing systems. Institutional support, teacher training, and standardized assessment criteria are necessary to ensure successful implementation. Without these conditions, portfolio assessment risks being reduced to a formal requirement rather than a meaningful pedagogical tool.

In conclusion, this study confirms that neither portfolio assessment nor achievement testing alone is sufficient for a complete evaluation of B1 writing skills. A blended assessment

model provides a more accurate, fair, and development-oriented framework that reflects both the learning process and final performance. Such an approach not only improves assessment quality but also enhances learner engagement, supports autonomous learning, and contributes to long-term writing skill development.

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