

## **B03**

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### **Understanding complexity in writing assessment tasks: toward a useful analytical framework**

This paper reports on an in-progress, mixed-methods study investigating difficulty and complexity in EFL writing assessment tasks. Conducted in a university ESL context in the Arabian Gulf state of Qatar, the study examines learner perceptions of task difficulty and compares them to an analysis of task complexity following models of cognitive complexity from in the domain of speaking assessment. The study will draw attention to issues of task equivalence and task choice in writing assessment, raising important questions about reliability and validity in high-stakes proficiency testing.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How is the concept of difficulty in EFL writing tasks understood by learners?

This difficulty question is addressed through student interview data, task ranking activities and the analysis of written performances. Teachers' perceptions of writing task difficulty are also considered. Preliminary results indicate that students identify some tasks and task types as more difficult than others; therefore, a method of task analysis becomes necessary, and a second question can be formulated:

2. How can writing tasks best be analyzed to determine their level of complexity?

In addressing this question, the usefulness of models of cognitive complexity drawn from the research literature of speaking tasks, their adaptability and application to a set of writing tasks is investigated. A working framework is proposed and trailed, the results and implications of which will be discussed.