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DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT LITERACY IN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS: A CAMBRIDGE-BASED APPROACH TO A2 KEY FOR SCHOOLS WRITING

ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of A2 Key for Schools, one of the Cambridge English Qualifications, in secondary education and in the systematic development of assessment literacy in pre-service English teachers, with a specific focus on the writing paper. Emphasis is placed on the email / letter and story tasks and on preparing teacher-training students to apply the analytic Writing Assessment Scale and CEFR A2 descriptors to learners' written production.

Drawing on recent official exam materials and teacher-development resources, the study proposes a framework of core competences for pre-service English teachers. These include: understanding the principles of analytic writing assessment and the structure of the scale (Content, Organisation, Language); interpreting and applying A2-level criteria when working with learners' texts; designing coherent lesson sequences that integrate preparation for A2 Key for Schools with the communicative development of writing; using formative assessment, varied feedback formats and self-assessment; organising mock exams, analysing typical learner errors and planning subsequent teaching on this basis. Practical implications concern the elective course "International Examinations and the Specificities of Exam Preparation", which is presented as a reference model for designing methodology and assessment components aligned with international examination standards. It is argued that informed, reflective and ethically grounded exam-preparation practices enhance both learners' writing performance and the professional growth of pre-service teachers. Aligning university-based teacher education with school realities through such a framework helps future teachers to build a robust understanding of the A2 Key for Schools Writing paper and to prepare learners for the exam in a responsible, learner-centered way.

Future research is aimed at exploring the long-term impact of exam-focused assessment literacy on classroom outcomes, adaptation of the framework to other CEFR-



aligned exams, and the integration of digital assessment tools to enhance pre-service teachers' training.

Keywords: *A2 Key for Schools, Cambridge English Qualifications, assessment literacy, writing skills, pre-service English teachers, exam preparation, teacher education, analytic assessment, lesson design, teaching and learning strategies.*

РОЗВИТОК КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ МАЙБУТНІХ УЧИТЕЛІВ З ОЦІНЮВАННЯ ПИСЕМНОГО МОВЛЕННЯ УЧНІВ: КЕМБРИДЖСЬКИЙ ПІДХІД ДО ОЦІНЮВАННЯ ПИСЬМА НА ІСПИТІ A2 KEY FOR SCHOOLS

АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті розглянуто особливості міжнародного іспиту A2 Key for Schools, що належить до лінійки Кембриджських іспитів, та його значення у системі загальної середньої освіти та розвитку в майбутніх учителів англійської мови компетентності з оцінювання писемного мовлення учнів. Окрему увагу приділено письмовій частині іспиту, а саме завданням на написання електронного листа / листа та розповіді, а також підготовці студентів педагогічних спеціальностей до застосування аналітичної шкали (Writing Assessment Scale) та дескрипторів рівня A2 CEFR для оцінювання учнівських письмових робіт.

На основі офіційних екзаменаційних матеріалів та ресурсів для професійного розвитку вчителів запропоновано рамку ключових компетентностей майбутніх учителів англійської мови. До них віднесено: розуміння принципів аналітичного оцінювання писемного мовлення та структури шкали оцінювання; інтерпретацію та застосування критеріїв рівня A2 під час роботи з текстами учнів; проектування логічно послідовних серій уроків, що інтегрують підготовку до A2 Key for Schools з комунікативним розвитком навичок письма; використання формульованого оцінювання, різних форматів зворотного зв'язку та самооцінювання; організацію пробних тестувань, аналіз типових помилок учнів і планування подальшого навчання на цій основі. Практичні результати дослідження стосуються вибіркового курсу «Міжнародні мовні іспити та особливості підготовки до них», який подано як орієнтир для проектування методичних і оцінювальних компонентів, узгоджених із вимогами міжнародних іспитів. Обґрунтовано, що усвідомлена, рефлексивна та етично виважена підготовка до іспиту сприяє підвищенню результатів учнів у письмових завданнях і водночас професійному зростанню майбутніх учителів. Узгодження університетської підготовки з реаліями шкільної освіти в межах запропонованої рамки допомагає сформувати у майбутніх учителів ґрунтовне розуміння письмової частини іспиту A2 Key for Schools та забезпечити ефективну підготовку школярів до складання іспиту.

Подальше дослідження спрямоване на вивчення довгострокового впливу оцінювання грамотності на результати навчання, адаптацію рамки до інших іспитів, що відповідають CEFR, та інтеграцію цифрових інструментів оцінювання для покращення підготовки вчителів.

Ключові слова: *іспит A2 Key for Schools, Кембриджський сертифікат (іспит) з англійської мови, компетентність з оцінювання, навички іншомовного письма (писемного мовлення), майбутні вчителі англійської мови, підготовка до іспиту, педагогічна освіта, аналітичне оцінювання, планування уроку, стратегії навчання та викладання.*



INTRODUCTION

International language qualifications have become an integral part of many national education systems, providing externally validated evidence of learners' language proficiency and shaping curriculum, teaching and assessment practices. Cambridge A2 Key for Schools, aligned to CEFR level A2, represents an early but important milestone in this pathway for school-age learners and is often their first experience of a high-stakes international exam (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020). For many secondary-school students, successful performance in A2 Key for Schools opens a route towards higher-level examinations and enhanced educational opportunities. In this context, faculties of secondary education carry a dual responsibility. On the one hand, they must prepare future teachers to foster long-term communicative competence in English; on the other hand, they need to equip them with assessment literacy specific to the high-stakes exams their learners are likely to take. Current students of teacher-training programmes are the future secondary-school teachers who will prepare candidates for A2 Key for Schools and related Cambridge English Qualifications. Written production is a critical component of A2 Key for Schools: candidates must produce short functional texts and simple narratives under timed conditions. However, many pre-service teachers have limited experience of formal writing assessment, limited familiarity with analytic rating scales, and limited training in exam-oriented lesson design.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this research is to examine how pre-service English teachers can be systematically prepared to develop assessment literacy in relation to the writing component of Cambridge A2 Key for Schools. The study seeks to identify the core teachers' competences required for evaluating students' written production, to explore effective strategies for integrating exam-oriented writing tasks into teacher-education curricula, and to provide a framework for fostering future teachers' ability to support learners in high-stakes international language assessments.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in the concept of language assessment literacy in the preparation of pre-service English teachers, with a particular focus on writing assessment at CEFR A2 level.

The research employed methods of literature analysis, document analysis of official exam materials, and synthesis of contemporary pedagogical approaches to teaching writing, formative assessment, feedback, and mock testing. Based on these methods, a framework of core competences for pre-service teachers was developed and evaluated for integration into the course "International Examinations and the Specificities of Exam Preparation". Recent scholarship demonstrates a growing consensus on the centrality of assessment literacy in preparing future language teachers, particularly within accountability-driven and exam-oriented educational contexts. Foundational works (Stiggins, 1991; Abell & Siegel, 2011) emphasize that teachers must understand assessment purposes, methods and evidence-based decision-making, while more recent studies highlight persistent gaps in pre-service teachers' assessment competence (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; McGee & Colby, 2014; Siegel & Wissehr, 2011). International research in teacher education underscores the need for structured programmes that integrate assessment for learning, reflective practice and identity-building as assessors (Brevik et al., 2017; Looney et al., 2018; Willis et al., 2013). Empirical studies show that action research and practicum-based training can substantially improve assessment literacy by enabling



teachers to analyze classroom evidence and refine assessment strategies (Burns, 2010; Güngör & Güngör, 2023; Swann et al., 2011). Within the specific domain of language education, scholars point to the importance of developing language assessment literacy (LAL), noting that teacher candidates often enter programmes with limited knowledge of criteria, descriptors and exam-oriented assessment procedures (Giraldo & Murcia, 2019; Johnson, 2009; Lutovac & Flores, 2022). Ukrainian research echoes these tendencies: Ukrayinska (2024) demonstrates that synergistic models of LAL development in universities can meaningfully enhance pre-service teachers' readiness to assess language performance. Parallel discussions in recent ELT publications highlight the importance of mediation skills (Chiappini & Mansur, 2021), online training environments (Gaballo & Silk, 2022), and exam-focused resources from major educational publishers (Gatens, 2022), which collectively shape contemporary pedagogical approaches to assessment.

Latest ELT publications from major international publishers offer a wide range of teacher-development and exam-oriented materials that provide structured approaches to the teaching of reading and vocabulary, to multilevel preparation and to strategy training for learners and teachers. These include the A2 Key for Schools handbooks and coursebooks (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020, 2022, 2024), as well as exam success guides and skills-focused resources from other international publishers (Delta Publishing, 2024; Gatens, 2022; Oxford University Press, 2023; Macmillan Education, 2023). Taken together, these materials reflect current international standards in assessment-focused pedagogy and offer relevant models for integrating exam preparation into teacher-education programmes.

Recent shifts toward social constructivist paradigms and a stronger recognition of classroom assessment as a driver of learning have led to a reconceptualization of the competencies required for effective assessment in educational settings. As Inbar (2008) notes, these developments necessitate an expanded and reconfigured knowledge base for language assessors, which in turn reshapes the design and content of language assessment courses (Inbar, 2008).

These studies justify the need for a systematic, competency-based framework for developing pre-service teachers' assessment literacy, particularly in relation to high-stakes international exams and the specific demands of analytic writing assessment. Building on this perspective, the present article focuses on the writing component of A2 Key for Schools and proposes a framework for integrating exam-related writing assessment literacy into pre-service education, with particular reference to the in-service teaching course "International Examinations and the Specificities of Exam Preparation".

RESULTS

1. Exam context: A2 Key for Schools and the construct of writing. A2 Key for Schools assesses Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. The Reading and Writing paper lasts 60 minutes and includes two productive tasks: an email/note and a short story. Candidates must write an email of at least 25 words based on an input text and three prompts, and a story of at least 35 words based on three pictures (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020). These task types operationalize the CEFR A2 descriptors for written production, which require learners to produce short, simple texts on familiar topics using basic structures and linking devices. The A2 Key for Schools *Handbook for Teachers* outlines the exam format and construct, provides sample scripts with commentary and explains the analytic Writing Assessment Scale used to award marks for content, communicative achievement, organization and language (Cambridge University Press &



Assessment, 2020, p. 26). Authentic papers in *A2 Key for Schools 2* further illustrate how writing tasks are realised through age-appropriate topics and situational contexts (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2022). For pre-service teachers, these resources offer a concrete foundation for understanding exam requirements and how candidate writing is interpreted by examiners.

2. Distinguishing A2 Key and A2 Key for schools writing: age, topic selection, and appropriacy. A2 Key and A2 Key for Schools share the same CEFR level, global format and scoring system, but they differ in their intended candidature and topic selection. A2 Key is a general qualification which can be taken by candidates of any age, including adults, and thus includes topics and situations that can be relevant to both teenage and adult life. By contrast, A2 Key for Schools is explicitly designed for school-age learners, typically between 11 and 17 years old, and the content is carefully targeted at their interests and experience (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020). In the writing paper, this means that task prompts focus on areas such as school life, free-time activities, family, friends and everyday digital communication rather than on work, training or more independent adult lifestyles.

For writing assessment and teaching, this distinction in age profile and topic appropriacy has important pedagogical implications. First, it highlights the need for pre-service teachers to make informed choices about which version of the exam is most suitable for a particular cohort. For a mainstream secondary-school class, A2 Key for Schools is usually more appropriate not because it is easier, but because the writing tasks are grounded in topics that learners recognize and find meaningful. Second, it requires future teachers to reflect on the appropriacy of the topics, models and stimuli they use in exam preparation lessons. If their learners are aiming for A2 Key for Schools, then classroom writing tasks should mirror the age-appropriate themes and contexts of the exam, even when lessons also aim to develop broader communicative skills.

Third, understanding the relationship between A2 Key and A2 Key for Schools is crucial in institutions where both versions are offered, or where groups include older teenagers and young adults. In such settings, pre-service teachers need to develop the ability to adapt input, topics and examples to their learners while still training the same core A2 writing skills: understanding a rubric, selecting relevant content, structuring a simple text, and using basic grammar and vocabulary accurately enough to be understood. This comparative perspective prevents A2 Key for Schools from being seen as a “lighter” variant and instead presents it as an exam which operationalizes the same construct through age-sensitive, developmentally appropriate content.

3. The nature of writing assessment and assessment literacy. Writing assessment in the context of international qualifications such as A2 Key for Schools is typically direct and analytic: candidates are required to produce a sample of writing under specified conditions, and trained examiners apply a rating scale with several separate criteria to judge its quality. In the case of A2 Key for Schools, the Cambridge Writing Assessment Scale distinguishes between different dimensions of performance such as content, communicative achievement, organization and language, with descriptors that articulate expectations at each band for A2 (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020, p. 26). This analytic approach allows examiners and teachers to identify not only whether a candidate passes or fails, but also which aspects of their writing are relatively stronger or weaker.

Language assessment literacy is the broader knowledge base that teachers need in order to understand, design, administer and interpret such assessments. Ukrayinska (2024)



conceptualizes language assessment literacy in Ukrainian teacher education as a synergy of knowledge, skills and values that are distributed across courses in pedagogy, psychology, methodology and practicum. Within this perspective, writing assessment is not reduced to scoring scripts; it also involves issues of fairness, validity, washback, feedback and learner agency. For pre-service teachers who will prepare learners for A2 Key for Schools Writing, assessment literacy therefore includes at least three interrelated components: an understanding of how the exam's writing tasks and scales are constructed; the ability to connect these scales with lesson objectives and classroom tasks; and the capacity to use assessment results formatively, to inform future teaching and learning.

4. Core assessment competences for pre-service teachers. In line with the synergetic model proposed by Ukrayinska (2024), the development of assessment literacy for A2 Key for Schools Writing should be distributed across several elements of a teacher-education programme rather than confined to a single testing course. Within the in-service teaching course "International Examinations and the Specificities of Exam Preparation", at least four core competence areas can be identified (Ukrayinska, 2024).

First, pre-service teachers need conceptual and procedural knowledge of the A2 Key for Schools exam: structure, timing, task types, rating scales and reporting of results. This includes the ability to read and interpret official documentation such as the Handbook for Teachers and authentic exam papers, and to extract from them clear learning objectives for their own students (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2022, 2024). Such knowledge aligns with broader conceptualizations of teacher assessment literacy, emphasizing understanding both the technical and interpretive aspects of assessment (Willis et al., 2013).

Second, they require practical skills in designing writing tasks and lesson sequences that reflect the exam construct while maintaining a focus on communicative development. Recent work on task-based learning proposes a pedagogical cycle in which teachers experience tasks as learners, analyse their features, adapt them to local contexts and subsequently reflect on learner output (Chiappini & Mansur, 2021). This task-based orientation can be applied to A2 Key for Schools writing, encouraging pre-service teachers to move beyond narrow "test practice" towards richer instructional sequences that combine exam preparation with language learning (Willis et al., 2013).

Third, pre-service teachers need well-developed competences in feedback and learner support. Recent teacher-development literature emphasizes reflective approaches to classroom assessment in which trainees analyse learner work, share evidence with peers and experiment with feedback techniques (Chiappini & Mansur, 2021; Gaballo & Silk, 2022). Integrating such approaches into exam-preparation courses helps future teachers to conceptualise writing assessment as a dialogic process that can foster learner autonomy (Willis et al., 2013).

Finally, pre-service teachers should develop the ability to use mock exams and exam-style tasks diagnostically and ethically. This involves designing trial tests, applying the rating scale at least informally, discussing results with students, and using the insights gained to plan future lessons. The following sections consider these practical aspects in more detail.

5. A2 Key for Schools Writing: task types, can-do descriptors and learner expectations. The two main writing tasks in A2 Key for Schools correspond broadly to important real-life text types for teenagers: short messages and short stories. In the email or note, candidates are expected to respond to three specific prompts, covering content points



such as thanking, inviting, explaining or suggesting. In the story, they must narrate a simple sequence of events based on visual prompts, typically using the past simple and basic time expressions (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2022, 2024).

The underlying expectations can be linked to CEFR A2 descriptors for written production, which describe learners at this level as being able to write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate need and to describe aspects of their everyday life in simple phrases and sentences. Cambridge's latest handbook illustrates how these descriptors are operationalized through level-appropriate topics such as weekends, school events, family visits and hobbies (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020). For pre-service teachers, comparing the can-do statements with sample exam tasks and candidate scripts is a powerful way of understanding what A2 learners realistically can and cannot do in writing.

Within the in-service course, teacher educators can guide students through activities in which they match exam tasks to CEFR descriptors, critique the wording of rubrics, evaluate the clarity of prompts and rephrase them for their own learners. Such activities help future teachers to see exam tasks not as external, fixed objects but as instances of broader pedagogical principles related to level, topic choice and task demand.

6. Applying the 1–5 analytic assessment criteria to diagnose writing sub-skills. Within A2 Key for Schools, writing performance is assessed analytically using a banded scale across three sub-scales: Content, Organization and Language. In the official A2 Key for Schools Handbook for Teachers (digital edition), the Assessment of Writing scale (p. 26) sets out descriptors for each band, operationalized as a six-point scale from 0 to 5, where Band 0 is used when the writing does not meet the minimum criteria and Bands 1–5 describe qualitatively different levels of successful performance (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020, p. 26). In practice, teacher training often focuses on the positive bands 1–5, which profile the strengths and weaknesses of candidates whose texts are at least partially successful.

Each of the three sub-scales targets a specific cluster of writing sub-skills: Content: how fully and appropriately the task is addressed, whether all required content points are included, and to what extent the target reader is “informed”; Organization: how coherently ideas are ordered, whether there is a recognizable beginning, middle and end, and how effectively simple linking devices (e.g. and, but, because, then) are used; Language: the range and control of basic vocabulary and grammar appropriate to A2, together with the impact of errors on intelligibility (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020, p. 26).

The descriptors are cumulative and hierarchical: higher bands presuppose the competences of the lower bands but with greater consistency and control. For example, at higher bands for Content, the candidate fully addresses all three prompts and the target reader is clearly informed; at lower bands, some content points may be missing, or irrelevant information may reduce clarity. In Organization, higher bands describe texts that are coherent and logically sequenced with basic but effective linking, whereas lower bands mention very little organization or list-like production. In Language, higher bands accept a limited range of structures and lexis but require that errors do not impede communication; lower bands describe frequent errors that may cause strain for the reader (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020, p. 26).

Because the scale is analytic, it is particularly useful for identifying weak specific sub-skills in learners' writing. A candidate might, for example, receive Content 4,



Organization 2, Language 3 – indicating that they generally include all required ideas (stronger Content) but have difficulties in structuring the text coherently and using linkers (weaker Organization), or Content 2, Organization 3, Language 2 – suggesting that the learner can produce a basic, coherent text but struggles to understand task requirements and has limited control of A2 grammar and vocabulary.

Such profiles enable pre-service teachers to move beyond a global impression and to target discrete writing micro-skills in subsequent lessons. Weak Content bands lead to work on reading rubrics, underlining key words, planning to cover all prompts, and checking content at the end. Weak Organization bands lead to focused tasks on ordering jumbled sentences, grouping ideas into paragraphs, and practicing a small set of linkers. Weak Language bands lead to remedial work on high-frequency vocabulary from the A2 Key wordlist, control of present and past simple, basic sentence patterns and punctuation.

In this way, the 1–5 (0–5) scale serves a dual function. Summative, it provides a standardized metric for exam marking. Formatively, it offers a structured diagnostic profile that can inform lesson planning, differentiation and feedback. This dual function is consistent with current conceptions of language assessment literacy in Ukrainian teacher education. Ukrayinska (2024) argues that assessment literacy should enable future teachers not only to administer tests, but also to interpret assessment evidence and use it to make informed pedagogical decisions in areas such as planning, feedback and learner support (Ukrayinska, 2024).

7. Brainstorming and task analysis as prerequisites for targeted use of assessment criteria. Effective use of the 1–5 analytic criteria in A2 Key for Schools Writing requires systematic pre-writing practice in brainstorming and task analysis. Without clarifying the task and generating ideas first, weaknesses in Content and Organization are likely regardless of language proficiency. Pre-service teachers should therefore treat guided brainstorming and task analysis as essential components of exam preparation. Brainstorming enhances Content by helping learners identify all required points and expand brief responses into meaningful sentences. Organizational brainstorming –planning beginning, middle, and end of a story or email – supports coherent texts and stronger Organization scores. Pre-service teachers must also learn to deconstruct tasks into communicative purpose, target reader, content points, text type, tone, word count, and timing, using resources such as the A2 Key for Schools Handbook and authentic exam papers (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2022, 2024). This systematic approach allows teachers to anticipate common learner errors, design targeted pre-writing activities (e.g., WH-question grids, peer idea checks), and link post-writing feedback to specific analytic criteria. In this way, brainstorming and task analysis are integral to developing assessment literacy and improving learners' writing performance.

8. Lesson staging and method diversification in A2 writing instruction. Effective teaching for high-stakes examination success is grounded in a coherent lesson structure that scaffolds learners' progression from guided language practice to independent exam-format writing. The Cambridge guide *Developing Reading Skills for A2 Key for Schools* demonstrates that reading and writing can be integrated within a coherent instructional sequence in which learners first engage with input texts, subsequently notice relevant linguistic features, and ultimately produce their own written responses (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020). This integrated approach is readily adaptable to writing lessons that address both exam format familiarity and broader communicative development.



A typical lesson targeting the email task may include several pedagogically sequenced stages: an introductory lead-in that activates learners' prior experience with digital communication; task analysis, during which candidates examine the structure of an exam prompt and identify required content points; model analysis based on an authentic sample answer; language clarification focusing on functional phrases and basic cohesive devices; guided writing with partial scaffolding; and a brief exam-style writing stage completed under light timing constraints (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2022, 2024).

Recent discussions of task-based learning highlight the importance of teachers experiencing tasks from the learner's perspective, analysing their design and adapting them to the needs of specific groups (Chiappini & Mansur, 2021). Building on these insights, the proposed course can guide pre-service teachers in developing diversified instructional programmes that integrate both exam-oriented tasks and broader communicative writing activities. Examples include short class blogs, collaborative stories and simple project-based writing sequences which allow learners to recycle language from the A2 Key for Schools syllabus while providing greater variety and opportunities for personalisation.

Diversification is especially crucial in contexts where teachers instruct groups preparing for both A2 Key and A2 Key for Schools, or where learners cover a broad age range. For younger learners, instruction may prioritize school-related and leisure topics, incorporating visual or game-based prompts; for older adolescents, teaching may include tasks reflecting independent-life or academic contexts. Cultivating such a methodological repertoire enables future teachers to maintain a balance between authentic exam practice and ongoing language development, ensuring that instructional activities are both pedagogically effective and age-appropriate.

9. Feedback, reflection, and learner training. Feedback is crucial for developing writing skills and exam readiness. Cambridge materials emphasize checklists and simplified assessment scales to help learners understand expectations and engage in self- and peer-assessment (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2020). For pre-service teachers, effective use of these tools is a key aspect of assessment literacy. Teacher-education programmes can create reflective spaces, such as micro-teaching sessions, where trainees design short writing tasks, collect peers' texts, apply simplified scales, and discuss feedback strategies (Gaballos, & Silk, 2022). Practical frameworks from DELTA Teacher Development guide iterative reflection: planning a lesson, collecting learner output, analyzing it against the exam scale, and adjusting subsequent lessons. This approach positions feedback as an ongoing process that develops learners' awareness of task requirements, timing, planning, and checking strategies.

10. Mock tests, timing, and exam strategy. Mock exams are essential for preparing candidates for timed writing tasks, but their effectiveness depends on careful planning, administration, and review. Oxford University Press and Macmillan Education guides highlight the importance of combining realistic practice with explicit strategy training, model answers, and clear revision checklists (Gatens, 2022; Oxford University Press, 2023; Macmillan Education, 2023). For A2 Key for Schools Writing, pre-service teachers should learn to design mock tasks that replicate exam conditions within a pedagogical cycle. Learners can be guided to manage their time, underline key rubric words, address all content points, and review for errors. Post-task feedback using simplified writing scales, self-assessment, and target-setting supports continuous improvement. Teacher-education courses can model selecting authentic tasks, briefing learners, managing timing, and



conducting post-exam reviews, transforming exam strategy from implicit “tips and tricks” into a principled aspect of assessment literacy.

11. Implications for the in-service course and teacher-education curricula. The analysis presented above yields several implications for the further development of the in-service (pre-service) teaching course “*International Examinations and the Specificities of Exam Preparation*” at Khmelnytskyi National University. As the course already constitutes a stable element of the curriculum and functions as a platform for integrating international examination materials into methodology and assessment training, the proposed framework should be viewed not as a blueprint for a new course, but as a means for its systematic refinement.

First, the course may continue to employ the most recent official resources issued by Cambridge University Press & Assessment, including the *A2 Key for Schools Handbook for Teachers*, authentic exam papers and teacher-development guides. These materials form the primary evidence base for understanding the exam construct and enable coherent alignment between university-level learning objectives and actual exam requirements.

Second, the course can further strengthen the integration of principles and practices drawn from contemporary international teacher-development literature. Task-based and teacher-development resources, together with accounts of reflective practice in teacher-training contexts, offer concrete models for connecting methodology with assessment and learner reflection (Chiappini & Mansur, 2021; Delta Publishing, 2024; Gaballo & Silk, 2022). Likewise, exam-preparation series produced by major publishers demonstrate how graded practice, strategy training and structured feedback can be systematically combined to develop exam competence over time (Gatens, 2022; Oxford University Press, 2023; Macmillan Education, 2023). Incorporating such models into the course design can help pre-service teachers to link exam preparation with broader pedagogical goals and to approach assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning.

Third, in line with Ukrayinska’s synergetic conception of assessment literacy, the course may enhance coordination across methodology, practicum and independent study components. Such integration would ensure that pre-service teachers encounter A2 Key for Schools writing tasks in multiple roles: as learners, as analysts of exam materials, as novice assessors and as beginning teachers (Ukrayinska, 2024). This repeated engagement increases the likelihood that assessment literacy for A2 Key for Schools Writing will become a durable component of their professional identity rather than a short-term, exam-specific competence.

We draw on the findings of Looney, Cumming, van Der Kleij, and Harris (2018), which provide an additional conceptual foundation by reconceptualizing teachers as assessors and emphasizing the notion of teacher assessment identity (Looney et al., 2018). The authors argue that teachers function not merely as implementers of assessment tools but as reflective practitioners who actively shape how assessment informs learning. Their work highlights the interplay between teachers’ beliefs, knowledge and assessment practices, underscoring the importance of developing assessment literacy as an integral element of professional preparation. Within the context of pre-service English teachers’ preparation for A2 Key for Schools Writing, this perspective is particularly relevant. The conceptualization offered by Looney et al. (2018) reinforces the argument that future teachers must be equipped to act as informed and responsible assessors – capable of analysing writing tasks, applying analytic criteria, delivering formative feedback and guiding learners through high-stakes writing assessments (Looney et al., 2018). By



foregrounding assessment identity, their research supports the need for deliberate and systematic integration of assessment literacy into teacher-education curricula, ensuring that graduates can manage exam-oriented writing tasks both effectively and ethically.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

As A2 Key for Schools gains prominence in secondary education, pre-service English teachers must be prepared as both communicative instructors and informed assessors of high-stakes writing tasks. Based on the in-service course at Khmelnytskyi National University, the proposed framework identifies core competences: understanding A2 Key for Schools Writing tasks, differentiating between A2 Key and A2 Key for Schools, designing diversified lessons integrating exam practice with communicative development, applying analytic scales and feedback tools, and ethically planning and reviewing mock exams. Implementing this framework strengthens alignment between university training and school practice, fostering both improved learner performance and reflective, principled, learner-centered teaching.

Future research could explore the long-term impact of exam-focused assessment literacy on classroom outcomes, adaptation of the framework to other CEFR-aligned exams, and the integration of digital assessment tools to enhance pre-service teachers' training.

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