A Comparative Review of CET4 Essay Writing Assessments Insights from the CEFR Level Descriptors and CET4 Writing Rubrics

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Abstract: The alignment of assessment frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the College English Test Band 4 (CET4) has gained significant attention in language testing and assessment research. This study explores the intersections between CET4 writing rubrics and CEFR level descriptors, focusing on their implications for essay writing evaluation. Grounded in Robinson's (2001) Cognition Hypothesis (CH) and Skehan's (1998) Limited Attentional Capacity Model (LACM), this research examines the role of task complexity in influencing lexical and syntactic outcomes in writing performance. Robinson's CH posits increased task complexity enhances linguistic output, encouraging richer lexical and syntactic performance. In contrast, Skehan's LACM highlights the trade-offs in accuracy, fluency, and complexity under cognitive constraints. Recent studies have applied these frameworks to investigate task complexity dimensions, such as "+/- planning time (PT)" and "+/- few elements (FE)," in standardized tests like CET4. Empirical findings from the past five years indicate significant correlations between task complexity, lexical diversity, and CEFR-aligned performance measures (Bui & Skehan, 2018a; Lambert et al., 2017; Xu & Zhang, 2023). Moreover, this study reviews research on aligning CET4 writing rubrics with CEFR descriptors to identify overlapping and divergent assessment criteria. Findings suggest that incorporating CEFR descriptors enhances the validity and fairness of CET4 assessments, bridging local and global standards in language evaluation. By

synthesizing theoretical insights and recent empirical evidence, this study offers a nuanced understanding of writing assessment practices, informing educators and policymakers about the potential for harmonizing these frameworks.

Keywords: assessment, CEFR level descriptors, CET4 writing rubrics, essay writing

INTRODUCTION

The intricate dynamics of essay writing assessment have long attracted researchers' interest, particularly in the context of standardised language proficiency tests. Among these, the College English Test Band 4 (CET4) in China serves as a central benchmark for measuring the English proficiency of non-native speakers at the university level. Similarly, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provides a globally recognised framework for assessing language skills. Despite their different origins, the CET4 assessment rubrics and the CEFR level descriptors overlap in their emphasis on core writing skills such as coherence, lexical accuracy, and grammatical range. This review explores the theoretical underpinnings and empirical studies that illuminate these intersections, guided by Cognition Hypothesis (CH) (Robinson, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Robinson et al., 2014; Robinson & Gilabert, 2007)and Skehan's Limited Attentional Capacity Model (LACM) (Ellis et al., 2019; Skehan, 1998, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2018; Skehan & Foster, 2008, 2016).

Robinson's Cognition Hypothesis posits that task complexity, manipulated by cognitive demands, directly influences linguistic output. This framework is particularly relevant to essay writing, where increased complexity promotes greater lexical diversity and syntactic sophistication (Robinson, 2001b; Skehan, 2016). Empirical studies applying CH have highlighted the nuanced interplay between task complexity dimensions, such as '+/- planning time' and '+/- few elements,' and learners' writing performances (Bui & Skehan, 2018b; Lambert, 2020). On the other hand, Skehan's LACM emphasises the limitations of cognitive resources, suggesting that increased task complexity may impair performance in specific domains due to divided attention (Skehan, 1998). This model complements Robinson's CH by highlighting the trade-offs between linguistic complexity, accuracy, and fluency under different task conditions, a phenomenon documented in recent studies (Ishikawa, 2022; Yang & Zhang, 2021a).

Research has increasingly focused on aligning the CET4 writing rubrics with the CEFR descriptors to ensure comparability and coherence in assessing communicative competence. For example, studies (Dunlea et al., 2021; Zhang & Zhang, 2023) show significant correlations between CET4 scores and CEFR levels, particularly in the areas of lexical sophistication and cohesive devices. These findings underline the applicability of CEFR descriptors in fine-tuning CET4 rubrics to reflect international standards better. Furthermore, recent research has highlighted the role of task complexity in shaping the lexical and syntactic outcomes of test-takers written responses (Kyle & Crossley, 2021; Vajjala & Rama, 2018). Such findings are crucial for understanding how the CET4 and CEFR frameworks can jointly inform the development of robust and equitable assessment practices.

This review situates the CET4 writing assessment within the broader theoretical and empirical discourse on task complexity and standardised language testing. Integrating Robinson and Skehan's frameworks with recent studies aims to clarify the implications of task design and rubric alignment for promoting meaningful assessment. Ultimately, this research contributes to ongoing efforts to harmonise local and international standards in language education and provides valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers alike.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The College English Test Band 4 (CET4) in China is crucial in evaluating university students' English proficiency, particularly in the writing component. However, the effectiveness and fairness of its writing assessment rubrics have been the subject of ongoing debate. Similarly, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an internationally recognized framework, provides comprehensive descriptors for assessing writing skills. Despite the growing interest in aligning CET4 writing rubrics with CEFR descriptors, significant gaps remain in understanding the comparability and compatibility of these frameworks. This misalignment risks inconsistencies in evaluating linguistic competencies, particularly in lexical sophistication, syntactic complexity, and cohesive devices, which are critical to effective written communication.

Research (Lambert & Kormos, 2014; Yang & Zhang, 2021b) has highlighted task complexity's importance in influencing writing performance in standardized tests. Studies applying Robinson's (2001) Cognition Hypothesis (CH) and Skehan's (1998) Limited Attentional Capacity Model (LACM) have demonstrated how task design affects lexical diversity, accuracy, and fluency. For instance, "+/- planning time" and "+/- few elements" have been shown to significantly impact the linguistic outcomes of essay writing (Bui & Skehan, 2018c; Zhang & Lu, 2023a). However, little attention has been paid to how these findings inform the alignment of CET4 and CEFR frameworks.

This lack of integration challenges educators and policymakers in creating valid and equitable assessments. Addressing this gap is critical to harmonizing local and international standards, ensuring fair evaluation of students' writing skills, and fostering globally relevant language education practices. This study seeks to explore these issues, offering insights into the potential for aligning CET4 writing rubrics with CEFR descriptors to enhance the validity and reliability of assessments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The College English Test Band 4 (CET4) is a standardised English proficiency test widely used in China to assess the language proficiency of college students. Its writing component assesses learners' ability to produce coherent, grammatically accurate and lexically varied essays under timed conditions. Meanwhile, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provides an internationally recognised standard for describing language proficiency at six levels (A1-C2). The CEFR's writing descriptors emphasise communicative competence, including task completion, coherence, grammatical range, and lexical sophistication (Council of, 2020). In recent years, research has focused on harmonising CET4 writing rubrics with CEFR descriptors to ensure consistency and global comparability (X. Liu & Y. Wang, 2020b; J. Sun et al., 2022). This alignment effort addresses critical gaps in CET4's ability to assess higher-order writing skills, such as lexical richness and syntactic complexity. However, the integration of international frameworks such as the CEFR into localised assessments such as CET4 requires a robust theoretical underpinning. Robinson's (2001) Cognition Hypothesis (CH) and Skehan's (1998) Limited Attentional Capacity Model (LACM) provide complementary lenses for understanding how task complexity influences writing performance.

Task Complexity and Writing Performance in TBLT

Task complexity plays a crucial role in shaping learners' written performance. According to Robinson's (2001) Cognition Hypothesis, complex tasks demand greater cognitive engagement, leading to increased use of advanced linguistic structures. For example, when learners are tasked with integrating multiple elements (e.g., comparing multiple viewpoints), their essays often reflect higher lexical diversity and syntactic complexity (Lambert, 2020). Conversely, tasks with fewer cognitive demands tend to produce more formulaic and less sophisticated language use (Zhang & Lu, 2023a). Empirical studies within the past five years have expanded our understanding of task complexity's role in writing performance. For instance, Bui and Skehan (2018) investigated the influence of planning time on writing quality. They found that more extended planning periods enhance lexical richness but may detract from fluency due to increased cognitive focus on idea generation and accuracy. Similarly, Yang and Zhang (2021) examined CET4 test-takers and observed that tasks with greater cognitive demands resulted in more varied lexical and syntactic choices, aligning with CEFR's emphasis on communicative competence. However, task complexity also poses challenges, as highlighted by Skehan's (1998) Limited Attentional Capacity Model. Studies by Ishikawa (2022) and Wang and Xu (2023) demonstrate that as cognitive load increases, learners often prioritize certain aspects of performance (e.g., complexity) at the expense of others (e.g., fluency or accuracy). These findings underscore the need for balanced task design in writing assessments to ensure fair and valid evaluations across diverse proficiency levels.

Connection of CET4 Writing Rubrics with CEFR Descriptors

Efforts to align CET4 writing rubrics with CEFR descriptors have gained momentum in recent years, driven by the need for greater comparability with international standards (X. Liu & L. Wang, 2020). While CET4 primarily evaluates writing skills through predefined criteria such as grammatical accuracy, coherence, and task completion, CEFR descriptors offer a broader and more nuanced framework. CEFR emphasizes communicative competence, including effective message delivery, appropriate lexical choices, and cohesive text organization (Council of Europe, 2020). Recent studies (Y. Sun, H. Zhang, et al., 2022; Zhang & Lu, 2023b) highlight key overlaps and divergences between these frameworks. For instance, Sun et al. (2022) found significant alignment in assessing coherence and cohesion but noted gaps in evaluating higher-order lexical sophistication, which is more explicitly addressed in CEFR descriptors. Similarly, research by Zhang and Lu (2023) revealed that CET4's scoring system tends to prioritize surface-level accuracy over deeper linguistic complexity, limiting its ability to measure advanced writing skills. Incorporating CEFR descriptors into CET4 rubrics has the potential to address these limitations. Studies (X. Liu et al., 2021; Wang & Xu, 2023) suggest that integrating CEFR's emphasis on communicative intent and functional adequacy can enhance the validity of CET4 assessments. For example, adopting CEFR's task-based approach could encourage the inclusion of writing prompts that elicit more diverse linguistic responses, fostering a closer alignment between CET4 scores and CEFR levels.

A Comparative of Automated and Manual Approach to Writing Assessment

The CET4 and CEFR writing assessments share several core principles, such as evaluating grammatical accuracy, lexical diversity, and textual coherence. However, they differ significantly in their approach and focus. CET4 emphasizes test-takers' ability to meet predefined criteria under timed conditions, often using standardized prompts with limited room

for creativity. In contrast, CEFR descriptors prioritize functional adequacy and adaptability across a range of communicative contexts (Council of Europe, 2020). Comparative research (X. Liu & Y. Wang, 2020a; Y. Sun, L. Zhang, et al., 2022) highlights these differences. For example, studies by Liu and Wang (2020) and Sun et al. (2022) found that while CET4 effectively measures grammatical and lexical accuracy, it falls short in assessing higher-order skills such as argumentation and stylistic variation. By contrast, CEFR's descriptors for advanced levels (C1–C2) explicitly address these competencies, offering a more comprehensive framework for evaluating writing proficiency. These findings have practical implications for aligning CET4 with CEFR standards. Adopting CEFR-inspired descriptors could enhance CET4's ability to assess a broader range of skills, including lexical sophistication, pragmatic competence, and textual cohesion. Moreover, incorporating CEFR-aligned scoring criteria may facilitate better international recognition of CET4 results, supporting Chinese learners in academic and professional settings. See Table1.

Table 1: Key Characteristics of Automated vs. Manual Measurement Approaches

Aspect	Automated Analysis Approach	Manual Measurement Approach
Focus	Quantitative analysis of linguistic features (e.g., lexical variety, cohesion) using computational tools.	Qualitative assessment of writing quality, including content dimensions (e.g., coherence, argument strength).
Scope	Effective for large-scale datasets and objective analysis of linguistic features.	Nuanced evaluation of qualitative features such as logical flow and comparison with scoring rubrics.
Framework Application	Common in CEFR-aligned and SLA research for complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF) analysis.	Aligns well with CEFR descriptors and CET4 rubrics for content-focused assessments.
Advantages	High scalability, consistency, and efficiency for large data sets.	Provides contextualized insights into coherence, content, and task adherence.
Challenges	Limited in assessing discourse-level features like argument quality.	Time-consuming and prone to subjectivity without rigorous rater training.

Table 1 compares automated and manual approaches in CET4 writing assessment, emphasising their roles in evaluating lexical complexity. The Automated and Manual Measurement. Automated tools, including Coh-Metrix (Crossley et al., 2019; Emmanouil et al., 2024; M. Latifi & M. Gierl, 2020; S. Latifi & M. Gierl, 2020; Manchón et al., 2023; Uludag & McDonough, 2022) and Lu's Lexical Complexity Analyser (M. Latifi & M. Gierl, 2020; Manchón et al., 2023; Qian et al., 2021; Sun & Wang, 2021), have been widely used to measure CAF dimensions. These tools provide objective, scalable, consistent analyses, making them ideal for large datasets (Kuiken & Vedder, 2020b). Automated analysis has revealed that task complexity increases syntactic variety and lexical richness while reducing fluency in timed tasks (Suzuki, 2019; Tavakoli & Zarrinabadi, 2022). However, automated tools face limitations in assessing discourse-level features. For instance, they struggle to evaluate coherence, logical progression, and argument quality—critical dimensions for CEFR and CET4 assessments (Rahimi & Zhang, 2021). Manual measurement, by contrast, provides nuanced insights into higher-order writing features. Human raters evaluate coherence, argument strength, and task relevance, which are essential for comparison with CEFR descriptors and CET4 rubrics (Wang & Zhang, 2023). Despite its strengths, manual scoring is time-intensive and subject to variability without rigorous rater training (Zhang & Li, 2018).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY COMPARISONS

The methodological frameworks underpinning studies of writing assessment in CET4 and CEFR contexts reveal diverse approaches, including experimental designs, mixed-methods analyses, and corpus-based research. This section examines and compares key methodologies employed in recent studies over the past five years, focusing on their application to CET4 and CEFR writing assessments. The discussion is organized around three main areas: experimental designs, corpus-based analyses, and rater training and scoring methodologies.

Experimental Designs

Experimental research has been pivotal in exploring the effects of task complexity and cognitive load on writing performance in standardized assessments. Studies applying Robinson's Cognition Hypothesis (CH) and Skehan's Limited Attentional Capacity Model (LACM) have utilized controlled experiments to manipulate task variables such as "+/- planning time" and "+/- few elements" (Bui & Skehan, 2018; Lambert, 2020). For instance, Lambert (2020) conducted a randomized controlled trial to investigate the impact of task complexity on lexical diversity and syntactic complexity in learners' written texts. This approach involved dividing participants into groups exposed to different task conditions, allowing for precise comparisons of linguistic outcomes. Similarly, Yang and Zhang (2021) implemented a quasi-experimental design to examine how CET4 test-takers' performance varied under different time constraints. Their study highlighted the trade-offs between accuracy, fluency, and complexity, aligning with Skehan's LACM. Experimental designs like these are particularly valuable for isolating the effects of task-related variables, making them well-suited for Analysing the cognitive demands of writing tasks in both CET4 and CEFR frameworks. In contrast, studies focusing on CEFR-aligned assessments often incorporate pre- and post-test designs to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional interventions. For example, Wang and Xu (2023) investigated the influence of CEFR-based training programs on learners' writing performance, using a combination of pre-test/post-test comparisons and qualitative feedback analysis. These methodologies provide insights into the pedagogical implications of aligning CET4 rubrics with CEFR descriptors.

Corpus-Based Analyses

Corpus-based methodologies have emerged as a powerful tool for examining the linguistic features of written texts in standardized assessments. Recent studies have leveraged large-scale corpora to Analyse patterns of lexical diversity, syntactic complexity, and cohesive devices in CET4 and CEFR-aligned essays. Zhang and Lu (2023) utilized a corpus of CET4 essays to investigate the relationship between task complexity and syntactic variation, employing computational tools such as Lu's Lexical Complexity Analyser. Their findings revealed significant differences in lexical and syntactic features across task conditions, underscoring the importance of task design in writing assessments. Similarly, corpus-based research on CEFR writing descriptors has focused on mapping linguistic features to proficiency levels. Sun et al. (2022) Analysed a corpus of learner essays annotated with CEFR levels, identifying key linguistic markers associated with each level. Their study provided valuable benchmarks for aligning CET4 rubrics with CEFR descriptors, particularly in lexical sophistication and cohesive device usage. While corpus-based analyses offer robust quantitative insights, they also highlight limitations in capturing the functional adequacy and communicative intent emphasized in CEFR descriptors. Recent studies have integrated corpus findings with

qualitative evaluations to address this gap, providing a more holistic understanding of writing performance (X. Liu & L. Wang, 2020).

Rater Training and Scoring Methodologies

The reliability and validity of writing assessments are heavily influenced by rater training and scoring practices. Recent studies have emphasized the need for systematic training programs to consistently apply scoring rubrics, particularly when aligning CET4 assessments with CEFR standards. For example, Liu and Wang (2020) conducted a mixed-methods study to evaluate the effectiveness of rater calibration sessions in CET4 scoring. Their findings highlighted the challenges of achieving inter-rater reliability, particularly in assessing higher-order skills such as argumentation and coherence. Research on CEFR-aligned assessments has similarly underscored the importance of detailed scoring guidelines and inter-rater calibration. Yang and Zhang (2021) examined the application of holistic and analytic scoring methods in CEFR writing assessments, finding that raters often struggled with subjective criteria such as functional adequacy and contextual appropriateness. To address these challenges, Wang and Xu (2023) proposed the use of technology-enhanced scoring tools, such as automated essay scoring systems, to complement human evaluations. Comparative studies suggest that integrating CEFR descriptors into CET4 rubrics may require a hybrid approach combining analytic scoring for linguistic features and holistic scoring for communicative competence. Recent advancements in natural language processing (NLP) technologies offer promising avenues for automating the evaluation of lexical and syntactic complexity, enabling more efficient and objective assessments (Zhang & Lu, 2024)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) serves as an international standard for language proficiency, aligning with assessments such as IELTS and AIPTS (Academic International Proficiency Test System). However, CET4—a national English proficiency test in China—has not yet been fully aligned with the CEFR, despite its importance in evaluating academic English writing proficiency among Chinese students. Research from the past five years highlights key differences in scoring rubrics, test structures, proficiency benchmarks, and challenges in establishing alignment between CEFR and CET4. The CEFR levels provide qualitative descriptors of linguistic competencies, while CET4 assigns quantitative scores ranging from 0 to 15 for writing.

Key Components of the CET4 Writing Assessment

CET4 writing assessment has garnered significant attention, focusing on the multidimensional evaluation of students' essays. Dimensions such as task relevance, clarity of ideas, coherence, and language accuracy are central to ensuring comprehensive and fair evaluations. Task relevance emphasizes alignment with the prompt, clarity of ideas fosters logical expression, coherence ensures organizational flow, and language accuracy penalizes errors in grammar and syntax. Recent studies have explored how these dimensions influence overall performance and align with frameworks like the CEFR. This paper reviews these developments over the past five years, Analysing their contribution to refining CET4 writing criteria and enhancing their applicability to real-world language competency. Insights from this review underline the significance of a holistic and evidence-based approach to assessing writing performance in CET4. See table 2.

Table 2: Examining CET4 Writing Assessment: Scoring Dimensions

Dimension	Definition	Examples in Writing Assessment
Task Relevance	Evaluates how well the essay aligns with the prompt and fulfills all requirements, including content coverage and adherence to word limits.	Ensures that essays fully address the given topic, avoiding tangential or irrelevant content.
Clarity of Ideas	Measures the logical and clear expression of thoughts, avoiding ambiguity or redundancy.	Focuses on the development of clear arguments, precise thesis statements, and well-supported ideas.
Coherence	Examines the logical organization of ideas, the unity of paragraphs, and effective use of cohesive devices (e.g., connectors, transitions).	Assesses paragraph structure, logical flow between sentences, and use of discourse markers like "however" or "therefore."
Language Accuracy	Evaluates grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures, emphasizing correct tense usage, agreement, and syntax.	Penalizes frequent grammatical errors, such as subject-verb agreement, tense misuse, or fragmentary sentences.

Recent studies (Liu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023a; Zhang & Wang, 2021) reveal the critical role of the four dimensions in CET4 writing assessments. For instance, research (Zhang & Wang, 2021) identified task relevance as the most influential factor, contributing up to 30% of the total score variance. Similarly, coherence and clarity of ideas accounted for 25% and 20%, respectively, reflecting their importance in organizing and expressing ideas effectively. Though weighted similarly at 25%, language accuracy showed stronger correlations with higher CEFR levels (Liu et al., 2022). Regression models comparing CET4 scores with CEFR descriptors indicate a significant alignment, particularly at B1 and B2 levels, where task-related and linguistic competencies overlap extensively. The findings underscore the need for precise, criteria-aligned rubrics that balance linguistic proficiency and task completion in evaluating writing skills. The evolving emphasis on multidimensional assessment reflects a broader pedagogical shift towards integrating linguistic proficiency with communicative competence. Task relevance ensures essays are meaningful and contextually appropriate, aligning with CEFR descriptors such as "addressing familiar topics clearly." Clarity and coherence mirror global expectations for logical structuring, essential for academic and professional communication. Language accuracy remains a cornerstone, as frequent grammatical errors can detract from communicative effectiveness. However, overemphasis on accuracy risks undermining fluency and creativity. Recent studies advocate for a balanced approach that values idea articulation and coherence alongside linguistic precision. This balance supports fairness and enhances students' preparedness for real-world writing challenges.

Evaluating CET4 Writing: Insights from Scoring and Pedagogical Impacts

The CET4 writing test, a key component of China's College English Test Band 4, has been the subject of numerous recent studies exploring its scoring criteria and pedagogical implications. Research conducted (Huang & Li, 2020; Li et al., 2018; J. Liu et al., 2021; Wang & Chen, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023b; Zhao & Ma, 2019) underscores the importance of task relevance, grammatical accuracy, coherence, and clarity as core dimensions of writing success. See Table 3.

Table 3: Recent Studies on CET4 Writing, Examining its Reliability, Validity, and Influence on Teaching and Learning

Study	Participants	Focus	Key Findings	Theoretical Contribution
Zhang et al. (2023)	120 CET4 test-takers (China)	Validity and task alignment	Task relevance is the most reliable dimension, with essays scored lower for failing to meet prompt requirements.	Highlights task relevance as a core criterion of CET4 writing success.
Wang & Chen (2022)	150 Chinese undergraduates	Impact of CET4 writing on teaching practices	CET4's emphasis on clarity and coherence shapes classroom writing instruction, with teachers prioritizing formulaic structures like the "three-part essay."	Suggests that CET4 influences teaching strategies, potentially limiting students' creativity in writing.
Liu et al. (2021)	90 CET4 test-takers	Grammatical accuracy	Found that grammatical accuracy strongly correlates with overall writing scores. Errors in verb tense and sentence fragments were most penalized.	Confirms the importance of grammar-focused instruction for improving CET4 scores.
Huang & Li (2020)	100 Chinese university students	Coherence and clarity in CET4 writing	Essays with strong coherence and logical flow between paragraphs received higher scores. Misuse of cohesive devices (e.g., transitions) often led to lower scores.	Highlights coherence as a critical but challenging dimension for CET4 test-takers.
Zhao & Ma (2019)	180 Chinese EFL learners	Task relevance and clarity of ideas	Essays with vague or redundant ideas were penalized despite grammatical accuracy. Clear thesis statements and focused content were rewarded.	Suggests that clarity and task focus are interdependent in CET4 scoring.
Li et al. (2018)	100 university EFL learners	Influence of CET4 on students' writing proficiency	CET4 preparation improved students' ability to write formal essays but encouraged reliance on formulaic expressions and fixed structures.	Demonstrates how CET4 preparation shapes students' academic writing skills and strategies.

The synthesis of recent studies highlights the strengths and limitations of CET4 writing assessment and its pedagogical impact. Task relevance remains a critical factor, as evidenced by Zhang et al. (2023) and Zhao and Ma (2019). This underscores the need for explicit instruction on Analysing prompts and maintaining focus, which could be integrated into preparatory curricula. However, overemphasising task conformity might marginalize creative and critical thinking skills, presenting a potential conflict between assessment goals and broader educational objectives. As Liu et al. (2021) demonstrated, Grammatical accuracy plays a vital role in CET4 scoring. Nevertheless, the dominance of grammar-focused instruction risks sidelining higher-order writing skills like argumentation and synthesis. A balanced approach, combining accuracy with creativity, could address this issue. Similarly, Huang and Li's (2020) findings on coherence highlight the necessity of teaching effective use of cohesive devices. Misuse of transitions remains a significant detractor, suggesting targeted practice in logical structuring and paragraph development. Wang and Chen (2022) and Li et al. (2018) provided critical insights into how CET4 shapes teaching practices. While formulaic structures aid clarity and coherence, their overuse potentially limits students' ability to engage in more nuanced and diverse writing styles. A revised approach, blending formulaic writing with opportunities for creativity, could foster more holistic development. The studies suggest that while CET4 scoring aligns well with academic writing conventions, it also imposes constraints that may not fully support broader linguistic and cognitive development. Addressing these

challenges requires a pedagogical shift toward integrating CET4-specific preparation with broader skill development. In summary, the CET4 writing component provides valuable insights into English language proficiency while highlighting areas for pedagogical improvement.

Official Vacancies in Bridging CEFR Levels and CET4 Writing Scores

This section examines CET4 writing assessment concerning international English proficiency frameworks, focusing on recent research from the past five years. Drawing on comparative frameworks such as CEFR and IELTS, it highlights the distinctive features of CET4 in evaluating academic English skills among Chinese university students. Key focus areas include task relevance, coherence, lexical variety, and grammatical accuracy. Findings suggest significant overlaps with CEFR descriptors, particularly in coherence and task fulfillment, while unique cultural and pedagogical elements shape CET4's scoring emphasis. The study underscores the need for greater alignment between CET4 and global standards to enhance cross-contextual applicability and fairness in English proficiency assessment. See Table4.

Table 4: Comparative Analysis of CET4 Writing Assessment and International Proficiency Frameworks

Framework/Test	Key Focus	Application
CEFR	Focuses on communicative competence, real-world task fulfilment, and progressive language levels (A1-C2).	Commonly used in international and multilingual contexts to standardize proficiency benchmarks.
IELTS	Assesses academic and general English proficiency, with a strong emphasis on task achievement, coherence, and lexical variety.	Used for academic admission and immigration purposes in English-speaking countries.
AIPTS	Evaluates academic English proficiency with tasks focusing on argumentation, analysis, and coherence, similar to CEFR's emphasis on discourse.	Commonly used in international educational contexts for assessing advanced academic writing proficiency.
CET4	Evaluates task relevance, clarity of ideas, coherence, and grammatical accuracy, with a focus on academic English proficiency in China.	Primarily used to assess the English skills of Chinese university students in academic and professional contexts.

The CET4 framework uniquely assesses academic English, particularly in Chinese university contexts. While its focus on grammatical accuracy ensures rigor, it may limit opportunities for more authentic, communicative writing. By contrast, CEFR and IELTS emphasize adaptability to diverse communicative settings, promoting skills like discourse coherence and lexical innovation. Recent studies (Liu, 2019; Zhao & Zhang, 2021; Zheng & Cheng, 2022) advocate integrating CEFR-aligned descriptors into CET4, enhancing global comparability. Moreover, CET4's reliance on rigid scoring may hinder its responsiveness to task-specific creativity, which is a growing focus in international frameworks. Future revisions should balance these priorities to better prepare Chinese students for academic and professional demands. In summary, CET4 writing assessments, though robust in evaluating core academic skills, would benefit from alignment with global frameworks like CEFR. Emphasizing communicative competence, discourse coherence, and task flexibility could enhance its international applicability. Such reforms would ensure that CET4 evolves as a globally relevant tool, supporting Chinese students' integration into an increasingly interconnected world of academic and professional communication.

Comparison of CEFR Connection with IELTS, AIPTS, and CET4

This section examines the alignment of CET4 writing assessment with CEFR and other international proficiency scales, such as IELTS and AIPTS. A critical analysis reveals distinct emphases on task focus, coherence, language accuracy, lexical range, and argumentation across these frameworks. CET4 heavily penalizes grammatical errors and adheres strictly to structural and lexical unity, whereas CEFR and IELTS tolerate minor errors if communication remains clear. Argumentation in CET4 is assessed indirectly, emphasizing thesis clarity over detailed counterarguments. See Table 5.

Table 5: Comparative Analysis of CET4 Writing Assessment and CEFR Writing Proficiency Frameworks

Dimension	CEFR	IELTS	AIPTS	CET4
Proficiency Levels	A1 to C2, focusing on progressive language competence and communicative goals.	Band scores (1-9), mapped roughly to CEFR levels (e.g., B2 = Band 5.5–6.5).	Advanced levels (aligned with CEFR C1-C2).	Band 4 scoring rubrics, not explicitly mapped to CEFR levels.
Task Focus	Real-world communicative tasks with flexibility in interpretation.	Academic and general writing tasks with strict adherence to task prompts.	Academic-focused writing tasks requiring critical thinking and argumentation.	Academic-focused tasks with a rigid emphasis on prompt adherence.
Coherence	Emphasizes functional coherence and effective use of discourse markers.	Assesses paragraphing, logical flow, and linking devices.	Focuses on discourse-level coherence and cohesion.	Prioritizes paragraph unity and structural organization, with strict penalties for misuse of cohesive markers.
Language Accuracy	Tolerates minor errors if communication remains clear.	Emphasizes grammatical range and accuracy, with penalties for frequent errors.	Similar to CEFR: tolerates minor errors while prioritizing fluency.	Penalizes grammatical errors more heavily, even for minor issues.
Range	Assesses lexical and grammatical variety and appropriateness.	Focuses on lexical variety and advanced grammar use (e.g., complex sentences).	Encourages linguistic sophistication in vocabulary and syntax.	Indirectly assessed through lexical variety and grammatical accuracy.
Argumentation	Required at higher levels (B2-C2), emphasizing reasoning, evidence, and counterarguments.	Required in academic tasks, focusing on structured arguments and evidence use.	Central to advanced-level tasks, with emphasis on critical analysis.	Evaluates argumentation indirectly, with more focus on thesis clarity and supporting ideas.

Research (Peng, 2021; Wang & Zhang, 2021; Zhao & Guo, 2020) highlights variations in how CET4 and CEFR assess key dimensions of writing. Using task focus as an example, CEFR prioritizes real-world communicative competence, while CET4 enforces rigid adherence to prompts. Similarly, coherence evaluation diverges; CEFR values functional discourse markers and flexibility, whereas CET4 stresses paragraph unity with stricter penalties for errors in cohesion. Statistical analysis of CET4 scores (N=150) revealed significant correlations ($p < 0.05$) between lexical variety and higher band scores, aligning with CEFR's descriptors for lexical range. However, CET4's penalties for grammatical errors reduce alignment with CEFR's A2-B2 proficiency levels, where communicative clarity is emphasized over linguistic perfection. Regression models suggest CET4 task scores align best with CEFR levels A2–B2, though

substantial discrepancies arise at higher proficiency bands. These findings underscore the need for refined scoring mechanisms to align CET4 with international benchmarks better. Key differences in CET4 and CEFR evaluations lie in their approaches to accuracy and flexibility. While CEFR allows for minor inaccuracies, CET4 penalizes grammatical errors heavily, limiting learners' expressive capacity. The rigid task focus of CET4 constrains creativity, whereas CEFR and IELTS support diverse interpretations of prompts. Argumentation, a pivotal skill in global writing assessments, remains under-emphasized in CET4, compared to its prominence in CEFR's higher bands. These discrepancies highlight areas for potential alignment, such as incorporating CEFR-inspired descriptors that balance communicative fluency with accuracy. Recent studies also advocate for broader use of lexical complexity Analysers to calibrate CET4 assessments, enhancing their alignment with international frameworks. Training paradigms incorporating CEFR's communicative goals could bolster CET4's applicability in diverse contexts.

Comparative Analysis of CEFR and CET4 Writing Criteria

This section explores recent findings on aligning CEFR and CET4 writing standards, synthesizing data from six key studies published in the past five years. Both frameworks aim to assess language proficiency but diverge significantly in emphasis and scoring criteria. CEFR prioritizes communicative effectiveness, discourse coherence, and lexical variety, particularly at higher levels (B2-C2). In contrast, CET4 focuses on grammatical accuracy, task relevance, and intermediate proficiency benchmarks, which poses challenges for direct alignment. See Table 6.

Table 6: CEFR and CET4 Writing Assessment: Advances and Challenges

Study	Participants	Frameworks Compared	Key Findings	Theoretical Contribution
Green (2022)	100 European EFL learners	CEFR vs. IELTS	IELTS writing band scores align well with CEFR levels, particularly at B1-C1. IELTS provides clearer task guidelines than CEFR.	Highlights the CEFR's broad communicative focus compared to IELTS's specific academic goals.
Zhao & Wang (2021)	150 Chinese university students	CEFR vs. CET4	CET4 writing focuses on task relevance and grammatical accuracy, making alignment with CEFR's communicative flexibility challenging.	Suggests that CET4's rigid scoring rubrics limit direct alignment with CEFR levels.
Huang & Chen (2021)	120 AIPTS and CET4 test-takers	CEFR vs. AIPTS vs. CET4	AIPTS aligns closely with CEFR's higher levels (C1-C2), emphasizing discourse-level coherence. CET4 does not fully address CEFR's lexical and argumentative benchmarks.	Confirms AIPTS's advanced academic focus as comparable to CEFR C1-C2, whereas CET4 focuses on intermediate proficiency.
Kuiken & Vedder (2020)	88 Dutch and Chinese EFL learners	CEFR vs. CET4 vs. IELTS	Found significant differences in coherence scoring between CEFR and CET4. IELTS aligns better with CEFR due to its emphasis on task flexibility and lexical range.	Suggests that IELTS serves as a better intermediate benchmark for CEFR alignment than CET4.
Zhang & Li (2019)	90 Chinese CET4 learners	CEFR vs. CET4	CET4 emphasizes grammatical accuracy and task relevance, while CEFR prioritizes communicative effectiveness and argumentation, particularly at B2-C2 levels.	Highlights differences in scoring criteria and communicative goals between CEFR and CET4.

Study	Participants	Frameworks Compared	Key Findings	Theoretical Contribution
Wei & Wang (2018)	110 Chinese university students	CEFR vs. CET4	CET4's lack of emphasis on lexical variety and argumentation makes it less aligned with CEFR's focus on advanced language proficiency.	Suggests revisions to CET4 scoring rubrics to include CEFR-like descriptors (e.g., range, discourse-level coherence).

Research (Green, 2022; Huang & Chen, 2021; Kuiken & Vedder, 2020a; Zhang & Li, 2019; Zhao et al., 2017) highlights that CET4's rigid scoring rubrics and limited emphasis on advanced language use fail to capture CEFR's holistic communicative goals. Studies comparing CEFR with other frameworks, such as IELTS and AIPTS, reveal closer alignment due to their broader focus on lexical and argumentative benchmarks. Key findings underscore the need to reform CET4's assessment criteria by incorporating CEFR-like descriptors for improved comparability. This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion on aligning standardized tests with international proficiency frameworks, with implications for test development and educational policy. This analysis of the alignment between CEFR and CET4 writing standards reveals significant discrepancies in their core scoring criteria. Zhao and Wang (2021) highlight CET4's emphasis on grammatical accuracy and task relevance, contrasting with CEFR's focus on communicative flexibility and higher proficiency. Statistical comparisons, including Green (2022) and Kuiken and Vedder (2020), demonstrate weak alignment, particularly at higher proficiency levels (B2-C2), where CET4's rigid rubrics fail to address lexical variety and discourse-level coherence. Studies by Huang and Chen (2021) emphasize a more substantial alignment between IELTS and CEFR, especially in tasks assessing coherence and argumentation. Zhang and Li's (2019) regression models further indicate that CET4's focus on grammar overlooks broader communicative competencies critical for higher CEFR levels. Wei and Wang (2018) argue that CET4's narrow scope limits its ability to reflect CEFR's advanced descriptors. The findings suggest revising CET4's rubrics to incorporate lexical diversity, discourse coherence, and argumentation would improve its alignment with CEFR. Furthermore, integrating CEFR-like descriptors into CET4 and training raters to assess communicative effectiveness could enhance its global relevance. The systemic reforms necessary for better alignment with CEFR will allow CET4 to measure advanced proficiency and align with international academic standards more accurately.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study critically examined the interplay between CET4 writing assessments and CEFR level descriptors, emphasizing their shared focus on communicative effectiveness and linguistic complexity. Key findings revealed that while both frameworks prioritize task achievement, linguistic range, and coherence, CEFR emphasizes broad communicative competencies across proficiency bands (Council of Europe, 2020), whereas CET4's rubric offers detailed point-based scoring for lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical features (Yang & Dai, 2021). Despite these differences, their alignment suggests potential pathways for harmonizing assessment standards in EFL contexts. Integrating CEFR descriptors into CET4 evaluations can enhance transparency, providing educators and test designers with a robust, internationally recognized framework to gauge writing proficiency. Moreover, mapping CEFR levels to CET4 scores enables a clearer understanding of students' progression and facilitates global benchmarking (Little, 2022). However, discrepancies in their construct definitions highlight the need for context-specific adaptations to ensure fair and reliable assessments.

Recommendations include refining the CET4 rubric to incorporate task complexity dimensions, such as Robinson's (2001) and Skehan's (2009) models, to address individual task demands and cognitive loads. Teacher training programs should also prioritize familiarizing educators with both frameworks to ensure consistent scoring practices. To validate these theoretical linkages, further empirical studies should explore the relationship between CET4 and CEFR-aligned tasks, particularly in high-stakes testing environments. In conclusion, aligning CET4 writing rubrics with CEFR descriptors fosters a more comprehensive and equitable assessment paradigm, bridging regional testing practices with international standards. This comparative approach can support the development of pedagogically sound and globally relevant English writing assessments by addressing identified gaps.

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