



Research Article

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The Essay Assessment Criteria in the Maturity Exam: A Comparative Study - Albania, United Kingdom, Italy

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Abstract

The study of the student's writing product in the final exam of the Pre-university education process in Albania is built upon detailed analyses that include the structure of the writing, the topic of the essay, and the criteria for assessing the essay. This study extended the analyses to comparative levels with the same processes in the UK and Italy. For its realization, contemporary and traditional literature supports and argues the importance of the writing process (essay) within the Final Exam of Pre-university Education. The analysis aimed to determine the efficiency of the writing process in the Final Exam, the impact of positive practices, the level of student proficiency in the mother tongue (L1), and the identification of differences and similarities with the processes in the referred educational systems. To achieve these objectives, research and review methods were used, focusing on documenting the responsible institutions. Simultaneously, comparative methods within the State Matura process in Albania and the comparative extension to similar processes in the UK and Italy clarified the conclusions and recommendations that concluded the paper. The recommendations offer ideas for urgently revising the structuring of the process and improving the methods of essay assessment based on comparative analyses. The aim is to enhance the quality of education and accuracy in assessment and encourage cooperation with Europe's best practices.

Keywords: the essay criteria of assessment, essay structure, topic of essay in the final exam

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyze and compare the essay assessment criteria as part of the native language formative exam within the framework of State Final Exams in Albania, the UK, and Italy to provide recommendations for establishing essay assessment criteria for the Albanian language (as a first language) test in Albania, making these criteria comparable to those in European countries. Since different names refer to the same exam in different countries, we have used the term

State Final Exam to frame this exam within a common framework for European countries and Albania.

High school final exams have been a prevalent phenomenon for years in European countries, a phenomenon that has also been accepted in the Albanian education system. This new type of assessment, used for over a decade in European countries and for fewer years in Albania, named the *State Matura*, has positively influenced students' linguistic competences, particularly in critical thinking.

It is a fact that the essay, as a written product and an essential part of the Albanian language and literature exam within the framework of the *State Matura*, has reflected positive changes documented in the reports issued by the Achievement Assessment Agency (AVA) [later renamed the Center for Educational Services (QSHA)], whose role is to guide and direct the *State Matura* process and subject this process, especially the tests, to psychometric analyses. An essential voice in analyzing this process is assessing students' skills through the essay.

This article includes comparative statistical data analyses, structuring models, and essay assessment instruments in Albania, as well as in the sister processes in two European countries (*GCSE* in the UK and *Esame di stato* in Italy). An assessment sample of students' essay skills in selected samples has also been used. We have judged that this analysis helps demonstrate the functional role played by the argumentative essay in the native language exam within the framework of the *State Final Exam* and that the importance of the essay in this challenge extends beyond the exam itself, positively influencing students' personal and professional development.

This study conducted a comprehensive comparative analysis of the essay assessment instruments in L 1 (first language), favoring the importance of the writing component in the final exam test for the language as a predictor of students' communicative competencies throughout further learning. Based on the comparisons and data analysis of the assessment criteria and topics for the three countries, the conclusions drawn will also provide appropriate recommendations for determining the essay topics in the Albanian language and literature test of the *State Matura* and setting the assessment criteria for the Albanian school.

2. Methodology

The primary method of scientific research in this paper is desk review. A comprehensive bibliography has been utilized, relating to two essential phenomena: the importance of the writing process in aiming to skill the student as a master of the native language (L 1) and the evaluative structural framework of the essay in the *State Matura* process in Albania compared to their counterparts in European countries samples. The aim achieved through research, comparative, and applied treatments has ensured guiding recommendations for high productivity and assessment levels in the writing process.

The data for our research has been collected in several ways: on the official websites of the relevant Ministries of Education in Albania, England, and Italy; on the official site of *State Matura* exam programs in the three countries, which published on the official websites of the respective institutions; in the periodic publications of the National Examination Center in Albania. There, we wrote the evaluative criteria over the years, which helped us to describe the evaluative evolution of the essay in Albania; we found the same procedure ready on the official websites of England and Italy.

More analytically, the methods followed are:

Observation and Research: Research and tracing in early and contemporary applied linguistics literature. The research has been conducted in archival sources, primarily documentation of student products over the years, in comparative analyses between essay topics in the *State Matura* in Albania over several years, in comparative evaluations between institutional analytical reports supported by modern literature dedicated entirely to the linguistic and literary formation of the student in school. To better reflect students' linguistic and literary formation, a descriptive and comparative analysis of writing products was conducted and framed up to 2017 in Albania, a year

after which the respective programs stayed the same. Consequently, the results will remain qualitatively in subsequent products.

Research and Filing: The filings' references have brought facts and data that have helped document phenomena and compare them. Significant space has been given to the comparison between the writing product (essay) in the Albanian State Matura with GSCE in England and *Esame di Stato* in Italy in the native language material (L 1). The comparison method has extended to evaluative and content instruments.

Descriptive and Comparative Analysis: Programs and assessment instruments have been analyzed for their structure, content, application focus, and the amount and quality of innovations they have conveyed.

3. Literature Review

Completing the entire cycle of Pre-University Education concerning the native language (L 1) for the student represents a significant step in the student's skill acquisition as a master of the Albanian language. Additionally, completing this process constitutes a qualitative leap in the student's knowledge of the language and its accurate mastery during use. At this level, *the student not only masters the knowledge for using the language but also the knowledge about the language, expressed in scientific terms, they become a possessor of the language as a tool and of the metalinguistic ability.* (Rrokaj, 2001)

By perceiving the metalinguistic ability in school as a skill *that enables the language user to think about the language independently of understanding and productive skills* (Owens., 1998) and the writing process as a social practice (inspired by Vygotsky) in which *the passage of ideas into text does not result in a simple transposition of thoughts into words* (Cisotto, 2006), the writing process enables the student to master the language at such a level that ideational fluency translates into rhetorical solutions capable of expressing it. In the space between knowing metalinguistics, linguistic consciousness, and materialized speech, the student has also gained the ability to choose different methods of creating their thoughts. In the continuation of the writing process, these modes are modalities of mastering and expressing the language in varied ways in their disparity. The core of a successful writing process is the curriculum's nucleus, the text. *The texts the students consider throughout their formative cycle to achieve discursive competencies require recognizing and evaluating how they are constituted* (Poroçani, 2019). The concrete techniques learned throughout the pre-university journey enable the student *to understand the meaning of texts and practice and master them* (Poroçani, 2023) in specific processes of language use (especially the written one).

In order to evaluate students' proficiency levels in the field of language and literature over a now 12-year cycle, the approach of a final exam at the end (regardless of the name in each country) as an instrument and the process itself constitute a formative space and a vital link. In the composition of the tests, the student's linguistic and literary competencies are detailed through text analyses and essay writing. This test, considering that the pre-university cycle is judged as a formative space through which *the student does not only do literature but through literature, they also receive information from various fields* (Poroçani, 2021), is developed based on the orienting program. An essential space within the final exam format is also reserved for the *production process*, which is not perceived as a closed process but as a product in its format and rules described in special grammar. This format is the essay, the last part of the test, but based on the assessment level (8 points), it is its most important part.

The word "essay" comes from the French word "essayer," which translates to *sprovë* in Albanian, *saggio* in Italian, and *trial or effort* in English. Michel Montaigne first used it to define his work as an essay. He characterized the attempt to model his ideas in this format with an essay. Moving through various analyses and approaches, the exact definition of the term encountered many discussions. The essayist who provides some acceptable guidelines for this topic is Aldous Huxley, who notes that *"the essay is a literary term for saying almost anything but almost everything"* (Huxley, 1960).

Subsequently, the essay has seen expansions in the edges of this definition and its content. Nevertheless, its essence, as referred to by Huxley, rests on three poles:

- The personal and autobiographical
- The objective, factual, and specific
- The abstract-universal relationship.

While defining the structure of the essay, Thomas Kane states that when we begin to read an essay, we usually have several questions in mind. In contrast, in writing an effective essay, these questions must be answered somehow (Kane, 2010). Nick Redgrove states that in the GCSE essay, students are assessed on their ability to create personal and creative responses and to explore texts through different interpretations. This process develops critical and analytical skills that are essential not only for exams but also for academic and professional success in the future (Redgrove, n.d.). The importance of the essay in the GCSEs is affirmed by a study from York St John University, which found that the competencies gained throughout writing include time management, research skills, written communication, and the ability to understand different viewpoints. These skills are necessary for the job market (htt22).

Norman J. Urrau identifies seven stages in the writing process: prewriting, planning, drafting, responding, revising, editing, evaluating, and publishing. After the drafting phase, "students give and receive opinions from others about their and their peers' materials. They read each other's writings and fill out a response sheet prepared by the teacher for specific aspects of a text. During revising and editing, they finalize the writing, considering their peers' opinions and correcting grammatical errors and sentence structures. Together, the teacher and the student need to prepare elaborate evaluating standards so that the students are clear on what is required of them." (AEDP, 1998).

According to the above reference, it is judged that the student should have passed this preparatory phase during the schooling phase, at the end of which, as we mentioned earlier, the State Matura essay will evaluate the level of mastery (alongside other competencies) of writing competencies. However, there are cases when the essay product and correct writing are confused. The first means that the writing has achieved its goal, while the second means that it has respected the grammar, use, spelling, and punctuation rules. The process of evaluating the essay must avoid these imprudent viewpoints.

In evaluating the essay, the student's response should be assessed in its entirety for the quality it presents, for the sensitivity, thought, ideas expressed, and their originality. Students who have spelling problems but manage to communicate in writing a clear understanding of the literary part (the given text) and the question receive total points for understanding. On the other hand, students who write fluently and without errors but do not demonstrate a good understanding of the text and requirement get points for their way of expression, style, and spelling accuracy, but they are not evaluated for understanding, measuring more the evaluation of their ability to express. Mistakes that do not influence the answer's general quality should be considered in the evaluation. Points will be deducted only for the mistakes that influence the quality and are judged as graver.

The ways to ensure as accurate a result as possible in the student evaluation process can be done through comparison: a) comparison with other students; b) based on established standards – how much the student meets the set standard and at what level, (Grillo, 2002), and based on self-determined standards. Therefore, what is measured through testing and other instruments must be evaluated. "Assessment shows the results achieved by students against learning objectives by concluding this comparison." (Sholls, 2008).

3.1 *Essay Assessment in the Albanian Language and Literature Test within the State Matura (Albania) and Its Assessment Criteria*

The essay is usually the final requirement in the State Matura test. It constitutes a significant weight in the result that the graduate can achieve. In the best case, when the essay written by the graduate is

evaluated with 8 points, this means that only by fulfilling one requirement, 16% of the maximum assessment in the compulsory subject exam "Albanian Language and Literature" is secured (Rama, 2013). Initiated in 2005 (htt23) but applied in 2006, this experience continues with fundamental changes in the program and assessment, which are the focus of our study.

The student learns the structure of the essay from the 9-year education: introduction, development, and conclusion. In the secondary cycle, knowledge about the essay is deepened and expanded, and the student's skills in writing its forms are specified. The essay is illustrated with classical and moderated writing models and practices. The complete form of the argumentative, descriptive, informative, comparison-contrast, and presentation essay is given.

The criteria on which the essay evaluation is based have undergone several changes over the years. These changes aim to improve the quality of the ability to write and reflect on a specific topic. It should be insisted on the assertion that these criteria in their dynamics find reflection in the Albanian Language and Literature Program from 2006 (the year of the start of the State Matura) until 2017. Our study has not continued after 2017 because, in the Pre-University Education system in Albania, the State Matura program and assessment criteria last changed in 2017.

In the gymnasium program, we encounter this evaluation method: (example) (AVA, Prill 2010)

Table 1: Assessment criteria for the essay in the state matura

Expected levels of criteria fulfilment	beginner	average	accomplished	advanced	points
Presentation of ideas, their organization	4	6	8	10	10
Support of ideas with details and examples	4	6	8	10	10
Variety of sentences used, language	4	6	8	10	10
Language accuracy	4	6	8	10	10
Structure of the work coherence	4	6	8	10	10

While in the State Matura, the evaluation has continuously changed to come in this form in 2017: Objectives of the State Matura Test Evaluation (AVA, Matura Shtetërore, 2010)

- Knowledge and understanding: 40% or 20 points of the test
- Critical interpretation and evaluation: 40% or 20 points of the test
- Judgment and personal response: 20% or 10 points of the test

We present the changes concretely:

In 2006, the essay evaluation criteria in the State Matura were:

I: Idea and argumentation: 2 points

II: Organization of answers: 2 points

III: Spelling accuracy: 2 points

The essay was evaluated with a total of 6 points.

In 2007, we had the first expansion, including in the evaluation of the criterion of structure and lexicological elements:

I: Idea and argumentation: 3 points

II: Essay structure: 1 points

III: Language richness: 2 points

IV: Syntactic variety: 2 points

V: Spelling accuracy: 2 points

For the first time in terminology, the structure of the essay and the student's linguistic formation are included, focusing only on syntax and spelling. Language richness is narrowed to vocabulary and figurative language without being treated more broadly with writing process elements. The essay is evaluated with a total of 10 points.

In 2008, the essay evaluation criteria were reconceptualized again, and the evaluation became more qualitative, making it comparable to the PEGJ table.

- I: Idea development: 2 points
- II: Essay organization and structure: 2 points
- III: Style and originality: 2 points
- IV: Language accuracy: 2 points

Considering the essay as a literary product, the student's linguistic formation is immeasurable and contradicts the program objectives above. Furthermore, the types of texts a student prefers to write are narrowed. In the years 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010 (in both profiles), 2011, and 2012, the essay topic is linked to the fragments treated in the test. In this case, the essay measures the students' interpretive ability, allowing them to interact with the author of the fragment. In the tests of other years, the essay develops the students' ideas but disconnects the links from the fragments they treat in the exam.

2006: What are some of the feelings that characterize this poem? Do you think it belongs to the dark erotic lyric of Lasgush? Argue your opinion with verses from the fragment.

2010: The mountain and the highlander. Argue the strong connection between them beyond Migjeni's poetry.

As you may refer to the essay topics in the attached appendix, only the argumentative essay has been treated in the State Matura. We judge that students need to be more flexible in presenting their ideas. At the same time, the evaluation is focused only on the argumentative ability, not giving due weight to other types.

3.2 Essay in the Italian Language Test within the "Esame di Stato" (Italy) and Its Assessment Criteria

The State Exam (*Esame di Stato*) in Italy, held at the end of the first and second cycles of education, is a fundamental aim of the student's academic path and evaluates *the skills acquired by students at the end of the cycle* (htt24). In this context, students are also tested in the field of *the Italian language and literature* (htt25).

Randomly, we chose to refer to the 2015 test.

The test consists of four different typologies:

- *Typology A* - Text analysis;
- *Typology B* - Editing a "short essay" or a newspaper article (Literary-artistic/socio-economic/historical-political/technical-scientific field);
- *Typology C* - Theme with historical argument;
- *Typology D* - Everyday themes.

The student develops the exam by choosing one of the four proposed text typologies and technically is privileged by even being allowed and advised to use the Italian Language Dictionary or a bilingual dictionary for students who do not have Italian as their native language.

3.3 Assessment Criteria

- *Consistency with the question: 20%*
- *Content: 20%*
- *Language in use: 20%*
- *Grammatical and syntactic accuracy: 20%*
- The fields in which the student is evaluated are:

Understanding the text (Summarize the content of the part)

- Text analysis (Reflect on how the motivations of the part develop in the section).
- The rhetorical strategies in the part are given: repetition, enumeration, metaphor, and others; morphological, syntactic, and specific lexical uses are also intertwined to sharpen the narration. The student must identify them in the text. Explanation of sayings according to context, explanation, interpretation, and analysis of procedures.
- Complex and deep interpretation. (*The essay topic is entirely related to the part*).

Specifically:

The Path to the Spider's Nests (Italo Calvino, 1991) speaks of the tragedy of World War II and the partisan war but also tells the universal story of a boy who dramatically transitions from the world of childhood to adulthood. The part focuses precisely on this phase of his life. The student should reflect on this aspect, even using other texts (poems and novels by Italian and foreign authors) that recount similar experiences in formation or at the moment of crossing the threshold of adulthood.

The essay is equipped with didactic-type advice:

"Develop the chosen argument as a 'short essay' or 'newspaper article' using entirely and in ways you judge appropriate the highlighted documents and data.

If you choose the 'essay' form, argue your treatment with appropriate references to your knowledge and study experiences.

Give the essay a coherent title and, if you wish, divide it into paragraphs.

If you choose the form of the newspaper article, indicate the title and the type of newspaper in which you think this article should be published."

Additionally, the essay contains specific rules regarding its dimensions: *Do not exceed five columns of half a protocolled sheet.*

Assessment Criteria (htt26):

The test prepared by MIUR (Ministry of Education, Universities, and Research) in the subject of the Italian language and literature is evaluated based on these criteria:

- Understanding the text: consists of summarizing the narrative text or paraphrasing the poem;
- Text analysis: consists of answering three questions about the content of the text and stylistic aspects;
- Interpretation and deep analysis: a text must be written in which the meaning of the part is discussed, placed in the literary production of the author, and the student makes some connections with other Italian authors who have dealt with similar themes;

A requirement for dealing with text analysis is good preparation in the school program.

- The assessment and conception of the thesis by MIUR aim to center the text and consider the following dimensions of textual variations:
- Influences: between written texts close to fluent ones (with the use of complete phrases and clear connection marks), also considering non-fluent ones characterized often by combinations of linguistic and non-linguistic signs;
- Sociolinguistic space within which a type of text circulates: private, public, professional;
- Topics which are more or less general or specified in the argument and in the receiver;
- Open, communicative functions such as informing, educating, convincing, entertaining, etc.
- Dominating cognitive organization: time (narration), space (description), analytic (exposure), etc.

3.4 Essay in the English Language Test within the GCSE (United Kingdom) and Its Assessment Criteria

The GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is a subject-based academic qualification. Students learn according to the GCSE format in secondary schools in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales for two years (grades 12-13). They are assessed according to a scale of 9-1. (htt27) (This assessment started in September 2017). The fundamental requirement of the GCSE in the English language is alignment with the key curriculum phase and the statutory requirements of study in the legislative Acts for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

To be consistent with the preceding test, we chose to refer to the 2015 test.

Assessment Criteria

- Speaking and Listening: 20%
- Study of spoken language: 10%
- Study of written language: 35%
- Writing: 35%

Test Content

The content of GCSE tests in the English language should reflect learning outcomes.

GCSE English tests should select content that promotes *an integrated approach to speaking, listening, reading, and writing*.

The GCSE test in the English language should be consistent with the curriculum, programs, and statutory requirements. The GCSE test in the English language should allow students to develop their knowledge, skills, and understanding of the language and its specified use as follows.

Within the assessment, sub-fields are also evident for each field:

Reading assessment:

R1 shows a clear understanding

R2 shows the absorption of subtext

R3 analysis, evaluation, and development of facts, ideas, and opinions

R4 shows an understanding of the writer's style

Writing assessment

W1 articulates experience and expresses what is thought, felt, and imagined

W2 organizes facts, ideas, and opinions

W3 uses an appropriate range of words

W4 uses an appropriate register for audience and context

Essay assessment

W1 expresses experience and express what is thought, felt, and imagined

W2 organizes facts, ideas, and opinions

W3 uses an appropriate range of words

W4 uses an appropriate register for audience and context

W5 correctly uses spelling, punctuation, and grammar

The oral exam (htt28) covers simple topics, and the time available is 30-45 seconds. For example, "Talk about your favorite singer or group."

The language used is assessed using these criteria: It should be accurate and concise, provide a balanced opinion, include context, and be enriched with specific speech acts and body language.

The written test contains two types of texts: a literary text (an excerpt from a novel) and an informative-explanatory text (a newspaper article).

The aims of the GCSE (htt29) in the English language for the test are to enable the student:

- to demonstrate skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing necessary to communicate with others as appropriate, confidently, and effectively;
- to express themselves creatively and imaginatively;
- to become critical readers of types of texts, including multimodal texts;
- to use reading to develop their skills as writers;
- to understand the patterns, structures, and forms of written and spoken English;
- to understand the impact of variations in spoken and written language and their relationship with identity and cultural diversity;
- to select and adapt speaking and writing to different situations and audiences.

The writing process in the English language test goes through three phases that are highlighted by the degree of difficulty:

The first writing is a summary, the second is a letter, and the third is a full-fledged essay. All three writings are related to the excerpts that the student is handling in the GCSE test. Additionally, they are differentiated by the number of words used and the level of assessment. All three are equipped with instructions to assist the student.

Specifically:

First writing: "Use your notes to write a summary of what Passage B tells you about the architect's plans for the bridge over the Strait of Gibraltar and the main features of his writing. You should use continuous writing (not in note form) and use your own words as much as possible. Your summary should include all 10 points in question 3 (a) and be 100 to 150 words. Up to 5 marks are available for the quality of your writing."

Second writing: Write a letter

"Imagine you are Bresciano from Passage A and have arrived in Tangier. Write a letter to your father in Gibraltar.

In your letter, you should:

- describe your journey
- explain what you did when you first arrived in Tangier
- state your plans for the rest of your time in Morocco.

Base your letter on what you read in Passage A, but do not copy it.

Be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points

Start your letter: "Dear Father...".

Write about 200 to 300 words.

Up to 10 marks are available for the quality of your writing."

Third writing: The essay

"Write a piece in response to the journalist. Respond with ideas and arguments in the article.

You may agree or disagree with what the journalist has written.

In your letter, you should:

- identify and evaluate the writer's views;
- use your ideas to support your comments on the writer's views;
- base your letter on what you have read in the article, but be careful to use your own words

Start your letter politely: "Dear Sir or Madam..."

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your response and up to 15 marks for the quality of your writing."

4. Discussions and Findings

The purpose of this paper is to compare the essay evaluation criteria in the State Matura for three countries: Albania, England, and Italy. Reviewing the documentation related to the State Matura and the essay given above allows us to analyze and compare these criteria. The analysis is based on these criteria.

- We first selected the object of reference, in our case, the essay, judging it as an important instrument for the formation of global citizens.
- We spread our evaluation analysis at the same level of comparison: a—State Matura as the final process of pre-university studies in the three states, b—the essay as an evaluation instrument within the same process, and c—analysis of the criteria within the same process.
- Conceptual coordination of three analyses into a single one: There were three different analyses on the essay's evaluation criteria, which we coordinated in one focus.
- Analyzing the assessment findings was to highlight the three assessment types, their differences, and recommendations for the Albanian educational system.

Regarding the criteria for comparing the three processes, we first judge that the difference is in their structuring, which is also reflected in the scoring. In England, the essay scoring process directly relates to the listening process. The essay reflects the ability to concentrate and understand the information the student receives through listening, 30% of the overall evaluation. Since this type involves assessing multiple skills, apart from listening, it also looks at understanding and interpretation. This process is observed somewhere other than Albania or Italy. While Italy evaluates the compatibility with the crowd with 20% of the final evaluation, structuring the criteria in Albania

is more general. The detail (England divides the ability to interpret 20% and 10%; Italy 20%), the evaluation in Albania precisely measures the skills related to the topic 40%+40% (as we have described above), but the measurements on elements of pragmatics are missing such as coherence and cohesion, effective made the other two systems. This means separating evaluation criteria is more efficient than their unification.

Regarding the process of structuring the essay, context, and language (in the pragmatic sense) receive little attention in Italy (40%) and England (35%), which means that the structural weight of the essay evaluates critical thinking and respects the coherence of cohesion. In a clear and so specified way, we do not find it in the Albanian system, which has also been reflected in the finished products. The personal judgment assessment criterion of 20% needs to be revised to balance the deficiency we mentioned. Finally, regarding the criterion that assesses the student's ability to use the mother tongue grammatically correctly, this concept is different in England (perhaps also due to the nature of English), where a distinction is made between written and written language. By dividing them into concepts, the student was assessed for two modalities of language mastery. We do not find this form in Italy, but the Italian student is assessed with 20% for the language in use (its application) and 20% for the grammar. This clarity is a space that needs to be repaired in the Albanian system as long as the use of Albanian is closely related to all its grammatical forms, given that we have a language with high grammatical flexibility. Linguistic accuracy reflects accurate understanding, critical thinking, consolidated linguistic awareness, and mastery of the language.

The assessment of the essay in the State Matura is part of the teaching process built as a system that uniquely represents the typology and strategy at the end of the teaching cycle. However, it also determines the effectiveness of the linguistic educational journey that preceded it. In this sense, specifying the criteria affects the correct determination of the student's results. The results of the students are not the focus of this paper because:

- a. There is no possibility that the State Matura tests in Albania will become an object of study because the institution does not allow it (the only exception is when you agree with your parents, which is practically impossible for a generation whole),
- b. there are no matrices in Albania with students' results in the Ministry of Education or essays in years or even in a single year.

Therefore, analyzing the criteria would enable a more objective reflection in evaluating the essays in the Ministry of Education. A system with problems in evaluation criteria (as we have argued that of Albania) fails to objectify: a- the real result of the educational process in AP; b- the effectiveness of the process; c- the effectiveness of the curriculum. In England, the system measures through the essay: it measures the student's ability to listen and articulate; in Italy and England, it measures the ability to use the language in different contexts. This criterion evaluates the student's ability within the usage space of the language, as well as its ambiguity and implications. Here, not only the evaluative criteria of the State Matura essay in Albanian should aim, but not only. This is where the language and literature curriculum should aim.

Having no effectiveness in evaluating the essay, there needs to be clarity about the curricular effectiveness.

Currently, the construction of the essay's evaluation criteria in the State Matura in Albania shows a multitude of problems exposed in this study. Borders vary from their conception to structuring. The comparison in question leads us to review their approach.

5. Conclusions

Below, we present a table of the evaluation criteria of the State Matura exam for each of the countries that we analyzed. These criteria are indicators of the process of writing and literary formation in comparative circumstances.

Table 2: Evaluation criteria on a comparative level

Countries	Albania		Italy		UK	
Assessment criteria	Knowledge understanding	40%	Compliance with the question	20%	Speaking and listening	20%
	Critical interpretation and assessment	40%	Content	20%	Study of spoken language	10%
	Judgment and personal answer	20%	Use of language	20%	Study of written language	35%
			Grammatical and syntactic accuracy	20%	Writing	35%

The State Matura Thesis in the reference countries has two types of texts: literary and non-literary. In 2012, the thesis also included non-literary text, which continues to this day.

In the GCSE system, the exam is written and oral, with 30% assessed for the oral exam and 70% for the written exam. In the State Matura and in the Esame di Stato, the exam is done only in writing, and the scoring is referred to in the table above.

If we make a summary of the number of requests, which also guide the evaluation criteria, we notice that:

Esame di Stato has three written requests. Considering that the second request has three sub-requests, six specified and oriented requests are in writing. The evaluator has separate and specified criteria for each of the requirements:

1. Meaning is *the summary*.
2. Text analysis has three sub-requirements related to *pragmatics, morphology, syntax, and lexicology*.
3. Interpretation and analysis (essay) include evaluation for recognizing *discourses, utterances, discourse idioms, sociolinguistic relations, and variations*.

GCSE has an oral requirement and three formal writing processes: summary, paper, and essay. These processes assess oral discourse (including linguistic variation) and written language competence in specific contexts.

In the State Matura, we have twenty-five questions, and in some of them, we have an addition of eight sub-questions, for a total of thirty-three questions, which are not divided according to criteria. The only division is that of the essay, divided into concrete scoring.

We cannot identify how the evaluator divides the meaning, interpretation, judgment, and personal answer into scores for each student, and we cannot determine their specific weight in the thirty-three completed questions.

Variations and phenomena related to specific discourse acts are not included in the theses of the State Matura. The number of words or lines they will use is determined in the GCSE and ES systems, while in the State Matura, this is left to chance. In GCSE and *Esame di Stato*, the writing process topics are linked to the passage being studied by the student in the thesis. In the State Matura in 2006-2012, the essay topics were related to the passage. From 2012 until today, the essay topics have nothing to do with the passage. It is necessary to connect the essay's subject with the thesis because the student develops his critical thinking within the context of giving judgments of the analytical, interpretive, and judgmental types. Other effects are related to the emotional situation, such as concentration. The time available to the student is to be re-evaluated. GCSE gives students 5 hours and 15 minutes; *Esame di Stato* 6 hours, while the State Matura gives 2 hours and 30 minutes.

Albanian students show more problems in style, originality, and elaboration of ideas, two areas related to understanding and expression. At the same time, they are more confident in the structure of the essay, which is treated more like a formal conception based on paragraphs. From the study we carried out, we reached the following conclusions:

1. Essays present problems in conceptualizing the topic. We have writings filled with

- slogans and without an axial concept.
2. Interpretations are often random and come from arguments that do not involve typical phenomena or are directly related to the topic.
 3. It is rare to find a juxtaposition of arguments and arguments that support or oppose the topic.
 4. The student needs to realize their thesis, which they can justify and argue using facts and examples.
 5. The geography of the arguments could be more extensive, and many students make serious errors related to the lack of coherence or the completely incorrect use of cohesive devices. This happens because they not only do not know them but misuse them in their discourse acts.
 6. Some essays do not preserve chronology, which is entirely due to the lack of contextual and discursive knowledge.
 7. There is much variation in jargon and deviation from the standard, which makes the student's writing unclear.
 8. The most common grammatical errors relate to processes, verb tenses, pronouns, adverbs, sentence structure, and punctuation.
 9. Students misuse the final *ë*: they add it where it should not and remove it where it should.
 10. *Unnecessary repetition* is a symptom found in nearly 90% of essays.
 11. Students do not edit the essay. This is not only due to the time effect but also because the exam format needs to give them this opportunity.

Our comparative study is of particular importance for the following reasons:

- Identifying the similarities and differences between the evaluative criteria of the essay in 3 different systems, but one object of observation (the essay) helps to quote more deeply the constituent aspects of the process and the object itself. Therefore in correct conclusions.
- Evaluating the best ideas suggests their adoption in the Albanian system, specifically in the quality structuring of the criteria.
- The critical analysis of the evaluation of the essay in the State Matura of Albania highlighted the need for reconceptualization and re-organization of the evaluation criteria.
- This deepening of knowledge broadened the perspectives of more in-depth studies on the Albanian curricula in the field of writing, critical thinking, and re-evaluation of policies that have this focus.

However, this study has opened the way for more in-depth studies. First, it remains the duty of the institutions to provide assessment matrices of students in years so that the comparative process can be extended to a system. Second, the study should be deepened by making concrete measurements of the products (essays) in the process, and the possibility of studying these products is legitimized. Thirdly, the possibility of inter-institutional and international scientific cooperation can be deepened because, in this way, the fields of knowledge are deepened, strategies become effective, and practices are significantly improved.

6. Recommendations

After the comparative analysis of the L1 language essay (first language) in the State Matura in three European countries (respectively three educational systems, and therefore three different curricular frameworks), we think that in the Albanian educational system, unchanged from 2017 until today (2024), the organizational and structural criteria of the essay should be reviewed, taking into account:

- the new contexts in which the Albanian educational system has entered in the conditions of interculturality and galloping technological development, the thematic reconceptualization seems to be more comprehensive and reflects the above problems;
- the types of essays must be studied and always depending on the textual material presented

in the State Matura test;

- in addition to the written assessment, the meaningful interpretation of the texts must be accompanied by an oral assessment;

Only in this way can we make it possible to achieve the goal of educating and training students in their native language, equipping them with a comprehensive methodological approach. In globalization, knowing and mastering the mother tongue gives the student stable access to other languages.

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Appendix 1: Essay topics 2006-2024

2006: What are some of the feelings that characterize this poem? Do you think that it belongs to Lasgushi's erotic lyrics of dark colors? Argue your opinion with verses from the passage.

2007 Argue in essay form one of the following variants:

A or B 10 points

A. Life, loneliness, and death. How do these three affect the lives of the characters in this novel?

What did Camaj want to say about the nature of the human being?

OR

B. Only love can melt the ice of the soul. Based on the novel's context, I argue this statement's value.

2008: Read the passage above carefully, then in a well-organized essay, compare Macbeth with Lady Macbeth. Where do the two differ? How do the details affect

the selected and the images created by Shakespeare to give this difference?

2009: Many readers think this is a rather sad poem.

Support this opinion in the form of an essay focusing on:

- the moments that create the sad atmosphere.
- the imagery and details selected by the writer to create this atmosphere.

2010: From antiquity to modern times, great writers have conveyed that extreme behaviors and passions cause irreversible consequences in human life. Argue the value of this idea in the form of an essay.

2011: Who is the tragic hero in this work: Orestes or Clytemnestra? Argue your opinion.

2012: Which of the author's conclusions more closely aligns with your worldview regarding optimism or pessimism? Argue your opinion in the form of an essay.

2013: People are always dissatisfied with what they have. They are constantly looking for something more or something different. Is this always right? Argue your opinion using specific examples and reasons to support your answer.

2014: Some people think: "If you live only for today, you will destroy your future." Do you agree with this statement? Why? Argue your opinion using specific examples and reasons to support your answer.

2015: Some people think the best preparation for life is learning to work with others and be cooperative. Some others think that the best preparation is to learn to be competitive. Which point of view do you agree with? Argue your opinion.

2016: Some people think the journey is more important than the destination. They argue that people are more satisfied when they work towards a goal than when they achieve it. Others think that it is the destination that gives meaning to the journey. Which of the points do you agree with? Argue your position.

2017: A philosopher said: "Your character is something you choose to create yourself." Do we build character qualities ourselves, or is it formed by influences we cannot control? What do you think? Justify your solution.

2018: Argue how the environment surrounding us gives meaning to our lives.

2019: In the text "Time," the author concludes his opinion with the statement, "...being involved in life is much more interesting than watching a version of it on TV".

Do you agree with this statement? Argue your opinion in the form of an essay.

2020 - the test had no essay.

2021: In the "Orientation for the future," the author notes: We must expand our horizons and be part of the world. Argue your position on this statement

2022: Esmeralda is one of the most beautiful figures in world literature. Based on this, argue in an essay why simplicity, talent, and beauty delight, please, and inspire the human spirit.

2023: Write an argumentative essay on the topic: I always keep going. I always find inspiration to keep going. My inspiration is the love for life.

2024: The famous writer Amos Oz, in his book "A Tale of Love and Darkness," which is dedicated to country, family, and love, says, "If I had to choose between wanting to be an astronaut and wanting to be a butterfly on the wall of a house, I would choose to be a butterfly because the family is the most exotic, the most mysterious, the most amazing institution that the world knows today." Write an argumentative essay on the topic: The family is globally the most interesting, diverse, and fantastic institution.