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Report on the BILC Survey on Testing Writing in the Digital Age

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The BILC survey on writing tests in the digital age sought to assess current practices across different nations and provide insights into the future of writing assessment in the BILC community. The survey revealed varied approaches to testing writing proficiency, with countries using a combination of single-level, bi-level, and multilevel tests across different proficiency levels. The most common format remains bi-level tests for levels 2 and 3, with fewer countries testing at levels 1 and 4. The allocated time and word count increase with higher proficiency levels.

The development and moderation of writing prompts are generally done through team collaboration, following the STANAG 6001 level descriptors. However, some countries acknowledged gaps in systematic moderation and prompt development, pointing to a need for more rigorous and structured processes.

Piloting of writing tests is an area where many countries struggle, often due to limited time and resources. While some teams engage in regular piloting and gather extensive feedback, the majority tend to forgo this step, relying instead on post-test evaluations to make adjustments.

Another finding was the variability in the frequency of prompt replacement, with some teams introducing new tasks for every test session, while others operate with less strict replacement schedules.

The shift to computer-based testing was also a major topic of discussion. While half of the respondents still rely on paper-based tests, there is a growing interest in transitioning to digital formats. This raises questions about the role of computer skills in writing assessments and the need for fairness and standardization.

The use of aids such as spell checkers and dictionaries was another debated issue, with some countries allowing them to reflect real-world writing conditions, while others maintain stricter policies. There is a growing recognition that testing in the digital age requires updates to current practices, particularly to align with the evolving nature of writing tasks in the TLU context.

The presentation concluded by emphasizing the need for collaboration, continued research, and norming activities to improve writing assessments and adapt them to the challenges of the digital era.