



**Self-assessment Influence on Biographical Writing of Imaginary Characters**

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### **Self-assessment Influence on Biographical Writing of Imaginary Characters**

Among the four skills of English language learning, writing is often the one in which students are most challenged. As such, writing should be rated and assessed early on “however, this assessment is usually done by teachers. Learners usually have no idea of their place in writing skill and cannot evaluate themselves” (Fahimi & Rahimi, 2014, p.731). This lack of participation in assessment writing processes has led to an underestimation of students' ability to improve through self-reflection.

The issue of how students can develop a more active and responsible role in improving their writing skills in English is part of the modern educational discourse among ESL teachers. Discourse that gradually had required to put into practice different types of evaluation in which students play a leading role without the loss of validity and reliability of the evaluation. To address this concern, the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education proposed a set of guidelines compiled in a pedagogical use document called Classroom Assessment Suggestions.

Among the lines of this document, it is stated that “these suggestions are not intended as a first introduction to assessment in foreign language teaching, but rather it has been assumed that teachers are already familiar with it” (Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador, 2014, p.5). However, it is not always so. In a particular Ecuadorian context, learners lack knowledge about how to use self-assessment to improve their English writing. This was especially evident in the writing of biographies as students demonstrate grammatical, spelling, punctuation, capitalization errors, and lack of vocabulary. But more importantly, they were unaware of all the mistakes they had made. For this reason, this study sought to investigate the integration of self-evaluation in writing and its influence on improving writing biography.

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### **Literature Review**

This section describes the basic concepts regarding the self-assessment strategy on writing skills, related studies, challenges, opposing points of view, and how to train students to use the strategy. All this is the central part of the research and the elements that frame the design of the innovation with the corresponding support of the authors and their conclusions.

Student self-assessment refers to a process “during which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria, and revise accordingly” (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009, as cited in Daren, 2016, p. 1). In other words, self-evaluation allows students to think about what they did well and what they might do better next time. At the same time, it is aligned with one of the goals to be achieved in the classroom which is to make students more responsible for their own learning. In this regard, Badrinathan (2015) mentioned that “self-assessment is recognized as an important tool towards autonomy” (p. 66). Therefore, allowing a learner to self-assess is to recognize him as a subject who is able to give judgments on his own learnings.

Although self-assessment should be a usual class activity at all levels of education, Panadero and Tapia (2013) stated that “a high percentage of teachers report not knowing how self-assessment influences students’ learning or how to implement it successfully in their classrooms” (p. 552). This is probably because teachers are not familiar with what they want to obtain after applying self-evaluation. In this regard, Dragemark (2009) concluded that “teachers need support in making assessment analyses and having access to students’ self-assessments gives a more comprehensive base from which to make these judgments” (p.231).

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Thus, even teachers must have a clear picture of what is intended to be assessed in students through their self-criticism. Moreover, a proper application of a self-assessment strategy could not only organize the students' level of understanding but also simplify the teachers' work since the student becomes his own evaluator.

Regarding the student's role as a self-evaluator, there are some doubts about the objectivity that students can attain in self-evaluation; as was revealed by a study conducted by Young (2000, cited in Bhatti & Nimehchisalem, p. 20) “students perceived self-assessment more reliable if teachers are a part of it”. This probably happens because traditional assessment practices had the teacher as the principal actor and the opinion of the students was hardly considered.

However, when the process is done correctly, self-assessment becomes an objective means of verifying how a task is actually performed as stated by Andrade (2019) “when the act of self-assessing is given a learning-oriented purpose, students’ self-assessments are relatively consistent with those of external evaluators” (p.2). This means that it should be formative because, without the possibility of adjustment and correction, self-evaluation is almost useless.

For this reason, attention should be paid prior to implementing a self-assessment since “it is important that discussions and information sessions are held with students to promote understanding, negotiate and decide upon assessment criteria, and to clarify the required standards and learning outcomes” (Wride, 2017, p.4). In this way, students can identify for themselves what they need to learn, with a set of criteria that will judge what is considered good work.

Furthermore, students should perceive their classroom as a safe space where no harsh judgments are made. Another, way to engage students in their self-assessment is

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to consider using a rubric specifying the criteria to be evaluated; this will assist students in identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, it becomes vital to explain the rubric criteria, as well as, to establish realistic expectations which can be accompanied by “intensive conversations with students before introducing any self-assessment practices” (Spiller, 2005, p, 05). This will make it easier for students to clear their doubts and make their evaluation process more objective.

Moreover, in order to successfully implement self-assessment in education, it is necessary to consider the convenience of introducing its practice gradually until the student gets used to it. Hence, “teachers need to implement strategies that encourage and foster honest self-reflection” (Brown & Harris, 2014, p.26). Among some strategies and tools available to engage students in self-assessment there are the rubrics that refer to scoring guides with criteria used for assessing specific components and expectations of students’ assignments in direct relation to the class learning outcomes. In addition to that, checklists help teachers save time and clarify students' expectations and task components.

### **Innovation**

The intervention started when the innovation planning was approved by the instructional design professor. Initially, the students received an explanation of how to use a writing rubric in the self-assessment, describing each component in detail. Next, they practiced assessing a mentor text of a biography of an imaginary person.

To apply the pretest students were required to imagine they were journalists, so they had to write a short biography about the person who just invented the time machine. Since the inventor's life was a mystery, they had to include the most relevant facts of this person's life such as (date and place of birth, current location of residence, personality traits, educational background, and major achievements). When they

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finished, they were given the writing rubric to self-assess the biography (See Appendix 1).

From that moment onwards, five classes of 45 minutes one per week was developed with the various activities planned in the innovation (See Appendix 2). The sessions were made up of different moments such as engagement, exposure, construction, and application they covered different grammatical topics such as the simple present, simple past, time markers, conjunctions, adjectives to describe personality traits, and vocabulary related to jobs and occupations that would help students improve biographical writing of imaginary characters.

The posttest application was carried out in the same way as the pretest, that is to say, they were asked to develop the same writing activity. The same rubric used in the pretest was handed out and then they were asked to self-evaluate their written work. Finally, students were asked to compare the pretest rubric with the posttest rubric to see if they had improved or not. The innovation phase lasted a month.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was based on an action research approach which in “education is known for improving the teachers and administrators’ professional practice and deemed favorable by most educationists for solving problems in education” (Lufungulo et al, 2021, p. 115). Since one goal of the inquiry was to find a suitable solution to a deficiency in assessing students' writing skills.

Throughout this action research project, two types of data were collected quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative instruments were a pretest and posttest, and a writing rubric was used to assess them. Meanwhile, the instrument for qualitative data collection was an open-ended survey (See Appendix 3) to know the students' views on self-assessment. The data was gathered to help answer research questions: To what

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extent does the use of self-assessment rubrics improve the biographical writing of imaginary characters among Grade 9 students in private schools in Quito, Ecuador? and what are the students' perspectives on the use of biographical writing self-assessment?

### **Participants**

This study recruited participants from a single grade nine classroom at a private school in Quito, Ecuador. The school was in a major urban area near the Valle de los Chillos. Students were between the ages of 13 and 14 years old. The class had 25 students who were invited to participate in the study. Parental consent was provided for 17 students. Two of the 17 students were absent and did not complete the pretest or posttest and were excluded from the analysis.

The final sample size for the project was 15 students who completed both the pretest and the posttest and participated in the self-assessment intervention. From the total number of participants, there were 5 male students and 10 female students. Students had an A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It is worth mentioning that in order to work specifically with the 15 students involved in the research it was necessary to request some class periods from another teacher after the authorization of the school's academic coordinator.

### **Instruments**

The instruments used for data collection have been determined by the research questions and therefore produced evidence-based data that has subsequently been tested and verified.

### **Pre and post-writing test.**

To provide an answer to the research question: To what extent does the use of self-assessment rubrics improve the biographical writing of imaginary characters among Grade 9 students in private schools in Quito, Ecuador? A pretest and posttest were used.

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These are defined by Caris et al. (2004) as “assessment tools used to tap into students’ prior knowledge and to evaluate how well they have learned material in a given course” (p.9). So, the pretest gave information about the current level of students writing biography while the posttest provided information about the student's academic progress.

### ***Rubric***

Due to the fact that “rubrics are useful grading tools that add reliability, validity, and transparency to assessments” (Chowdhury, 2019, p. 61). The use of rubrics made the research process more accurate and objective.

The writing rubric used for this research study displayed distinct scoring criteria such as language, content, and organization. In the content section of the rubric, there was a 1 to 5 scale, with one being the lowest score and five being the highest. In the rubric, a 1 corresponded to “irrelevances and misinterpretation of the task may be present. Target reader is minimally informed”. A five corresponded to “all content is relevant to the task. Target reader is fully informed”.

In the organization section of the rubric, there was a 1 to 5 scale, with one being the lowest score and five being the highest. In the rubric, a 1 corresponded to “production unlikely to be connected, though punctuation and simple connectors (i.e., ‘and’) may on occasion be used”. A five corresponded to “text is connected and coherent, using basic linking words (also, while, however, but, yet, moreover, so, although) and an appropriate number of cohesive devices”.

Finally, in the language section of the rubric, there was a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 as the lowest score and five being the highest. In the rubric, a 1 corresponded to “the writer produces basic vocabulary of isolated words and phrases. Produces few simple grammatical forms (simple present/simple past) with only limited control”. A five



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corresponded to “writer uses vocabulary to describe personality traits, jobs, and occupations generally appropriately, while occasionally overusing certain lexis. Uses simple grammatical forms (simple present/simple past) with a good degree of control. While errors are noticeable, meaning can still be determined”. The full rubric can be seen in Appendix 1. The rubric was vetted by an expert in the field at Universidad Casa Grande.

### **Open-ended survey.**

The use of an open-ended survey was considered in order to answer the research question about students' perspectives on the use of biographical writing self-assessment. This is due to the fact that “open-ended survey questions allow respondents to answer in their own words. Open-ended questions also allow the researcher to explore ideas that would not otherwise be aired and are useful where additional insights are sought” (Salant & Dillman, 1994, as cited in Glasow, 2005, p.7). The open-ended survey was applied by means of a printed document following the posttest and with two of the fifteen participants who were randomly selected. As a highlight, it is important to note that the survey was revised and approved by a high school academic coordinator.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to give a response to the first research question which referred to the use of self-assessment rubrics to improve the biographical writing of imaginary characters. The pretest and posttest results were classified, quantified, and compared in a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel by using formulas. This program displayed information about the minimum, maximum, mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and *p*-value.

With regard to the question about students' perspectives on the use of biographical writing self-assessment the written responses from the open-ended survey

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were considered. Since the survey was applied in a written format, the results were classified according to the impressions on self-assessment and writing biographies.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to carry out the present research study in a thorough manner, it was “important to further consider the fundamentals of ethical research involving human participants” (Fleming, 2018, p. 209). For that reason, in the first instance, formal permission was obtained from the Principal and Academic Coordinator of the high school to implement the innovation.

Once authorization was given, parents were informed through the institutional platform that their children would participate in a research study of a master’s project. Later on, it was explained to the students the different activities that would be carried out over a 4-week period. They were notified that the research study was voluntary, and they all agreed to be part of it. All data collected as part of this research study was treated completely anonymously and confidentially.

### **Results**

This section presents findings based on both qualitative and quantitative data. The first research question, “To what extent does the use of self-assessment rubrics improve the biographical writing of imaginary characters among Grade 9 students in private schools in Quito, Ecuador? The results are reported in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive statistics per rubric criteria*

Criteria	Pretest					Posttest				
	Sample	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>p.</i> value
Content	15	3	5	4.66	0.62	4	5	4.73	0.46	0.00
Organization	15	1	5	3.73	1.10	1	5	4.13	1.25	0.00
Language	15	1	5	3.66	1.23	2	5	4.26	0.80	0.00

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*Note.* Table 1 shows the average results of the pretest and posttest (See Appendix 4) and presents all the components of the rubric, such as content and organization, pronunciation, and language. Each of the criteria was assigned a score of one to five points based on the rubric. All three aforementioned criteria displayed an improvement of 0.07 for content, 0.40 for organization, and 0.60 for language which obtained the highest improvement.

Moreover, the results also show that the standard deviation results were farther away from the mean in the posttest results. Likewise, the *p*-value shows a result of 0.00 which indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected and therefore the results are statistically significant, which indicates that the data are more reliable and objective.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive statics of the total pretest and posttest scores*

	Pretest					Posttest				
Criteria	Sample	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation	<i>p</i> . value
Total score	15	6	15	12.06	2.69	9	15	13.26	2.02	0.00

*Note.* Table 2 shows a comparison between the pretest and posttest total rubric scores. Outcomes evidenced that the posttest increased a 1.20 in relation to the total mean obtained from the pretest. Besides, the standard deviation in the pretest is higher which means that data are more spread out. While in the posttest it tends to decrease indicating that data are clustered around the mean. The *p*-value was 0.00 which means that the results did not happen incidentally. To sum up it can be said that the use of writing rating rubrics with clear descriptors may impact the quality of L2 students' writing performance in biographical writing.

With respect to the second research question: What are the students' perspectives on the use of biographical writing self-assessment? responses were

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positive. Since participants stated that the self-assessment helped them improve their grammar and vocabulary, so they can produce written texts. For instance

*“Self-assessment process was really helpful in a way that improved my grammar skills to describe people and create paragraphs.”* (Student No 2)

*“Self-assessment made us aware of our performance and helped us revise grammar and vocabulary.”* (Student No 1).

When students were asked if the self-evaluation encouraged self-reflection their responses showed that they increased their awareness of mistakes. As indicated below.

*“Self-assessment process made us realize the mistakes we have made and allowed us to correct them.”* (Student No 1)

*“Self-evaluation has made me accustomed to being more attentive to my own mistakes and now I can improve for the next one”* (Student No 2).

With respect to the effectiveness of using a writing rubric to facilitate the biography self-assessment process. Students highlighted the usefulness of the rubric criteria

*“The rubric made me realize the aspects that I completed and those that I was missing or not using properly when writing biographies”* (Student No 1).

*“Of course, this helped me realize in which parts I was really good at writing and in which points I failed”* (Student No 2).

Finally, when participants were asked to recommend self-assessment for evaluating biography writing. In addition to giving a positive response, they noted that the teacher should accompany this self-assessment process as this way they feel more confident. They also emphasized the importance of honesty to have true self-examination and error detection. As shown below

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*“Yes, I would recommend it because that helped me to become aware of what we were doing.”* (Student No 1)

*“Yes, I would definitely recommend this process because when we looked at our biographies, we felt good and supported by the teacher's explanation. However, it is necessary to be honest when assessing yourself.”* (Student No 2)

### **Discussion**

This study examined the influence of self-assessment on the biography of imaginary characters. Regarding the first research question concerning: To what extent does the use of self-assessment rubrics improve the biographical writing of imaginary characters among Grade 9 students in private schools in Quito, Ecuador? the results of the application of the pretest and posttest showed that the use of self-assessment rubrics with clear descriptors can improve the quality of students' biographical writing and they can become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

The aforementioned assertion is consistent with what Rohmah (2018) referred to about self-assessment when he claimed that self-assessment builds students' awareness to realize their understanding of the English language. Therefore, self-assessment is not a mere classroom activity, but a process during which students reflect on the quality of their work (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009, p. 13 cited in Daren, 2016, p.10).

Because the process of self-evaluation of the biographies was mainly carried out by the students; self-assessment becomes an important tool for autonomy (Badrinathan, 2015). However, this technique should be introduced carefully and accompanied by the teacher in this way students perceive self-assessment as reliable (Bhatti & Nimehchisalem 2020). This may be because students are accustomed to the teachers

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being the ones who give the guidelines to follow and provide accurate information about learning processes as well as outcomes.

With respect to the second research question: what are the students' perspectives on the use of biographical writing self-assessment? All participants provided positive perceptions of its application in the classroom as one of them affirmed that the self-evaluation process made him realize his mistakes. So, it can be said that students get immersed in process of judging, assessing, and reflecting on their own work or abilities to think independently and critically (Panadero & Tapia, 2013, p, 552).

Additionally, one of the participants assured me to feel more confident when teachers guide the self-assessment process. Because of this, teachers need to know how to implement self-assessment in class in a way that encourages students to understand the criteria to be assessed and the standards and learning outcomes needed for the class. (Wride, 2017, p.4).

Considering that the student is the main protagonist in the self-assessment process teachers have to implement strategies that encourage and foster honest self-reflection. (Brown & Harris, 2014, p.26). This aspect is something of which the students are aware, as one of the participants stated that it is necessary, to be honest when assessing yourself. In this way, reliable results will be obtained so that the teacher will have valid results for the students' learning.

Regarding the effectiveness of the rubric as a self-evaluation instrument, students reported that the rubric enabled them to realize what they had completed and what was missing or not being used properly when writing the biographies. This happens because rubrics provide a rating guide with criteria to evaluate the work of students in direct relation to learning outcomes (Office of Institutional Research and

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Assessment, 2017, p.03). Overall, with appropriate training and teachers' guidance self-assessment can reach satisfactory levels of reliability.

### **Conclusions**

Evidence from data collection in accordance with various theoretical postulates suggests that self-evaluation improves biographical writing. However, in order to obtain more reliable results, it is necessary to train students in self-evaluation beforehand. Thus, although self-evaluation involves mostly student participation, the role of the teacher is vital since he is the one who must guide the process in order to obtain the desired results.

Additionally, it is possible to affirm that self-evaluation allows students to enter into a process of self-reflection that makes them realize their strengths and weaknesses. This practice tends to give more responsibility to the student as the main person in charge of identifying the aspects that need to be improved for future writing activities. In this sense, it can be assured that self-evaluation constitutes a path towards autonomy in the learning process of students.

This study also found that students' perceptions of self-assessment are positive, and its constant practice may develop a habit of self-analysis of their school activities. It was also noted that many of the students' responses remark that self-assessment in the first instance can help to improve aspects such as vocabulary and grammar and as a consequence, they would be able to produce biographical texts more neatly. Furthermore, it has also been found that the active participation of the teacher in the student self-assessment process gives them more confidence and, consequently, the results will be more valid.

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### **Limitations**

The implementation of innovation has been a little overwhelming for the researcher and the students due to the constant change of study modality, which at times was synchronous and at other times asynchronous because of Covid - 19 pandemic. This meant that even though 17 students obtained parental consent to participate in the research study, 2 of them were unable to participate in the posttest as they had to be kept in isolation due to possible contagion.

Furthermore, students' lack of knowledge regarding how to evaluate their writing performance made the researcher start from the very basics including the explanation of the rubric in detail because the students had never used one before and did not know how to use it. Also, there were unexpected extracurricular activities with the students so the expected schedule for the innovation was extended by an additional two weeks.

### **Recommendations**

For future research studies, it is important to consider the type of study modality that students are in, since even though events such as a pandemic affected the educational environment in many ways, a researcher must be ready to adapt the planned activities to any type of unforeseen event. In addition, as far as possible, it should be ensured that all participants begin and end the research process in such a way as to maintain a stable population.

It is also important to consider certain periods of class prior to the application of the pretest in which induction of the use of the rubric is carried out, especially if it is a group of students who have never used a rubric before. Finally, I advise reviewing the annual calendar of the school in which the investigative study is going to be applied, in



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this way possible unforeseen events can be prevented and the activities to be developed can be better organized.

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### **Appendix 1**

Writing Rubric

Available upon request.

### **Appendix 2**

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

### **Appendix 3**

Open-ended survey

Available upon request.

### **Appendix 4**

Grades

Available upon request.

### **Appendix 5**

E-portfolio

Available upon request.