



The Impact of Self-Assessment to Enhance Writing Skills

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Currently, high school students have received online tutoring because of the pandemic, and as a result, that has caused issues in their studies. High school students tend to distract easily during online lessons, and do not try to apply their knowledge. Barrot et al. (2021) indicated that due to COVID-19, students experienced anxiety, boredom, sadness, and isolation, impacting how they learned.

One of the most complicated things to do during the pandemic was applying technology during the whole class, and for both teachers and students were necessary to learn how to use different apps and programs there. Barbour & Unger (2014, as cited in Dolighan & Owen, 2021) agreed that virtual teaching and computer-based instruction are substantially different from face-to-face practice and require different teaching training and preparation. According to Kamal & Illiyan (2021), for students, the lack of interaction with teachers in online classes, and a low motivation when studying at home, affect their performance in classes. Therefore, learning a new language became a more significant challenge for them, considering that communicating in English is difficult for students.

On the other hand, students need to contemplate that this language will be an essential tool in their future careers. Nishanthi (2018) agreed that English is a dominant language in sciences since most of the research and studies in any scientific field are written in it as well. In the same way, Adil (2022) pointed out that English is the most common and understandable language globally, and people who can speak and understand it can easily get a job in international companies. According to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education (2014), English is essential in order to interact and communicate in today's globalized world. That is why Ecuador is getting updated and

has implemented a curriculum that includes English as one of the main areas of study (Pinos-Medrano et al., 2018).

English has become a new challenge for teachers. Kiseleva and Pogosian (2021) agreed that managing students' behavior, maintaining discipline, and preserving students' attention during virtual classes is a new issue in pedagogy. That was a complete shock for teachers since the use of technology in the classroom was not so relevant in all the activities before the pandemic, and not all of them were used to applying it. While a number of teachers had experience teaching online, others had to pivot online for the first time to deliver instruction and engage students (Bird et al., 2021).

In general, for Spanish speakers, applying writing skills to communicate in L2 is demanding because in Spanish words are pronounced and spelled similarly unlike English. That is why teachers need to identify a suitable method to help them improve this skill so they can express their ideas accurately. "Generating correct sentences is an essential ability that learners should practice" (p.15). Gabrielatos (2002, as cited in Pihuave, 2021). This project was designed to enhance students' writing skills, applying techniques and strategies that help them through ideas, grammar explanation, experiences, and assessment to describe their own personal stories.

Using the above solution allows students to demonstrate their level of English because they will be able to explain their thoughts with a wide range of vocabulary and accurate grammar. Moreover, according to Adas and Bakir (2013), students could become independent learners and benefit a lot from innovative teaching techniques. That is why teaching English creatively would help students to improve their speaking ability.

Literature Review

According to Karim et al. (2018), as cited in Saher et al. (2022), authentic assessment refers to a “process that is based on reflection on teaching, learning, motivation, achievements of both teachers and students during the teaching and learning process” (p. 284). It can develop the students’ investigative side, allowing them to uncover by themselves their strengths and weaknesses, trying to figure out and enhance their misconceptions. Therefore, it will improve students’ participation and their autonomy. As stated by Aziz et al. (2020), “learners are given the experience to practise real-life problem-solving skills, communication and critical thinking in addition to collaboration and networking.” (p. 760).

As explained by Aliningsih and Sofwan (2015), some techniques that can be applied in authentic assessment are oral interviews, storytelling, writing samples, projects and exhibitions, self and peer assessment, observations and interviews. Barber (2014) stated that the application of authentic assessment requires careful planning, successful integration, and ongoing effort (p. 3).

Self-assessment allows students to self-evaluate their learning process based on criteria they have agreed on with the teacher. When students can assess their own learning, then we could say that they are effective learners. Students' self-assessment skills can enhance students’ self-efficacy in the tasks being performed (Panadero et al., 2016). It motivates them to analyze their own learning progress to show what they know and what they think they know. It helps students become autonomous learners as well. They can be responsible for their own learning, permitting them to develop their abilities more independently.

Boud (1995, as cited in Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013) agreed that self-assessment is a process by which students develop their learning skills. They can

associate different strategies that enhance their comprehension and capacity as well. By Hearn and McMillan (2008), “the development of learning skills occurs when students judge their own work to improve performance as they identify discrepancies between current and desired performances” (p.40).

However, some teachers are not used to involving students in this kind of assessment, and they assign grades without any explanation, which at times leads to a bad performance in the classroom. Ratminingsih et al. (2018), stated that "students get the score without understanding what mistakes they have done dealing with their work" (p.278). Conversely, teachers need to apply authentic assessment in their classrooms to develop students' thinking skills.

Self-assessment can be most effective when applied to maintain learning as formative assessment. Radjabova & Rakhmonova (2021) stated that formative assessment is “an on-going dynamic process of assessment for learning which helps teachers to detect students’ strengths and weaknesses” (p. 490). They also agreed that if formative assessment is used correctly, it can effectively enhance student learning.

It is necessary to consider that if there is not any improvement, the assessment is not meeting its objective because it does not warrant reflection on the work done (Alonso-Tapia & Baker, 2010, as cited in Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013). It is not advisable to reduce students’ self-assessment to any grade since students may focus on that instead of the real purpose of learning. Ward et al. (2002), agreed that reducing self-assessment to a score might not be as important to students’ self-assessment as focusing on the content-matter of that self-assessment.

To obtain good results through self-assessment educators should teach students how to use it properly. Daily practice identifying mistakes, and improving their skills, can give students the necessary confidence to use self-assessment accurately. Panadero

et al. (2016) and Ross (2006) pointed out that students who had been trained in evaluating their work have shown adequate consistency in their self-assessment and their academic performance. As explained by Ross et al. (1999 as cited in Ross, 2006) “agreement of teacher and student assessments are also higher when they have been taught how to assess their work” (p. 3).

There are mechanisms that may encourage students to evaluate themselves more effectively. First, it is important to set goals to clarify the purpose of the assessment. Students need to be explained the different purposes of self-assessment including understanding of the content and having evidence of progress and skill development (Wride, 2017 as cited in Bueno, 2021). Another important thing is to provide examples of good performance before applying it to them; as a result, they would be able to do it better. Also, giving students some opportunities to assess themselves can reduce the gap between their ongoing production and the desired one.

There are designs that may help improve students’ self-assessment. The first one implies applying self-evaluating prompts, in which students must analyze their activities according to given criteria. Then, students complete those ideas and, as they do so, analyze their work. It can be task-oriented and evaluative to reflect on the processes they have done to reach their goals.

Another way to apply self-assessment is using a traffic light. Following Clarke (2005, as cited in McMillan, 2013) “this method indicates readiness to proceed or quality of understanding. Depending on the color, it can show either comprehension (green) or difficulty (red)” (p. 369). Finally, a rubric can be a very useful tool for guiding students’ self-assessment. As Andrade (2000, as cited in Andrade, 2007) explained, “a rubric is a document that lists criteria and describes levels of quality, from

excellent to poor” (p.2). It also provides an opportunity for students to see exactly how they performed on the different sections of the rubric.

One of the biggest problems in the practice of self-assessment is that students tend to overestimate their achievements. As a result, students can rate their performance higher than the teacher. On the other hand, another problem can be that students may resist self-assessment because they are not confident enough to assess themselves. Another challenge can be data interpretation. According to Bueno (2021), it can happen when students fail to understand the rubric, or the criteria have not been deeply socialized among both teachers and students.

Innovation

An innovation can help create more independent learners who feel motivated to get their desired results. This innovation implied using self-assessment to improve their writing skills in English, where students had to describe situations in the past in detail.

This procedure is described in detail in a lesson plan (see Appendix A). Students had to learn to write short paragraphs describing different situations, trying to improve their grammatical skills in each activity with their self-assessment. It was part of a learning unit of four weeks with synchronous and asynchronous activities.

At the beginning of the innovation, students learned how to evaluate themselves and identify potential mistakes with the help of a checklist (see Appendix B). Then, it was necessary to practice analyzing each checklist parameter with different paragraphs. Finally, in the following activities, students were able to assess themselves. Then, each week, students learned a specific topic necessary for their final task.

In the first week, students also reviewed grammar rules related to simple past tense, regular and irregular verbs, and structures. After that, they observed some pictures, and they had to develop new ideas about them. In the second week, students

continued practicing with the checklist, and they also focused on locations, identifying prepositions of place in different situations.

The last two weeks were focused on the organization of a story. In the third week, they learned how to describe a text by using linking words both to connect their ideas and to present a coherent text. In the fourth week, they concentrated on learning how to structure a paragraph correctly, trying to determine a clear beginning, middle, and ending, as well as establishing both the main and supporting ideas. Finally, they applied self-assessment using the checklist which they consulted in every practice during this period.

Research Methodology

This study is action research since the author oversaw all aspects of the innovation. Action research is a spiral process that includes problem investigation, acting and fact-finding the result of an action (Lesha, 2014; Lufungulo et al., 2021). One of the important things about action research is that it allows teachers to study their own students and their own assessment to understand the process to improve their efficacy in the classroom.

The design for this Action Research project used both quantitative and qualitative data to investigate how self-assessment ameliorated their writing skills. This action research project was conducted in a private school in Santa Rosa - El Oro.

Participants

The candidates who participated in this project were students of the 1st. year of high school. They were between 15 and 16 years old. There were twelve of them at the beginning of the school period, but just ten finished the whole process and they were the ones included in the analysis. Out of those ten students, six were female, and four were male. They were born in Ecuador, and they live in Santa Rosa - El Oro. Therefore, their

native language is Spanish. This group of participants showed a satisfactory level of English since they have been part of a design that the high school has been developing for the last four years, which consists of dividing students into groups according to their English level. The students are in the A2 level within the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

Instruments

The instruments applied in this research were the pre-test and the post-test. These instruments help the researcher answer the following question: *Does the implementation of self-assessment influence Writing Skills among first year of high school students in a private school in Santa Rosa - El Oro?* To measure students' writing proficiency, they had to describe their last Christmas vacation before the innovation process. It was considered pre-test data. As the final activity, they had to write a paragraph about their best trip in Ecuador, applying all the topics taught in the innovation. It was considered post-test data.

The researcher implemented a rubric (see Appendix C) based on the checklist to evaluate students' performance. According to the Northern Illinois University Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning (2012), a rubric is a set of criteria used for assessing a type of work or performance. It aims to grade more objectively because it provides more details than a single grade.

This rubric contained the following components: content, organization, and language. It also had five different bands which graded students' writing according to their performance in a range of zero and ten, with zero being the lowest score and ten being the highest.

2.3.1 Content grading rubric. The content section was used to quantify if all the content could keep the readers fully informed. In the rubric, a zero corresponded

to “Content is totally irrelevant.” A five corresponded to “All the content is relevant to the task.” which means that the writer included everything that the task needed.

2.3.2 Organization grading rubric. The organization section was used to quantify if the ideas were well-connected, and the text was easy to understand. In the rubric, a zero corresponded to “The writer does not know how to apply linking words.” A five corresponded to “All the text is connected and coherent.” which means that the text is not difficult to understand.

2.3.3 Language grading rubric. The language section was used to quantify good management of grammar and vocabulary. In the rubric, a zero corresponded to “The text is not understandable.” which means that the writer mixed the tenses and the text impeded meaning. A five corresponded to “All the text shows good management of vocabulary.” which means that there was a wide variety of adjectives and prepositions that showed accuracy.

The researcher also applied an interview with the group of students to have a broad idea about the effect of self-assessment. As Gallagher-Brett (2019) explained, interviews allow participants to show their thoughts on their own ideas. It can help the researcher obtain new directions in the action research. This interview helped the researcher answer the following question: *Which was the most enriching part of the innovation process according to these students’ perspective?*

Data Analysis

To evaluate the effectiveness of self-assessment on English language writing grades, a paired sample *t*-test was accomplished to report the first research question: *Does the implementation of self-assessment influence Writing Skills among first year of high school students in a private school of Santa Rosa - El Oro?* The paired-sample *t*-

test was used to make a comparison between the pre-test and post-test. The analysis was done in Microsoft Excel with the Analytics Tool Kit.

Descriptive statistics were carried out: mean, minimum, maximum and standard deviation. Inferential statistics were implemented. The *p*-value was calculated as well. The researcher also conducted an interview to analyze students' points of view. It helped report the second research question: *Which was the most enriching part of the innovation process according to these students' perspective?* After obtaining their responses, that data was analyzed to identify whether they improved their writing or learned how to apply self-assessment.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are part of the design and conduct of the research process (McKellar & Toth, 2016). In addition, as this research involves younger students, it is necessary to consider ethical issues such as consent, confidentiality, and anonymity (Goredema-Braid, 2010). Therefore, the application of this innovation needed authorization from the school (see Appendix D) and parents (see Appendix E), who were asked for consent in order to preserve students' integrity.

The researcher considered important that all the students were aware of the purpose and consequences of this research project in order to understand all the process. Salkind (2010), agreed that the process should be informed consent, to protect each participants' welfare and to promote positive feelings before and after completing a study. In this case, both authorities and participants knew that the purpose of this investigation was academic.

Results

To respond to the first research question: *Does the implementation of self-assessment influence Writing Skills among first year of high school students in a private*

school of Santa Rosa - El Oro? Means and standard deviations were used as descriptive methods to explore the data. Furthermore, the *t*-test was used as an inferential method to reject or not reject the hypothesis of equality of means in two populations.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of pre- test and post-test

	N	Min	Max	M	PI	SD	p value
Pre-test	10	4.33	8.67	6.67	26.94%	4.195	0.00092
Post-test	10	7.67	10	9.13		2.010	
Valid N	10						

Note: N=Sample, Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum, M=Mean, PI=Percentage of improvement, SD= Standard deviation.

Table 1 shows a significant percentage of improvement in their writing skills comparing the results of both the pre-test and post-test, which shows the students' enhancement in the final activity. This also means that the innovation helped them have a better accomplishment with a 26.94% improvement. The bilateral *p*-value is 0.00092, less than 0.005. Therefore, there was a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Additionally, the standard deviation in the pre-test shows more variability, which means that students' grades were sundry. On the other hand, the standard deviation in the post-test is lower, which means that after applying the innovation process, students' grades behave similarly.

Comparison of the components in the Pre-test and Post-test.

According to the data that was collected from the innovation process, students showed a significant improvement in each component. The organization shows the highest development from 6.2 to 9.3, representing 33.33% of improvement. Content

also evidences an increase, from 7.7 to 9.9. Even though, 7.7 is not a bad average, students applied new techniques to improve their level by 22.22%. Language also has an increment from 6.1 to 8.2, representing 25.61%. The results were obtained after analyzing the pre-test and the post-test results.

To respond to the second research question: *Which was the most enriching part of the innovation process according to these students' perspective?* The researcher applied an interview where the students were able to give their points of view about this project which revealed an important level of acceptability and, at the same time, improvement in their level of knowledge. Furthermore, there are a couple of fragments from the learning records which show several students' positive perspective.

“It has been a dynamic process so that learning was achieved without being a monotonous class.” (S.2)

“What I liked the most was that I was able to improve my writing and I was able to see a change in the texts I wrote before with the ones I write now.” (S.5)

“It was the learning process and everyone's participation in the program.” (S.9)

Even though, the analysis of the interviews showed a positive result, there were also opinions that are important to consider for future research. The following extracts show the difficulties that students found in the innovation process. Students had not major complications with the self-assessment process, but they had issues with the writing skill.

“The part of the process that was the most complicated for me was writing the texts following the structure, since I had to check my text to see if I put everything and if I didn't miss anything.” (S. 5).

“Learning how to use "supporting ideas" because whenever I wrote I always went to the point, and I didn't feel like writing anything else.” (S. 3).

“The most complicated part I had during the program was when we learned about connectors because it seemed complicated to try to make the ideas fit together and be connected.” (S. 9).

After the interview, the teacher asked the candidates if they would participate in a learning process like this again and 90% of the students answered affirmatively, and 10% indicated they were not sure. It means that students welcomed this innovation process. By the end of the fourth week, they were able to apply self-assessment with more confidence and use it correctly.

Discussion

The positive results that were obtained in this research encourage the researcher to continue considering English as an area that can produce bilingual professionals to perform anywhere in the world. As Adil (2022) indicated, people who speak English can easily get a job in international companies.

Findings in this study have shown results that demonstrate what Boud (1995, as cited in Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013) said, self-assessment is a process by which students develop their learning skills. Additionally, results supported Panadero et al. (2016) and Ross (2006), who pointed out that trained students who apply self-assessment show adequate consistency in their academic performance.

At the end of this process, students learned how to use a checklist, which also helped them develop their ability to use self-assessment. As Andrade (2007) said, it allowed them to describe the level of quality, from excellent to poor. In addition, it is an opportunity for students to see how they will perform in different activities. Furthermore, after analyzing the data obtained in the interview, it is possible to confirm what Panadero et al. (2016) and Ross (2006) said about students who had been trained

in evaluating their work. The results of the interview showed that they were able to identify their weaknesses as well as improve their academic performance.

Conclusions

This innovation had relevant benefits. First, it showed how to apply different strategies to teach a skill. Also, how self-assessment enhances language skills, in this case, writing. Students improved their abilities after receiving their feedback on the results. It means that an innovation is a helpful method that should be applied with English-learning groups.

Regarding the first research question, which explored the impact of self-assessment on writing skills, the analysis showed a significant gain in writing skills through self-assessment practices. It can show how self-assessment helps students to engage in the writing process. By encouraging students to complete self-assessment, teachers can turn them into active learners instead of passive learners, situation that became quite common due to the pandemic.

Regarding the second research question, which required the researcher to interpret students' points of view, this innovation helped students to improve their writing skill because they learned to describe stories by applying different techniques such as writing paragraphs to identify mistakes, apply punctuation and to structure paragraphs properly, as well as grammar exercises to recognize the correct use of tenses that allowed them to be more organized and precise with the information they wanted to share.

To summarize, this innovation demonstrates the importance of finding new teaching and learning methods, trying to involve students effectively in order to have dynamic classes and a high level of students' participation either with group activities or practicing self-assessment.

Limitations

At the beginning of this planning, twelve students accepted to be part of the innovation process. However, they could not attend most lessons, and it was difficult for them to join later because of the order of activities.

The first challenge was to organize with the participants was the time because they attended lessons from 7:30 to 13:00, and during class periods, they were kind of tired. Moreover, another thing related to time was the project schedule since this innovation took place in November and December, coinciding with their projects at school and the celebration of Christmas. Therefore, this could have affected the students' concentration during the process.

The length of the activities was a complication as well. At times, they were long and time-consuming, which could be explained by the fact that learners are likely to get distracted during online sessions.

Recommendations

This research project would have showed more accurate results if it had counted with a larger number of participants. Additionally, it would also be recommendable to replicate this process in face-to-face classes since teachers may apply more activities and all students' attention.

Future researchers need to organize their schedule carefully to get a clearer idea of how the innovation can be developed with the purpose of achieving better results. Furthermore, they should look for shorter activities to practice in class to have more opportunities to concentrate on self-assessment learning and giving feedback during the entire process.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Self-assessment checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix D

School Authorization

Available upon request.

Appendix E

Consent letter

Available upon request.

Appendix F

Instructional design of units for transfer of learning to real life contexts.

Available upon request.

Appendix G

E-Portfolio

Available upon request.