



**Peer-Assessment to Improve Writing Skills in A2 Level Students in a
Virtual Classroom**

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At a public higher education institution, evaluating and grading students' written English during online classes has become a challenging task. Nowadays, students have presented negative factors such as limited learners' proficiency to write their ideas, a lack of prior knowledge of English, learners' reliance on the teacher, limited communication in English usage outside of the classroom, learners' lack of perseverance to improve on writing skills, and others.

Writing skills, which are extensively employed to improve second language understanding, help to overcome the barriers to enhance communication. Writing also helps to improve fluency, allows a better knowledge of sentence structures, and gets a better connecting vocabulary learned and grammar words in phrases.

Some adult students lack the confidence to write in English during virtual sessions. Students find difficult to develop some learning techniques, which became a significant obstacle in class, these are some of the setbacks that this study tried to face.

According to Pianta et al. (2012), "different results have shown that peer feedback and a backup learning environment are instruments which help to student's learning, getting them the opportunity to intervene in improve measures on their learning" (p.6). In this action research, the primary goal is to increase students' English language ability through peer assessment using the Moodle platform.

Literature Review

The Writing Skills

Writing is a mean of communication that can help us to have good socialization; we can express our idea, feeling, and our opinion through written language (Jayanti,

2019). It implies that the language is produced both orally and in writing. People frequently utilize language for communicative purposes. This ability is necessary for developing effective communication skills with others. Students must grasp writing in order to acquire a second language and deal with real-world problems. According to Dar and Khan (2015), writing is the most challenging area in learning second language. It is based on appropriate and strategic use of language with structural accuracy and communicative potential, additionally writing skill is the most difficult part to master when studying a foreign language. That is because students need ideas and thought to write, but learn a second language must also pay attention to components such as vocabulary, grammar, and punctuation to represent those thoughts.

Writing as a skill provides students with the potential to obtain many other benefits that can help them thrive in their academic pursuits, careers, and other aspects of their lives. Its significance increases when it comes to writing in the English language which is extensively used for global mediation of knowledge (Marlina & Giri, 2014).

According to the explanations above, writing is a process of organizing thoughts in which the writer is supposed to be creative in employing language abilities to produce a written document. Writing boosts thinking and learning to guide communication by presenting concepts and ideas in a visible and physical form.

Moodle in Developing Writing Ability

Moodle is a platform designed for asynchronous repository-based assignments. The forums are designed to help students to improve their writing skills. It can be constrained to a specified deadline, resulting in more straightforward, less speculative responses. Students can use the website to submit assignments. According to Gilakjani (2017), "Technology integration is defined in terms of how teachers use it to perform

familiar activities more effectively, and students found understandable learning on a deeper and more in integrated level” (p. 5).

According to Chaparro et al. (2020), Moodle has a student-centered design, facilitating peer-assessment and interactions between students and instructors, as well as among students in the virtual classroom. This evaluation allows students to construct a criterion through relevant peer learning on the Moodle platform.

Fransey and Siahaan (2021) mentioned that the effectiveness of Moodle in acquisition of students' English argumentation writing skills, showed significant results, where there is an increase in the educational activity and student learning outcomes of the English Education Study Program, backing up Moodle's influence on improving writing skills in online classrooms.

Peer-Assessment

Based on Boztunç et al. (2019), “Formalized peer education has great potential in terms of enhancing learning effectiveness” (p. 11). The goal of peer assessment is to offer students an overview of their learning process and to help them enhance their knowledge. Peer-assessment is an arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners (Topping, 2009).

Some authors have researched the effect of peer-assessment, for example: according to De Grez et al. (2012), students indicated having observed significant learning gains as a result of being engaged in peer-assessment. Based to Li and Chen (2016), “peer-assessment involves students making judgments and commenting about peers’ work” (p. 11).

Logan (2009) indicated that peer-assessment gives students a better understanding of assessment criteria and leads to deeper learning. Students who have fulfilled the assessment standards can create a proper learning process. As Cacay (2022) noted, “learners might become more active and reflective in their work by engaging with their peers” (p. 3). Peer assessment has been used to connect and to enhance students’ engagement at the same time elevate their learning capabilities.

Peer-Assessment to Improve Writing

Peer-assessment through online spaces can be as effective for improving students’ writing as face-to-face peer review (Lu & Law, 2012). Peer assessment is most effective when students are guided to focus on their classmates' ideas rather than sentence-level corrections. It makes students more conscious of audiences other than the teacher. It also assists mates in developing meta cognitive awareness and management of their writing processes.

Peer-assessment enhances writing with training and practice. Students align with other assessors' results. Meek et al. (2017) reported that “a higher level of motivation, sense of confidence in personal abilities, and engagement as the result of students’ attitude changes due to peer-assessment.” (p. 6).

Peer evaluation inspires students to develop their writing abilities while making them more aware of and responsible for their classes. Peer work increases the motivation of the students, which helps to improve their writing skills (Li & Chen, 2016).

In a study carried out by Mosmery and Barzegar (2015) integration of Peer-assessment methods in writing instruction let the students get some corrective feedback to correct their errors in writing, which gives them little anxiety compared to the

teacher's feedback. Students worked on the forum on the Moodle platform, becoming active participants in activities rather than passive users just working on exercises from the book website; Working on writing exercises allowed students to develop essential skills in the target language. Additionally, the teacher's feedback supported students output showing them where the mistakes were.

Backward design

Understanding by Design is an approach to designing a plan where lessons, units, and courses should be logically inferred from the outcomes sought to achieve specific outcomes (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). It has a scope, and it is critical to have a curriculum design in which the plans, units, and courses maintain a learning process that produces and get meaningful results.

Innovation

The innovation consisted of students applying peer-assessment to improve writing skills. During the innovation it was faced some aspects like academic limitation in the writing activities was lack of connectivity due to most students' location. Getting used to work in the platform was also another massive obstacle for students; the majority did not understand how to work correctly with the different resources available on the Moodle platform

The A2 level in a Language Center relates to the level specified at the start of the innovation. This innovation began on the second weekend of April 2021 and lasted four weeks (See Appendix 1). It included synchronous classes on the Zoom video-conferencing technology and asynchronous activities on the Moodle platform. Four hours per week were set aside for synchronous Zoom meetings with a group of thirty-five students and six hours for independent work. The teacher demonstrated how to use

the peer assessment and grade each rubric component during the first week. After learning how to peer-assess, learners were encouraged to produce short compositions, peer-assess each other and correct their tasks.

Students became acquainted with the Moodle platform after being given instructions on how to use it. It was easy to them because they have been using Moodle for more than one year. The activities that requires other platforms like Padlet or Canva, were used to students felt motivated in the writing process.

Research Methodology

The current research report is action research because it sought to alter current writing practices. Action research is evidence-based changes to improve the set of study, whether it is for teaching practice or learning process (Hunter, 2017). A2 students were introduced to peer-evaluation in order to boost their writing productivity. The following research questions were posed in the current study:

1. Would the deployment of Peer-Assessment with the assistance of a digital platform improve the Writing skills of A2 students in a virtual classroom?
2. How do students feel about this innovation?

Participants

There were thirty-five students in the class, 14 males and 21 females; all of them were registered at a public technological institute in Daule, Guayas, Ecuador. This school provides technical careers with English classes as part of the curriculum. The ages were in the range from 18 to 39. According to CEFR standards, the participants' language level was A2, meaning they could write isolated sentences about people and

locations and interact fundamentally. Therefore, all students were entitled to take part in this initiative.

Instruments

The innovation began with a pre-test and ended four weeks later with a post-test. Many studies in the literature, like Jönsson and Balan (2018) suggest that “the analytic rubric is expected to create a common frame of reference among the raters, thereby improves rater reliability.” (p. 6). This study aims to search to measure the impact of peer-assessment using a rubric to improve writing skills in higher educational students.

The grading criteria are divided into content, organization, and language. The scale went from 1 to 5, with one being the lowest and five being the highest (See Appendix 2). It was designed following the objectives stated in the backward design principles and approved by a Casa Grande University expert.

Students conducted a pre-test and posttest in which their writing was about a friendly letter to their family about what they enjoy doing in their leisure time. The teacher then used the scoring rubric to determine the students' final grades and contrasted the outcomes of this innovation.

During the process also was taken field notes, the researcher wrote down his observation about the students' progress and most relevant points, it was not used a specific format to take the field notes. The results of the survey and the field notes are going to be analyzed to answer the second research question: how do students feel about this innovation? Survey information and the notes taken by the teacher, would clarify the students' feeling during the innovation process.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to examine students' writing abilities before and after the implementation of peer assessment in a virtual classroom. A paired-samples *t*-test was used to investigate the effect of peer-assessment grades. Likewise, for the results obtained comparing the pretest and posttest, it was analyzed the mean, minimum, maximum, mode and standard deviation. Maravelakis (2019) said "The first step in any statistical analysis is the use of descriptive statistics to present the data and try to identify any kind of trends, relationships or abnormal behavior" (p. 89). When comparing the pretest and posttest findings, descriptive statistics were run using excel.

Ethical Considerations

This action research was guided by ethical considerations from start to finish to ensure its integrity. The objective of this study's pedagogical goals and actions were ensured. Beforehand the implementation of this innovation, it was asked for the authorization of the principal of the higher educational institution, who gave the permission. In this study was not necessary to ask for parents' authorization because all the students were adults. It was informed to the students of the innovation, and they agreed to participate, it was not necessarily written permission because of the condition of adults of the students, avoiding the problem identified by Huang et al. (2007) "Seeking individual informed consent may lead to serious selection bias and may compromise the external validity of the research if the consent pattern is not uniform" (p. 2).

The exercises and seminars were held at specific times to help them improve their writing skills. The pupils were informed about the invention and agreed to take part. Arifi (2018) mentioned:

It is responsibility of researchers to ensure participants to have power of freedom of choice to involve in the study, protect the participants' identity throughout recruitment and dissemination process, and promote clear and honest research reporting without deception to readers. (p. 32).

This was followed in the research, the results were showed to the institution and to the students.

The confidentiality was respected, keeping the learners' results and their names under anonymity. The instructional plans were implemented correctly, and the data collecting and analysis results were accurate. Students felt comfortable working on the Moodle platform to generate their assessments, works, and comments.

Results

The most outstanding pretest score was 8.50 out of 10, while the lowest grade was 5.00. The post-test resulted in a maximum score of 10 and a minimum score of 8.50. Table 1 shows the results of the pre-and posttests.

A mean difference of 2.24 is the increase in post-test evaluations for a sample of 36 people. Furthermore, the calculated standard deviation values for the pretest and posttests show that the data is concentrated near the mean. Because the p -value is less than 5%, or less than 0.05, the innovation is statistically significant, showing that the sample improved after using peer-assessment.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Pre-test and Post-test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	36	5.00	8.50	6.7900	.88522
Post test	36	7.50	10.00	9.0300	.67554

Students peer-assessed and used the Moodle tool during the innovation, scores were different in both tests, with a marked increase in post-test. Both resources influence how students learn, even though using rubrics and peer-assessment were difficult for them, the practicing in class helped in the use of these tools. Nonetheless, the peer review was positively accepted by all. Peer-assessment learning was complicated for the students. However, after the first weekend of class and several activities, students effectively implemented peer assessment in each activity.

Students using the Moodle platform had similar issues since several initially denied using it. Students could only use it and understand its significance in peer assessment after multiple rounds of practice and handling. Students developed their skills and felt more secure if they provide comments to their peers and use the rubrics to fix their writing assignments.

Discussion

The findings show that peer assessment can help students improve their writing skills. Concerning the research question: Would the deployment of Peer-Assessment with the assistance of a digital platform improve the Writing skills of A2 students in a virtual classroom?

Students are now aware of the need to peer-assess their writing skills. As explained by Lu and Law (2012) “when students are asked to provide both comments and ratings for peers papers in online environments, they increase their metacognitive understanding of writing and use the feedback to produce higher-quality drafts” (p. 13). The results of this research showed that students improve in the different scales of their writing skill (content, organization, and language), agreeing with this state.

The use of the rubrics helped students to enhance their writing skills, rubrics explain the students what they need to accomplish, how they are going to be evaluated, and this make students focus on what is really necessary, this align with Jönsson and Balan (2018) who suggested that rubrics create a common frame of reference among the raters, thereby improves the results of the students.

Boztunç et al. (2019) mentioned that a positive high correlation exists between ability estimations calculated according to scores given by the peers, and by the instructor for both via, analytic rubric and general impression scoring methods. This was confirmed in this research, students peer-feedback, and their corresponding peer-assessment, gave their partners the tools to improve their writing skills, and consequently got better grades.

Peer-assessment helped learners gain confidence and build and enhance their writing skills by practicing in various forums and forums using Moodle features, the practice that students made during this innovation were enhancing through the different tasks they were doing. This research confirmed that peer-assessment with the use of a rubric improve writing skills of A2 students in a virtual classroom.

Conclusions

Conclusions show that learners can and do evaluate peer writing activities under the teacher's supervision. Although adult learners have a clear concept of peer assessment, the teacher's dissemination of criteria will be required to create the proper path for enhancing students' production.

The findings of this study show that peer evaluation can be utilized as an alternative to developing a new method of evaluation. It improves learners' ability to communicate their points of view and receive peer opinions with corrections. As a

result, learners are more responsible for their development in learning English skills in order to gain the knowledge they seek.

Limitations

The idea was only used in one virtual course. One of the constraints was that most students lived in rural areas, which indicates exceptionally inadequate internet connectivity. Some students could not access digital tools to work at home and submit homework. However, the most severe issue with the study was a lack of desire or a negative attitude toward the English language, and this was the participants' lack of confidence in their ability to appraise their peers. The learners' lack of confidence in their capabilities of writing in English is in their views as they do not implement it in their everyday routine.

Recommendations

For English lessons where students have restricted access to technology, it was suggested to develop asynchronous exercises in online applications reasonably so that students can find a location where they can access the internet. Create a plan or some classes on how to use platforms in public universities to improve students' knowledge because many of them cannot do it independently.

Interviews can assist researchers in understanding how peer assessment helps students improve their writing and discover why students may have a negative attitude toward the language. It would also assist the researcher in understanding how students' study between pre-test, peer-assessment, and post-test time points. It was recommended to record a class to add to the Moodle platform and allow students to watch the information explaining step by step.

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Appendix 1

Lesson plan.

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric for Innovation

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Consent Letter

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Portfolio

Available upon request.