



Self-Assessment and its Impact on Writing Skills

Paola Omayra Gómez Cervantes

Coordinator: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

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Self-Assessment and its Impact on Writing Skills

Writing is a skill EFL students in high school must develop, especially since it is a prerequisite in most undergraduate degree programs both locally and internationally. The English programs in private and public high schools in Ecuador follow the Ministerio de Educación EFL National Curriculum standards, oriented to develop the four skills based on the Common European Framework of Reference. However, writing does not always receive the time and attention it requires within a lesson. As a result, students do not get enough practice (Heidarian, 2016). Moreover, they do not get to reflect, think, make mistakes, and learn from them (Taufik & Cahyono, 2019). Hence, teachers focus on the time-consuming nature of assessing and evaluating the student products without considering that students could assess their own work. They decide to cover mostly informative text types without getting to more work on complex text types such as argumentative essays.

A group of students, from sections A and B in 11th grade, has issues with writing. This is evidenced by not applying the vocabulary required for the subject and task, writing with little sentence variety, the limited mastery of the various conjugations of verbs in the simple and past tense, and the lack of organization and structure essays require. Hence, a study will be conducted to analyze the impact of self-assessment on students' writing skills. The group is formed by 15 high school students ages 15 to 18 in eleventh grade in a private German school in Samborondón, Ecuador. These participants have never studied English according to their levels, and their school implements an integrated skills-based English program. Also, according to the FCE mock test results, their proficiency ranges from B1 to C1.

This study focused a specific kind of product, written essays, which according to the Council of Europe (2018), entail complex topics, distinguishing one's viewpoints from those in the sources, and expositions with effective logical structures. A level B2 learner can

“Write an essay or report that develops an argument systematically with appropriate highlighting of significant points and relevant supporting detail” (p. 77). However, it cannot be paralleled with the Ecuadorian English Standards of written production since “the highest-level students are expected to reach when they finish high school is B1” (Ministerio de Educación, 2012, p. 9).

Literature Review

Before addressing, the problem is important to understand the theories that affect writing. Thus, this section will focus on the theories that support self-assessment to improve writing as well as the theories that complement this study.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of self-assessment on students' writing skills. On the other hand, Second Language Acquisition, Communicative Language Teaching and learning, Social Constructivism as well as Metacognition were also approached in this study.

Since this study focuses on writing which is a productive skill, it was essential to analyze how Second Language acquisition Theory (SLA) addresses output and self-assessment. Swain and Lapking (1995), proposed that the importance of output is that it pushes learners to process language more deeply and with more mental effort. Swain (1985, p.249) also asserted that “producing in the target language may lead students to notice the linguistic resources they lack to express or encode an intended meaning, which was the aim of this research.” Moreover, according to Lessard-Clouston (2018), true output through means of writing is inherently communicative. About self-assessment, Meihami and Varmaghani (2013) claimed that SLA theory embraces self-assessment as a tool for motivating, enhancing learning, and helping students to regulate themselves.

Furthermore, the theory that underpins this innovation is Social Constructivism owing to its main principle that brings about human interaction as the foundation of development and learning (Vygotsky, as cited by Woolfolk, 2017). In the context of this study, this refers

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to oral and written interactions between students through flexible grouping, and between teachers and students. In addition, Taufik and Cayono (2019) included group and class discussions as part of the self-assessment strategy to improve writing. Vygotsky also pointed out that collaboration with more capable peers as well as adult guidance could take students from their current state development toward reaching transfer goals. He called distance between these two, the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, as cited by Kern, 2000).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was implemented in the design of the innovation lesson plan as part of the process of attaining the research objective. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000, p.128), “it enables students to communicate in the target language, getting to master its forms, meanings, and functions by using the target language in a great deal of communicative activities.” In addition, Richards (2006) stated that most CLT activities must be designed to be performed in pairs or in groups to fulfill their communicative purposes. Finally, Richards (2006, p.22) also claimed that “Language learning is facilitated by both, activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.” Consequently, these kinds of activities were included in the innovation.

The current study focused on developing writing skills in EFL high school students who are around a year away from their journey to pursuing a college degree or becoming part of the country’s workforce. Concerning this, Cömert and Kutlu (2018) stated that writing enables students to benefit and produce academic publications as well as become qualified workers after graduation. Additionally, Hasanah (2015) maintained that among the four skills, writing might be the most complex to master since this productive skill demands mastery of components such as grammar, organization, vocabulary and content to develop ideas. Additionally, Hefferenan et al. (2001, as cited by Mat & Par, 2022), stated that writing is the foundation of education and a prerequisite for any academic discipline. Furthermore, Oshima

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et al. (2007, as cited by Febriyanti et al., 2018) mentioned that written production has four steps called prewriting, organizing, writing, and polishing. These ideas have been considered in the lesson plan as well as in the assessment rubric.

This research aims to determine whether self-assessment has a positive impact on the development of writing skills using a rubric. Richards and Renandya (2002) indicated that self-assessment is the first step to understand our weaknesses, which must be followed by making and executing a plan to address them and conclude with its evaluation. Moreover, Harus (2022) pointed out that through self-assessment, the quality of students' writing might improve by being aware of the essential requirements of writing as well as the standards against which their work will be graded. Also, Fathi and Khodabakhsh (2019) asserted that through self-assessment, writers integrate the criteria in the rubric for making their own revisions to refine their writing. Andrade (2019) indicated that the self-assessment is meant to generate feedback that promotes learning and improves performance. Finally, Wisnu and Pradana (2020) pointed out that self-assessment must be student focused so that it does not lose its efficacy. On this account, it is crucial that the research participants fully comprehend their self-assessment process; consequently, the features of their written product.

Self-assessment requires metacognitive strategies and reflection to be implemented. About the role of self-assessment in reflection, Ghoorchaei and Tavakoli (2019) indicated that self-assessment has a major role in shaping and directing the reflective process. Furthermore, Ratminingsih et al., (2018) pointed out that self-assessment can be a metacognitive process students use along with active cognition to interact with new ideas. McMillan and Hearn (2008) indicated that self-assessment promotes the awareness of how and when to use metacognitive strategies.

Similarly, according to McMillan and Hearn (2008), metacognition entails knowing how to monitor, evaluate and adjust to improve performance due to mastering cognitive skills. Consequently, metacognitive strategies have been considered to make self-assessment

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more effective, with the limitation that students must fully comprehend the descriptors in the rubric to be able to assess their own work. Hence, they must be trained to do it.

Thus, two main questions have been determined for this research:

1. How does the use of self-assessment improve the students' writing skills?
2. What are the students' perceptions about self-assessment with a rubric?

Innovation

The innovation comprised self-assessment facilitated by a rubric to improve writing skills. It came about within a regular unit that lasted nine teaching hours throughout three weeks. The participants were provided with essential vocabulary, language, and organization tools as well as communicative activities that mostly integrated the four skills. The innovation's instructional scheme was planned with reference to backward design (Appendix 1). Students delivered three versions of the same essay and received teacher feedback in form of comments in Turnitin (Appendix 2). In parallel, students self-assessed them.

The objective of planning with backward design was to circumscribe all the activities to reach the transfer goals. Having established this point, the assessment methods were selected along with the tasks and activities to be included in the unit plan with the critical focus on acquisition, meaning making and the transfer goal that involved writing skills. The aim is for students to apply writing skills in any other context of their lives.

The first part of the innovation consisted of teaching students to understand how to assess their essays with the assistance of a rubric (Appendix 3). In the first week of the innovation, students analyzed the descriptors in the writing rubric. Also, participants practiced assessing essays comparing different exemplars. Finally, students analyzed the final examiner grade and comments in the essays exemplars and compared their assessment and comments with the feedback these examiners had provided. The two weeks that followed, students developed writing activities in addition to pair and group work. Subsequently,

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students wrote two essay drafts, assessed them comparing their assessment with the teacher's comments.

The writing rubric (Appendix 3) students used for self-assessment included the following criteria: vocabulary, language, and organization. Students also used a grammar toolbox and an essay structure scaffolding. Moreover, three reflective logs (Appendix 4) were also done to enhance metacognition and help them reflect on the steps to follow to improve their essay writing using self-assessment.

Research Methodology

This study is categorized as Action Research (AR) since the author is involved. Moreover, even if AR is qualitative in nature, quantitative data has been gathered. Mertler (2019, p. 23) adduced that "this kind of research has a transformative nature oriented to social learning and change." Hence, the idea is to exert change and expect that the process and results help others exert change as well. Similarly, according to Mertler (2019, p.28), this methodology "takes place in different settings and levels." In this case, the study was conducted at a private German-international high school in Samborondón

Participants

The sample of participant students was taken from a class of Theory of Knowledge for the IB Diploma Program. The sample size is 15, formed by 9 males and 6 females, since this is the number of students whose parents' demonstrated agreement through signing the participation in the written consent form. The average age of this group is 16 years old, and the study was executed in the regular three class periods allocated to this subject and class per week over the course of three weeks. Furthermore, according to an FCE mock ran as a diagnostic test, at the beginning of the school year, their English proficiency ranges from B1 to C1.

The objective of this study is finding cogent results for the research questions. Hence, it was expected that students got higher grades in the post-test than in the pre-test. It was also

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expected that they managed to conduct a self-assessment and end up having a favorable perception about the use of self-assessment applying a rubric to refine their writing skills.

Instruments

The instruments in this research were designed to gather essential information to answer the following research questions: 1. How does the use of self-assessment improve the EFL students' writing skills? and, 2. What are the students' perceptions about self-assessment with a rubric? This study has self-assessment using a rubric as independent variable and essay writing as the dependent variable.

In relation to the first research question, for the pretest and posttest; students had to write and improve an essay in response to the same metacognitive prescribed title. To assess it, the teacher designed a rubric with three criteria: Vocabulary; Language, and Organization. Each criterion considered the references in the B2 description for productive writing skills in the Common European Framework of Reference, as well as the content found on most very good Theory of Knowledge essays. The initial results were expected to reach a maximum of 7 points that would increase at least in 2 points after the first draft has been self-assessed.

a. In the Vocabulary criterion, highest mark included using specific number of TOK concepts, elements, and terms, while the lowest mark included a significantly lower number. See the rubric in Appendix 3.

b. In the Language criterion, the highest mark is described as using simple, compound and compound-complex sentences effectively, conjugating all variations of simple and past tense and making few errors, while the lowest mark is described as using simple sentences, having difficulty conjugating verbs in simple and past tense and also making several errors. See the rubric in Appendix 3.

c. In the Organization criterion, the highest mark is described as including all the elements of an essay effectively, while the lowest mark is described as not including all the elements of an essay effectively. See the rubric in Appendix 3.

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Each criterion had a maximum of five points each, to get the general mark of 15. For scoring reliability, a teacher validator chose five random essays from each pre-test and posttest. The grades were compared, and they showed a minor deviation of one point.

Finally, the second question explores the students' perceptions about self-assessment facilitated by a rubric. To approach this, the researcher created an interview with open-ended questions and conducted interviews with five students. Two who achieved scores between 15 and 13, two who achieved between 13 and 11, and one who achieved 10 or below, with the objective to have students with varied levels of achievement and find out what can be improved in the innovation. The questions aimed to know what are students' perceptions about self-assessment using rubrics.

Data Analysis

To answer the first research question about the impact of self-assessment using a rubric in writing argumentative essays; students' grades of the pre-test and post-test were compared through the Statistic Analysis Tools in Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics functions were executed to analyze the data and generate information about the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation. Moreover, the paired sample t-test, as well as the *p*-value were also analyzed.

On the other hand, to answer the second research question about the students' perceptions of using rubrics to assess their own essays for revision and proofreading; reflection questions were used, to give students the possibility to reveal their thoughts as truthfully and accurately as possible.

Ethical Considerations

Zeni (1998) asserted that the methods, setting, subjects, and risks must be considered to make sure all the parties involved are well informed about how the study will be conducted, what each of their roles are and how their integrity will be protected. Hence, ethical considerations have been pondered to make the appropriate decisions in this study.

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First, getting the authorization of the school director (Appendix 7). Then, sending parents, consent letters for their agreement on students' participation (Appendix 8). These letters included all the details and timeline of the research, it also had a clause that clearly indicates that any specific personal information gathered for the research would not be shared and that the students' grades would not be affected whether their parents agree on their participation or not.

Results

To answer the first research question: How does the use of self-assessment improve EFL students' writing skills? Descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations were determined, as well as the p value.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics per Criteria

	PRE-TEST					POST-TEST				
Criteria	N	MIN	MAX	M	SD	MIN	MAX	M	SD	p -value
Vocabulary	15	1	2	1.4	0.50	2	4	2.93	0.59	0.00
Language	15	1	2	1.4	0.51	2	4	2.6	0.63	0.00
Organization	15	1	2	1.2	0.41	2	4	2.6	0.73	0.00

Note: N= Sample MIN= Minimum MAX= Maximum M= Mean SD= Standard Deviation

Table 1 contains the values of each criterion in the writing rubric in the pretest and post-test. The first criterion of Vocabulary had an increase of 1.53 points in the mean in the post-test compared to the pre-test. There were also increases in the other two criteria, Language and Organization, of 1.14 and 1.40 points, respectively. The standard deviation indicated that for each criterion, the scores tend to be somewhat close to their mean. The p value showed that the three criteria is statistically significant since they all resulted in a p value of 0.00 Hence, these are results are a product of the intervention.

Table 2*Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test total marks*

	PRE-TEST					POST-TEST				
	N	MIN	MAX	M	SD	MIN	MAX	M	SD	<i>p-value</i>
Total	15	3	6	4	1.27	6	11	8	1.45	0.00

Note: N= Sample MIN= Minimum MAX= Maximum M= Mean SD= Standard Deviation

Table 2 depicts a comparison between the pre-test and post-test total rubric. The posttest had an increase in the mean of 4 points. On the other hand, the minimum score increased in three points, and the maximum score increased five points in the posttest. The descriptive statistics calculations demonstrated that the total is coherent to the results in table 1, where the three criteria showed being statically significant. Also, the standard deviation showed that in the pre-test, the results were closer to the mean than in the post-test with 1.27 and 1.45 points respectively. To sum up, the results support the alternative hypothesis that self-assessment had a positive impact on the students' writing skills.

Regarding the second research question: "What are the students' perceptions about self-assessment using rubrics?" interviews were conducted to five students to collect data. The data disclosed positive ideas towards the use of self-assessment to improve their writing skills. These are some of the students' comments:

"Since English has always been difficult for me, Language is the criterion that gave me the hardest time, especially verb conjugation. So, finding my own conjugation mistakes helped me focus on improving my second draft." (Participant 1)

"The rubric helped me to spot specific mistakes I was making in the organization to proofread my essay." (Participant 2)

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These participants' comments are connected to what Harus (2022), pointed out about self-assessment, which is that the quality of students' writing might improve by being aware of the essential requirements of writing as well as the standards against which their work will be graded.

When students were asked about how they felt about assessing their own work using a rubric, students claimed that they realized they already had prior knowledge that could help construct new one, and that this increased their confidence and autonomy. These extracts support these ideas:

“The descriptors in the rubric were so specific that I felt confident on the improvements I had to make to improve my writing.” (Participant 3)

“The rubric was easy to understand, so it was easy to spot my mistakes and decide how to improve my writing.” (Participant 4)

On the other hand, when asked about whether the rubric helped them improve their writing in the second draft and if it was useful, students' responses positive:

“It took me time to understand how to assess my essay, but it has definitely helped me know how to write better essays”. (Participant 1)

“It was hard to assess my essay, but it was worth it. I could finish my second draft knowing it was better than the previous one.” (Participant 5)

During the interview with participant 5, more details were requested to understand what was meant by saying assessing her own essay was hard. The student said that the rubric had too many descriptors and that it took her longer than expected and this was a bit discouraging. However, considering most of the comments; the students' perceptions about implementing self-assessment with a rubric were positive.

Discussion

The research methods in this study are comparable to those in the research conducted by Fathi and Khodabakhsh (2019), and Cömert and Kutlu (2018) since they also administered a pretest and a posttest.

Concerning the use self-assessment its impact on improving students' argumentative essay writing skills, the analysis of the pre-test and post-test results illustrate that implementing self-assessment had a positive impact on the participants' written production. Other studies that show similar results are those carried out by Ghoorchaei and Tavakoli (2019); Meihami and Varmaghani (2013); Ratminingsih et al. (2018), and Wisnu and Pradana (2020).

Regarding the use of rubrics for self-assessment, it was concluded that having determined criteria and descriptors helped students identify the requirements and standards and in consequence, determine their strengths and weaknesses to improve their writing skills. This is connected to what Harus (2022) pointed out about self-assessment, which is that the quality of students' writing might improve by being aware of the essential requirements of writing as well as the standards against which their work will be graded. Some studies that also reveal these results have been done by Cömert and Kutlu (2018); Fathi and Kodabakhsh (2019); Harus (2022), and Mat and Par (2022).

Respecting to promoting students identifying their own mistakes, students identified their strengths and weaknesses in vocabulary, language, and organization through selfassessment using the criteria in the rubric. This is aligned with what Richards and Renandya (2002) indicated, this is, that self-assessment is the first step to understand our weaknesses, which must be followed by making and executing a plan to address them and conclude with its evaluation. Students took advantage of their own assessment to create a path and find their own strategies for improvement with the tools provided. These results are also

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aligned to the studies conducted by Mat and Par (2022); Ratminingsih et al. (2018), and Taufik and Cahyono (2019).

About the second question that explore students' perceptions about improving their writing skills through self-assessment facilitated by a rubric, the interviews exhibited a positive perception of students since they considered that being able to identify their own weaknesses on several occasions and having the time, the strategy and opportunity to improve their work was an advantage to them and it motivated them to learn. This is related to what Andrade (2019) indicated, which is that self-assessment is meant to generate feedback that promotes learning and improves performance. Students reflected on their own work, they got motivated in the process and at the end, they improved their writing products. This is also evidenced in the work done by the following researchers Ghoorchaei and Tavakoli (2019), Heidarian (2016); and Ratminingsih et al. (2018).

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact of self-assessment on students' writing skills. On one hand, the paired-sample *t*-test evidenced that self-assessment improved students written production significantly. On the other hand, the use of rubrics for assessing their own work promoted metacognition and reflection on their own writing process. Therefore, students centered their attention on the aspects in the rubric that were present in their work; this means, vocabulary, language, and organization. After reflecting on their own work, their final essay had improved to different extents. Some students reached greater progress in the application of the Theory of Knowledge concepts and terms in two areas of knowledge, others made flawless conjugations in simple present and simple past tense, as well as constructed sentences with some variety; whereas other students developed their essays with an impeccable structure.

Moreover, this study also intended to analyze the participants' perception about assessing their own writing product using a rubric. The results indicate that all the students

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perceived that the rubric for self-assessment led them to a greater awareness of the specific requirements and demands of argumentative essays. Finally, by the end of the innovation, students demonstrated to master the rubric by using it with ease.

Furthermore, self-assessment affected students positively by leading them to a greater awareness of their own knowledge, as well as toward gaining confidence and autonomy in their own writing process. Even if one student claimed that the process could be discouraging, she also recognized the result was overall positive.

Consequently, the benefits of self-assessment of writing facilitated by a rubric outnumbered any difficulty. In fact, it proved to increase students' awareness of the aspects they had to improve in their writing.

Limitations

The study was originally conceived to be carried out with at least 40 participants. However, only 15 of the parents agreed and signed the consent letters. Some parents' responses were that the Theory of Knowledge program is already too demanding and that they did not want their kids to be under greater pressure.

Furthermore, the students whose parents' consent were signed are usually highly motivated, goal oriented and high achievers. Which means that the results are somewhat biased by these students' mindset.

Finally, concluding the study took a week longer than expected since there were unexpected changes in the school calendar. Fortunately, by then, students had already managed to understand the task. However, the timelines of the study could have been greatly compromised if the changes had occurred before.

Recommendations

Since this sample is small, this research results must be interpreted critically. It would be ideal to conduct the same research with a more significant sample that included students with different levels of English proficiency and academic achievement.

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Additionally, to conduct the research effectively, students should be trained on how to understand and apply rubrics much before the study begins. Moreover, it is indispensable to give students time to process the criteria and the descriptors, especially in the case of rubrics with detailed descriptors like the one used in this study.

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Appendix 1

Backward Design process of Unit plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Screenshots

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Argumentative TOK Essay Self-Assessment Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Student Reflection

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Validation of the Writing Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Interview to a Sample of Students

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

School Authorization

Available upon request.

Appendix 8

Letter for Parental Consent

Available upon request.

Link to my portfolio

Available upon request.