



**Implementation of Peer-Assessment to Improve Essay Writing**

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### **Implementation of Peer Assessment to Improve Essay Writing**

Writing an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) extended text like an essay is the result of many hours of brainstorming, planning, writing, editing, and proofreading. Improving writing skills requires an entirely different set of competencies as thinking, drafting, and revising procedures which require special skills that are not developed naturally (Brown, 2000).

To improve English proficiency levels in Ecuador, in 2012 the Ministry of Education implemented the English as a Foreign Language Curriculum Guidelines aligned with the Common European Framework Reference (CEFR). According to these guidelines, Ecuadorian students will be able to achieve a B1-B2 level when they finish high school. Holding a B2 level implies that the language competence of an independent user has been achieved. Focused on writing skill the EFL Ecuadorian Curriculum Guidelines states that “students will be able to produce persuasive and narrative essays with correct layout, punctuation, and grammar, using a large number of cohesive devices to link their utterances into a clear and coherent discourse” (p.10).

In contrast with the Ministry of Education’s expectations, a study conducted by Education First in 2021 shows that the English Proficiency Index for Ecuador is very low, holding the 18<sup>th</sup> position out of 20 countries in the region. Learners struggle with production skills, students have difficulties in the construction of a well-written piece and with the process of writing. Among the main challenges observed in students’ essays are unorganized layout, vague introductions, lack of cohesion and unity among body paragraphs, absence of linking devices, and grammar and punctuation errors. Additionally, it is evident that students “jump” from one idea to another without linking devices forming very long and unclear sentences. Finally, the repetition of high-frequency words, adjectives, and adverbs reveals a lack of fluency in their discourse.

To improve the writing skills of the students, the assessment should detect errors in a precise and timely manner, therefore the strategy analyzed in this proposal is the positive impact between peer assessment and writing. According to Kellogg and Raulerson (2007), the use of peer assessment in students' writing provides rapid response and a realistic context that engages and motivates students to succeed. Additionally, the assessment should be consistent and thorough, including grammatical conventions and organization.

Students tend to feel overwhelmed when they are requested to write extended texts which increases their anxiety levels, especially with graded tasks that impact greatly their average scores. According to Nelson et al. (2012), when responding to the question of *How writing skills can be improved* the answer is to include strategies that use instructor modeling and peer assessment as well as the use of checklists to detect mechanical errors. Therefore, this innovation is aimed to support the writing process of the students, providing assessment and support from peers to improve their writing skills.

### **Literature Review**

The objective of this research proposal focuses on implementing peer assessment to improve essay writing in EFL. For this purpose, it is necessary to analyze different definitions concerning the writing process and how peer assessment can improve writing skills in EFL students.

“Writing well is a major cognitive challenge because it is a test of memory, language, and thinking ability. It demands rapid retrieval of domain-specific knowledge about the topic from long-term memory” (Kellogg and Raulerson, 2007, p. 237).

Therefore, EFL writing processes should be addressed as a “puzzle” where students solve different stages related to organization, fluency, and accuracy, in addition

to the relevance of the content. Consequently, the composition of an extended text is widely recognized as a form of problem-solving. The problem of the content -what to say- and the other problem of rhetoric -how to say it- which leads to writers using reasoning skills (Kellogg, 2008).

“Peer assessment requires students to provide grades to their peers on a product or a performance, based on the criteria of excellence” (Falchikov, 2007, p. 129).

However, it’s important to consider other points of view as Kaufman and Schunn (2010) found in their study that students sometimes consider peer assessment can be unjust.

The benefits of peer assessment are substantial both for the reviewer and for the student receiving the assessment. As Falchikov (1986) noted students who assess the work of their peers are engaging in a cognitively-demanding activity that extends their understanding of subject matter and writing. According to Spiller (2012), students can support each other and help fill the gaps and move forward in their learning process.

Additionally, peer assessment can promote cooperative learning through the exchange of ideas and the standards of what represents good work. As Brown (2000) mentioned, a classroom that promotes cooperative learning instead of competition among students usually involves a learner-centered characteristic. As students work together in pairs, they share information and come to each other’s aid. They are a "team" whose players must work together to achieve goals successfully. Research has shown an advantage of cooperative learning (as opposed to individual learning) is "promoting intrinsic motivation, increasing self-esteem, creating caring and altruistic relationships, and lowering anxiety and prejudice" (Oxford, 1997, p.445).

More importantly, as mentioned by Liu (2022), when peer assessment is done, the receivers could know their weaknesses and perceive the accuracy of their discourses,

essentially implications that might be helpful for teachers to carry out peer assessment and writing tasks in the future. Generally, peer assessment appears to create constructive reactions in students, though some learners have worries and concerns, it results in the improvement of self-awareness, perceiving the gaps between one's and other's perceptions, and simplifies learning and the responsibility for it (Ritonga et al., 2022).

Lastly, peer assessment enhances academic writing performance, the reason is that more sets of eyes can detect errors that a writer might overlook. Additionally, writing is perceived as a social act in which writers ought to be aware that their constructed messages are to be read by others (Kitajroonchai et al., 2022).

This research proposal presents a concise checklist to support students in the reviewing process. A checklist can balance time and effort for all involved, especially for the detection of mechanical errors, and it can be adapted to particular needs Nelson et al. (2012). An important advantage is that the use of the checklist can be implemented immediately, it is a medium size checklist that focuses on organization, cohesion, punctuation, and grammatical errors.

### **Innovation**

This research proposal will implement peer assessment through the use of a checklist that focuses on developing writing abilities in high school students. A group of students will be selected in their third year of high school, who hold CEFR-B1/B2 proficiency levels. The students will be undertaking the Language Arts subject as part of their curriculum, in the second term of the 2022 academic year offered by a private school in Samborondón Ecuador.

The checklist has been designed to be applied as a peer assessment strategy to support the reviewing and editing process. The checklist has the advantage to be focused on detecting organization, cohesion, punctuation, and grammatical errors,

## PEER ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE WRITING

encouraging interactions among students and speeding up the final process of writing.

This English class is mandatory in partial fulfillment of the required credits for students' high school degrees. The objectives of this class are to improve writing skills with an emphasis on writing essays. Therefore, the innovation strategy will be presented alongside the checklist that will be implemented in four sessions of 90 minutes over four weeks which students will be trained on the use of the checklist. The 4-week lesson plan will be shared with the students during class hours to engage students and show them the advantages of peer assessment. (See Appendix A). Moreover, to socialize the positive impacts that the application of the checklist would have on their writing skills and consequently in their grades.

During the first and the last session, students will be required to have pre and post-writing tests. For the pre-writing test, they will write 250 words essay about: "*The Qualities that make Someone Admirable*" in 60 minutes. For the post-writing test, students will write 250 words essay about: "*A Person or Something that has Influenced You*". After the pre and post-writing test had been finished, they will be graded according to the rubric. The first class will introduce the innovation strategy and students will receive a printed copy of the checklist, students will be trained on the use of the checklist and will receive a model text exemplifying what will be expected of them in their work after the four weeks. During class hours, students will have time to construct their essays individually once they have finished each section students will be paired to review each other's essays using the writing checklist and provide peer assessment (See Appendix B).

While reading their peer's essays, reviewers will mark the questions on the checklist with "yes" or "no" responding to the ten questions in the checklist. The

## PEER ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE WRITING

reviewer must complete the checklist and write any additional observations or recommendations. The checklist includes a question for each aspect: introduction, hook or engaging question, thesis statement, body paragraphs, conclusion, spelling and linking words, organization, punctuation, and grammar.

Each week a specific part of the essay will be addressed and a section of the essay will be assessed until all the sections of the essay have been revised and students have received peer assessment using the checklist.

### **Research Methodology**

According to Brydon-Miller et al. (2020), teachers are continuously observing students, collecting data, and changing practices to improve student learning and the classroom environment. Action research provides a framework that guides the energies of teachers toward a better understanding of why, when, and how students become better learners.

This research proposal will be carried out in a private high school in the urban area of the Ecuadorian coast. To gather quantitative and qualitative data the following research questions will be explored:

Does peer assessment improve the essay writing skills among third-year high school students? from this main research question, two research questions emerged:

- 1) “To what extent does the implementation of peer assessment through the use of a checklist will influence essay writing performance?”
- 2) “What are the students' perspectives about the implementation of peer assessment to proofread and edit their essays?”

Analyzing quantitative and qualitative data can provide reliable results.

Combining research methods like quantitative and qualitative information can support the researcher to understand both perspectives. According to new research its beneficial for

the researcher to integrate both methods as it can provide a better understanding (George, 2022).

### **Participants**

This research proposal will be carried out with students from third year of high school from a private bilingual high school in Samborondon-Guayas, in Ecuador. The high school is located in a well-developed area of the province. The average age of the students is 17 years old. Students hold a CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) B1/B2 level and receive two hours of English per day. The class has an average of 20 students, thirteen are female and seven are male.

Participants' socioeconomic situation is higher class. They all have access to an internet connection at home and on their personal phones, additionally, students use tablets or laptops to work in the classroom. The high school provides a Wi-Fi connection.

### **Instruments**

The instruments will gather information to answer the research question. "Does the implementation of peer-assessment will influence essay writing performance?" A pre and post-test writing task will be applied to measure students' possible improvement in their writing skills. Additionally, a writing rubric has been designed to contrast every task with the components written on it. This rubric will be used by the researcher and includes the following criteria: content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics the interval data have four bands of performance, 0.5 being the lowest band and 2 being the highest. (See Appendix C).

Finally, the second research question will be focused on the students' perspectives on the use of peer-assessment checklists to proofread their essays. To answer this question, an interview will be carried out to the students. Students will be



## PEER ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE WRITING

selected according to their high, average, and low scores in the post-test. This was decided to analyze equally different perspectives and improve innovation in the future. (See Appendix D)

### **Data Analysis**

**Quantitative.** To analyze the improvements in students' writing implementing peer assessment, the teacher will compare the assessments of the pre and post-writing tasks. The student's data will be tabulated on an Excel spreadsheet and the information will be revised with the IBM SPSS Statistics 24 to obtain descriptive statistics. Among the statistics that will be gathered and analyzed are the mean, and the standard deviation which will allow to calculate Cohen's Effect Size (ES). The improvement on the students' writing skills will be analyzed if the learners' and the teacher averages of the writing essays are similar by the end of the innovation strategy implementation.

Finally, the research questions will be analyzed with the rubric's component contrasting the learners' grades with the teacher's score on their weekly tasks. It is expected that the students improve in the use of the peer assessment checklist as they move forward through the weeks.

**Qualitative.** To collect information about the student's perspective an interview will be carried out to gather data regarding their experience using the innovation strategy. The proposed question in the interview is intended to collect the perspectives from the students concerning the assessment given from their peers after reading their essays and how using the checklist to proofread their essays impacted their writing skills. This qualitative information from the students will be useful to improve or change the innovation for further uses.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study (Mohd, 2018). Therefore, in this research proposal, the protection of the students will be a priority.

Firstly, the most important ethical consideration will be consent and voluntary participation. Since the students are under aged, it is important that an authorization slip would be signed by their parents, allowing the students to participate.

Finally, confidentiality will be considered. Especially because the research will access written material from the students who will share personal ideas and reflections. Moreover, the pre and post-test will be graded and the scores must remain confidential. All students participating in the research will be given a number to be identified. Students will be notified of this ethical consideration in the first stage of the research.

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PEER ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE WRITING

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**Appendix A**  
**Lesson Plan**

Available upon request.

**Appendix B**  
**Essay Writing Peer-Assessment Checklist**

Writer: \_\_\_\_\_ Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Available upon request.

**Appendix C**  
**WRITING RUBRICS**

Available upon request.

**Appendix D**  
**Students' interview about the unit: Essay Writing?**

Available upon request.