



Self-Assessment to Increase Creativity in the Writing Process

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This research seeks to demonstrate that self-assessment is a strategy that helps students to improve their English language skills, specifically in writing, and that in turn it allows them to enhance creativity, which is important within this skill.

This study was conducted in a private school, with students in eighth grade. They were previously assessed in their language skills, and had to perform writing activities for their level, A2.2, creating descriptive and narrative stories. In the context of this research, students with different language levels coexisted, and their initial assessments showed that there was a gap in writing ability that needed to be filled. Students were not able to reach the required number of words in their writing, nor did they show creativity in developing writing according to the requested statements.

This research work, which includes quantitative and qualitative instruments, is focused on the influence of self-assessment, and how it can help in correcting work and finding errors, and in turn, make suggestions on how classroom activities could be improved. Usually, students do not have opportunities to practice writing stories, and this is something that requires continuous practice to reach the expected level.

Literature Review

Writing Skills

L2 composing requires an adequate level of lexical, syntactic, and spelling information within the target dialect. It also requires control of composing processes, i.e., arranging, translation, and checking on amid the generation, to attain composing objectives, as in L1 (Byrnes & Manchón,2014), which indicates that students should seek to improve

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their writing skills linguistically, but they should also be able to monitor their writing production, analyze and evaluate their progress, as part of the indicators of proficiency.

Writing is one of the most complex skills for second language learners, as mentioned by Cole and Feg (2015), because learners rely on diverse prior knowledge to produce a coherent grammatical structure. Moghaddam and Malekzadeh (2011) also asserted that writing is a challenge even for native speakers of a language, as it is not an inherent skill in humans, it must be learned and perfected.

Ariyanti (2016), mentioned that writing is a production skill, and students should master it, and stated that academic writing is progressive since students know the possibilities and limitations of their writings, and it also helps to reflect on the corrections or changes that students could make throughout their activity. This skill is taught in the classroom as an intrinsic ability, which can be learned thanks to vocabulary learning, reading practice and the experiences that students acquire daily, however, students should have a guide and strategies to follow to achieve the desired results in their practices.

Creative Writing

Among the different types of writing, one of the most recognized, and one that is important for students to become proficient in, is creative writing. Wang (2012) suggested that creativity and writing have similar characteristics that allow to communicate ideas and express ourselves freely. Jiménez (1998, p.11), considered that creative writing is an open path toward metaphors, fantasy, imagination, chaos, and order, and it allows to create products from the imagination. Creativity then, is a concept that tells us that we must generate ideas.

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McVey (2008) affirmed that all writing is creative. Thus, creativity is implicit in all writing production, and it should be present in narrative or descriptive texts, as with storytelling, establishing connections, using imagination, and solving problems. While creativity is an inherent part of writing, students should be given information and strategies that allow them to practice or expand their knowledge of the different topics seen in class, and how these could be related to the creation of stories or texts that allow them to communicate naturally according to their abilities, in a second language.

Self-Assessment

The benefits of applying self-assessment have been studied for years in foreign language education, it is expected that an evaluation and feedback from the student based on their progress, and from the teacher, favors the development of students' skills in specific areas.

Harus (2022), who reviewed the application of studies, and found that there are several benefits of self-assessment and existing feedback, it provides quantitative and qualitative information, the correlation of this information allows students to reflect on their process, and therefore, to learn in a real way from their mistakes. I consider it is important to empower students and give them active participation in those areas that allow them to grow, and through this experience, they will learn experientially how they will be assessed in writing, the expectations, and how they should apply feedback to meet the standards.

In their study, Yan et al. (2020) also assured that self-assessment is a linear process since students are judges and learners at the same time. In this dynamic, they can evaluate

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their skills, pedagogically this innovation is a formative process, where the evaluated can identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Self-assessment also allows students to gain confidence when writing in a second language, which is why Yan et al. (2020) in their study agreed that when applying this strategy, the students' grade was similar to the grade provided by their teacher, but when a lower grade was obtained, the students made an effort to reach the grade given by their teacher, and if they surpassed the teacher's grade, they felt much more encouraged and energetic to continue improving themselves.

During the process of implementing the study, students encountered different checklists that allowed them to initially self-assess themselves and recognize the key points to consider when assigning a grade to their writing. To begin to establish what the basics are, and how this strategy should be properly implemented within a foreign language teaching classroom, it is important to know the steps to follow. Yan and Brown (2017) compared two application procedures in their study, among these they highlighted the pedagogical procedure of this assessment as follows: (1) the teacher shares the desired performance with students, (2) students work on the assignment and check their work, (3) students revise and improve their work.

On the other hand, there are some limitations that could impede the correct development of the self-assessment practice, and therefore, hinder this process. According to Biggs et al. (2022), some limitations are the lack of motivation of students, students not understanding the instructions, and false results that could be provided.

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Research Methodology

The type of research that was developed in this work is action research. Somekh (2005) mentioned that action research should be used when research is focused on the search for innovation, it allowed the understanding of self-assessment and influence the strategy in the classroom.

The design for this Action Research project used both quantitative (checklist, pre and post-test) and qualitative data (interview) to evaluate how self-assessment influence students' creativity and writing skills.

In this study, the following research questions were investigated:

- To what extent did the use of self-assessment improve creative writing skills?
- To what extent did students' self-assessments improve?
- What were the students' perspective on their writing skills after this implementation?

Participants

The participants in this study were 8 students as a study group, and 8 students in a control group, from a private school in Samborondón, Ecuador. These students belong to the basic secondary education group, according to the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education. The students were randomly selected from three different classrooms. The ages of students were 12 years old. Their native language is Spanish, and their English proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was A2.2.

Instruments

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As pre- and post-performance tasks, students had to complete a writing assignment, which was evaluated according to English standards based on the B1 Preliminary for schools (CEFR). The different criteria were Vocabulary, language, content, and organization. At the same time, a criterion corresponding to Creativity was added. Each of these criteria was evaluated out of 2 points, where 0 was the lowest value, 0.5, 1, 1.5, and 2 was the highest score for one of these evaluations.

In addition, students used a checklist to self-evaluate throughout the implementation of the study. Students used some criteria found in the school textbook, with which they had already become familiar through previous activities since the beginning of the school year.

Data Collection Analysis

In an Excel spreadsheet, the pre- and post-evaluation were analyzed according to the criteria presented. Quantitative data was collected and analyzed using the *t*-test where the mean, mode, median, and standard deviation results were shown.

The second question collected information about self-assessment, how this technique was used by the students, and how helpful it was. For these reasons, the students' and teachers' checklists were compared to determine if the students learned to self-assess or not.

The third question was about the student's perspective, emotions, and expectations. The interview was about how the students felt before and after the innovation. To answer the research question about the student's perspective, the interview was done in two parts: before and after the implementation. Students were asked about: What were some challenges faced during the process and if they consider that they have improved their

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writing. Students answered the interviews, and these responses were analyzed, the interviews were compared to select information, and transcribed.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted following some ethical considerations. Following the instruction of Pietilä et al. (2020), research communication and information should be described and explored by all parties prior to the initiation of a study. First, the principal, vice principal, and level and area coordinators (EFL) were notified through letters, requesting authorization to conduct the study in the classrooms. The students in the experimental group and their representatives were notified, to obtain their authorization to carry out activities that would allow the evaluation of the work to be done. These letters contained information of the study, emphasizing that these were voluntary and anonymous activities. This study was carried out following the procedures for data collection and data analysis. All the information received during the evaluation process was confidential, and the students who belonged to the experimental group received a pseudonym so as not to be exposed before this study. The principal beneficiaries (students) were asked to be honest during the whole study because we needed to evidence the real results.

Results

The data from the pre and post-test were analyzed and shown in Table 1; here the improvements in the writing process considered and compared teacher's rubric grades. There was no statistically significant difference detected by the *t*-test. Results show that the change or improvement that can be seen according to the different tables shown here, such

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as the first one, shows that there was minimal progress to evaluate once the post-test was performed.

	N Sample	Min	Max	Mean	SD	<i>p-value</i>
Pre-test	16	3.5	9.5	6.06	1.71	
Post-test	16	3.5	9.5	6.44	2.41	0.14

To answer the second question: To what extent did students' self-assessments improve? Table 2 compared the assessment done by the students and teachers, it considered the pre and post-test. It is noticeable that at the beginning the student's grades were similar to the teacher (mean) and at the end it was Higher (8.75), although the difference is minimal, which may indicate that they have made progress in their writing, and that they have learned to evaluate themselves adequately according to the checklist provided by the teacher.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Assessment Pre and Post-test Compared with Teacher and Student

	Pre-test					Post-test				
	Min	Max	M	SD	<i>p-value</i>	Min	Max	M	SD	<i>p-value</i>
Teacher	5.5	9.5	7.38	1.19	0.00	7	9.5	8.56	0.86	0.00
Student	6	7	6.38	0.52	0.00	6	10	8.75	1.28	0.00

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Table 3 shows the skill grades in the students' creative writing, which compares scores of pre and post-test with the checklist and the rubric. The construct of the rubric evaluated were Creativity, Grammar, Vocabulary, Organization and Usage. The improvement of their writing skills was not noticeable. Even though the students do not have the expected improvement, small changes can be seen in their progress, according to the different criteria considered to evaluate the outcome of the students. In the same way, it can be affirmed that although the result was not considerable, the students also considered the results of their progress relevant for their abilities and what they learned during the time of the intervention. From my perspective as a teacher, I consider that some factors that hindered the progress or development of the intervention could have also affected the students' appreciation of the work they did.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics in every construct

	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	<i>p</i> -Value
Creativity	16	1.31	1.56	0.052
Language	16	1.63	1.81	0.099
Content	16	1.38	1.88	0.009
Organization	16	1.38	1.44	0.175
Vocabulary	16	1.69	1.88	0.040

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Finally, to answer the third question: What were the students' perspective on their writing skills after this implementation? For this question, an interview was made with the students at the beginning and the end of this study. The questions were based on the rubrics, checklists, feedback, and teacher's notes. The interview was made in Spanish and English for better comprehension, they felt free to answer it in Spanish or English.

Question N1; Before the intervention *What do you hope for this intervention?*

When answering this question, some students responded that they did not feel prepared to start with a writing process, as this is the skill that represents the greatest difficulty for them. One of the students stated (S1) "What I expect from this intervention is that it will help me to give me the means to improve my writing and reduce the time I take for writing."

Question N2. Before the Intervention: What are you going to do to complete this process?

The students' answer to these questions was to be responsible for their duties and be honest about the process, do their best, and learn how to improve their writing production. One of the student participants' (S2) responses was *"I promise to review the content at home and do my part to complete the activities we develop. I will also ask for help from my classmates when I need it, and from my teacher."*

Question N1 After the Intervention; How did you feel with the intervention?

All students were happy to participate in the intervention, and even though the progress for them was not high, they were happy to have participated. At the beginning they were worried, even scared to have been selected to participate, but as they became

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more familiar with the self-assessment it was better for them to be critical of their evaluations and progress. For this, one of the students mentioned (S3): *"At the beginning I didn't know what to expect from the intervention, I know that my classmates and I were very nervous since this was something new for us, but we all did our part and now we are happy with the result."*

Question N2 After the Intervention; What did you like about this intervention?

The students agreed that one of the things they liked the most was being able to share with their friends from other classrooms, because throughout the year they had not had the time or opportunity to interact with people from other classrooms. In addition, they liked being able to evaluate their progress with a checklist, as this will allow them to self-evaluate the next time they do writing, one of the students in the study group mentioned (S6) *"I really liked the intervention because it allowed me to meet new people, and we all gave each other tips and recommendations to improve in addition to what we were learning. We also liked being able to evaluate ourselves and discover what that process is like."*

Question N3 after the Intervention; What were some challenges faced in this process?

The main problem for all of us was the institutional organization: we were given time, and dates, in which we could hold the study meetings, and these were changed with little or no prior notice, which is why the process felt disorganized at times, and it took longer for the students to adapt properly. Also, the low level in the language of the students (A1.2), according to what they should maintain in the scale they had previously attended,

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made them feel worried and stressed. One of the students answered (S1) *"Everyone knew that as a group we had a varied level of English, while some of us understood easily, others found it a little more difficult to understand the directions or even the topics of the writings we had to do, that did not stop us from enjoying the study, but more time and a group of students with better English would have helped us more."*

Question N4 after the Intervention; Would you use self-assessment in future writing activities? While the results did not show any real impact on the post-test evaluations, they stated that this would certainly be a technique that they could apply in the future, in the materials they receive in English for their evaluations and to improve their grades. They all determined that they would internally ask the questions on their checklists to see if they were doing a good job while developing their writing. Most of them said that despite the difficulties, it was a technique that they liked and that they felt they could show their progress. One of the students assured (S8) *"I hope I can remember this technique when I take evaluations, I always get very nervous when writing and I mostly forget the things I know and could use, but this time I know that after practice I will be able to ask myself at least two or three of the questions on the checklist to know if I am doing a good job."*

Discussion

Self-assessment has been studied as a means of enhancing student's writing skills. The findings obtained after the implementation of using self-assessment to improve the creative writing were negative, suggesting that his process involved an opportunity for self-correction and contributed in a positive way to the student's skills development, even when the results did not show a big improvement on their grades.

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To answer research question number one “to what extent did the use of self-assessment improve creative writing skills?” Andrade and Du (2007), commented that this is a formative process that allows students to evaluate the quality of their work and their mastery of knowledge, as well as to identify their strengths and weaknesses. This was evidenced with the implementation of the evaluation rubrics, but above all in the use of the checklist by the students, who were able to honestly evaluate their writings.

To answer research question number two “to what extent did students’ self-assessments improve?”, Noonan and Duncan (2019) indicated in their research that to achieve real effectiveness in the self-assessment process, one must consider the process of information and acquisition of students to become familiar with this process. That is, students must know what they are doing, and why they are doing it so that changes can be seen and there is a real production of what they are doing. Thus, the students improved in this process, since they were given explanations of what they should be doing regularly, and they were accompanied by the teacher to understand what was expected of them. The improvement of the students was evidenced in this study by the application of this strategy, and they affirmed that they would continue to apply self-evaluation in the future to improve their writing.

To answer research question number three “What were the students' perspective on their writing skills after this implementation?”, it was felt that the students gave their responses and views on how this would help them and if they would apply it, where positive responses were obtained. The group in general had a positive perception of the implementation of the study and considered that they improved in their writing since the beginning of the study. As Yan et al. (2020) stated, self-assessment allows students to feel

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more motivated and with clear goals about how they want to continue practicing and improving after recognizing their work.

Conclusions

This study sought to demonstrate that the application of the self-assessment strategy would have a positive impact on the development of writing skills in the experimental group. According to the objective of this intervention, to improve creativity in writing in a group of eight students, at the end of the study and after analyzing the data and results, it was concluded that the experimental group did not obtain a greater incidence after the implementation period, according to the different competencies considered.

In addition, the reception of the information by the students was always positive, although at the beginning they were worried and afraid of the results or of having to evaluate themselves. At the end of the study all of them were more open to receive the teacher's feedback because they already knew how to use the checklist that was provided to them. They understood better which were the competencies to be evaluated from the rubrics applicable in their classes (in a real context). It is also important to consider that the number of students was small, at the beginning participants were 10, but two of them decided not to be part of the implementation after the first week of study (this implementation was developed in a period of four weeks), despite being a small group, the eight students participated actively and were ready to learn and pay attention in the sessions developed.

Limitations

Prior to initiating the study process, the chosen private school gave a start date of May, but difficulties arose with the chosen distribution and extended the period, and the study

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began in August. Additionally, the study was designed for a period of eight weeks, but the period granted by the institution was four weeks, so changes had to be made in the planning of the lesson plan and the learning activities.

Another important limitation was that the students in the experimental group were from different classrooms, and at the beginning it was difficult for them to relate to each other, and they felt uncomfortable interacting with students they did not know. Similarly, it was also a limitation that the students in the classrooms eligible to be part of the experimental group did not have the level they should have according to their grade level (A2.2).

Another limitation was some disruptions caused by additional activities that occasionally postponed the implementation sessions (the sessions were scheduled on Thursdays, and on three occasions were postponed, so the study was completed in September), as well as the self-assessment sessions and the Teacher-student meeting. These limitations could be considered when interpreting the results and when implementing self-assessment strategies in future educational settings.

Recommendations

The first step to be taken by the researcher as a result of this implementation is to consider the group of students who will be part of the experimental group, and make sure that their level of English corresponds to the expectations and objectives of what will be developed. Second, it is important to demonstrate confidence in the students in their process and have them attend the sessions in an environment they feel comfortable with, without possible interruptions, discomfort, or fear.

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They must also understand the rubrics and checklists so that their process is honest, and the results are real. Third, according to the results of this study, it is essential to address and mitigate the identified limitations to maximize the benefits in future educational practices.

Teachers should be aware of the margins of error before starting this process and seek to reduce these through direct communication with all parties involved prior to and during the implementation of the lessons. When the competent authorities and the participants understand and work according to the established plans and agreements, the implementation can develop naturally and without pressure for the teacher or the experimental group.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric for Writing Skill

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Transcripts of interviews

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Grades

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

E-portfolio link

Available upon request.