



Improving Writing Skills Using Self-Assessment Among Eighth Graders

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Nowadays, English is one of the most used language as lingua franca worldwide, and writing skill represent a key element in teaching method (Dewi, A, 2015).

Nevertheless, not only the students but teachers face some complications in teaching – learning writing skills (Moses & Mohamad 2021). In Ecuador, it is one of the most challenging problems, especially in some public institutions because there are few opportunities to practice the language outside the academic context (Ministerio de Educacion, 2016, p.13). Even more, students who live in rural areas, where English language has not been taught, they deal with several learning difficulties. The lack of basic vocabulary makes it difficult to acquire some skills, especially writing.

(Astuti et al., 2020) asserted that writing skill is one of the most important abilities due to their importance in interaction. According to Linse (2005), writing is an active skill because the focus is on constructing essential information, necessary in teaching learning process to produce language in written form. However, the complications that students have to cope are influenced by the low level of vocabulary and grammar and other external situations (Shahzad & Sarwat, 2021). In addition, Sulasti (2003) stated the problems students mostly face are about how to write, what to write, and lack of vocabulary words as well as incompetence in structure.

The present research is intended to enhance writing skills, acquire vocabulary, and improve the learning process using self-assessment strategy, The problem identified lies essentially in the fact that in the rural areas of Balzar, there are modalities where the teacher is multi-modal or in charge of all levels of teaching within an institution. This occurs in schools that do not exceed 100 students. Under that premise the learning approach is based on mathematics, language, social studies and natural sciences. And

one of the many problems is the lack of a specialized English teacher and the need for hours to cover this curriculum.

It is estimated that children can only have between 10 to 15 English classes per year, and in some schools, they are not given regularly. Therefore, in the most remote districts, upon entering baccalaureate, students arrive with high deficiencies or no knowledge of the four English language skills. For this reason, the following due to self-assessment is considered in learning a language as an essential, as Adams and King (1995) stated that English language learners to be motivated to learn and reflect on their own English learning,

Literature Review

In this part of the research work, the basic concepts of the Self-assessment and Writing skills strategy are described in order to highlight the importance of the research and the innovation project.

Self-Assessment

Brown and Harris (2013) defined self-assessment as the work that students perform to value and reflect about their skills and abilities in an academic context (p.2). Panadero et al. (2016) highlighted that self-assessment integrates instruments and techniques with which learners can attribute value to their own work (p.3). On the contrary, Chan (2010) explained some disadvantages of using self – assessment strategy, he described that sometimes students could not be honest when they evaluate their work, and other limitations are the time used for students and the disinformation with the assessment criteria. For the mentioned before, it is important to explain the students, the importance of self-assessment strategy and what it is. Always we should show a model so that students know the modality to be implemented, and to reinforce the knowledge is necessary to do a practice. Nichol and Debra (2006) stated that

through a self-assessment strategy, the feedback could be much more efficient (p.20). Consequently, self-assessment will make students more objective, independent, and responsible in the learning process, since they must explore their strengths and weaknesses.

Bransford et al. (2000) asserted that developing self-regulated learning skills is important to prepare secondary students for future learning in higher education and workplace settings. On the other hand, Brown and Harris (2014) cited that it is essential in the self-assessment process that both: teachers and students must be schooled with the aim of applying this strategy in the correct way. Additionally, students might acquire skills that help them to achieve their goals and improve the knowledge in the learning process.

So, self-assessment will help students develop their knowledge through self-reflection and problem-solving abilities. Besides, learners may be responsible for their own learning.

Self-Assessment to Enrich Writing

Rubrics

According to the definition of Brualdi (1998), the main role of the rubric is to measure how well the learners know the instructional material. On the other hand, Popham (1997) believed that a rubric is an instrument used to evaluate quality. Alternatively, Andrade (2008) indicated that rubrics may be used as a formative tool to improve the students' performance. Thus, rubrics are a valuable tool in order to assess the accomplishments of the students.

Feedback

Orrell (2006) expressed the importance of feedback on performance assessment tasks for supporting improvement and progress in student learning achievement.

Likewise, Butler and Winne (1995) emphasized that feedback is related to the information about the performance and learning of the students and how they generate internal feedback that means: new knowledge produced through learning activities and tasks that assess progress towards goals. Therefore, the presence of feedback generates and achieve the desired goals. As a result, feedback will help students identify their disadvantages and construct their own knowledge and skills.

Writing Skills

Writing is an important language skill because it means learning, discovering, developing, and improving language skills (Astuti et al., 2020). Al-Asmari (2013) described this skill as a process where there is not only implicit social interaction.

Graham and Perin (2007) reported that writing is an essential skill required for young people in order to participate in civic life. Additionally, Danhya and Alamelu (2019) affirmed that writing skills are imperative for acquiring a language because they are fundamental means of communication. On the other hand, Nunan (1989) claimed that writing is a particularly difficult activity that demands control over various factors.

Innovation

The present innovation work was carried out at the end of September 2022, during three weeks. Which were divided into nine sessions (3 hours per week), with ten students aged between 11 to 12 who were in eighth grade at the public institution located in Cantón Balzar, Guayas province. The parents of the students provided a consent form in order to allow their children to participate in the process. The aim was to improve writing skills and acquire vocabulary by applying self-assessment. A placement test was applied to determine the proficiency level, showing that students did not even have an A1 level.

During the first week, students learnt new vocabulary related to personal information and daily routines. They had to work with the adapted activities from the English pedagogical module 1 for fifth grade. The class topic was ‘My School, and learners had to write sentences, answer questions, and complete exercises; they were also introduced to a self-assessment practice. In the second week, they learned about the Present Simple tense; the topic was ‘Routines,’ and they practiced with a simple checklist three times. Frequency adverbs and time expressions were introduced in order to write and express their daily routines. The last week was focused on reinforcing self-assessment skills and applying the summative assessment and post-test. The final assignment was to write a Postcard to a friend about personal information using new vocabulary related to everyday activities.

This research aimed at applying the self-assessment strategy for improving writing skills in Eighth-grade students. Students acquired vocabulary to enhance their writing skills.

A self-assessment strategy was implemented in this innovation process due to the benefit of the teaching-learning process and the interest of the others named in the literature review. This strategy was performed seven times according to the established lesson plan. And at the end, they had to use the checklist in order to assess the final assignment.

Research Methodology

This work of action research with the application of quantitative and qualitative instruments was aimed to improve writing skills in the English language. This study was centered on constructing and reinforcing knowledge by applying the self-assessment strategy. According to Lufungulo et al. (2021), action research in education

is known for improving and solving problems in education as well as a formative study that is usually conducted by teachers and administrators in schools, and it helps the teachers to adopt or craft the most appropriate strategies within teaching-learning environments. The following are the research questions:

1. To what extent does self-assessment improve eighth graders' writing skills?
2. What are the students' perceptions about self-assessment to improve writing skills?

Participants

The sample was ten students. All of the students agreed to participate. It should be noted that they do not know the English language, as most of them come from rural areas. The students are between 12 and 14 years old; they attend face-to-face classes at a public institution in Balzar in eighth grade. There were five girls and five boys, and according to their socioeconomic status, they belonged to the lower class.

All of the students were Ecuadorian and Spanish native speakers, they were attending the eighth grade of upper primary and their level of proficiency in the English language was ultimately none; after the placement test was taken, they were placed in level A1. Learners spent three weeks working in 3 synchronous classes and three asynchronous ones.

Instruments

The present study was performed using several instruments to collect the proper information to validate the advancement of the investigation work.

For this task, authors such as Rezai et al.(2022) and Lam (2020) were used as a basis, the first one contributed with a skill feature called checklist that allows to qualify and comment their own skills while generating a productive structure in linguistics,

finally a feature called narrative framework was used that incorporated the description of everyday situations and whose purpose was to obtain a structured description of at least eight sentences that allows you to communicate in writing and give personal details to an acquaintance or native English-speaking friend.

For that reason, four questions were addressed to find out their points of view and concerns on the first survey over learning English and later it incorporated 4 more questions regardless of his perceptions on the self-assessment utility on writing skills. All the questions were translated into Spanish due to the low level of the students in the English language.

Placement Test

The placement test used with the participants was taken from the website of Cambridge English Language Assessment for Young Learners, and it was made up of fifteen questions divided into four sections. All of them were multiple choice, and those contained 2 of the four skills (reading – listening) and some vocabulary and grammar. The main intention of taking the placement test was to measure and know their English knowledge and prove their interest in learning this language. It was a useful means to plan and design different strategies and activities in order to get the desired goal, the improvement of writing skill.

Pre-Test and Post-Test

For the present innovation work, the Cambridge Assessment English (Sample Papers) for Pre-A1 Starters was used as an example to design the Pre-Test, however, only the writing part matched the reality and necessities of the learners. This test included the instructions in order to be developed by the students, who had to complete

the text with the correct word, complete the vocabulary and finally, they must look at some pictures and describe them using Simple Present and daily routines. Nevertheless, the Post-Test was different; learners had to write a Postcard to a friend about personal information using new vocabulary related to everyday activities.

Surveys

The survey was designed and applied by the instructor using a simple questionnaire in order to gather information about students' opinions of the importance of writing improvement and the use of self-assessment strategy as the principal goal of the innovation project. The students provided their feelings and different points of view about the present project. The survey was made up of ten questions based on the students' opinions concerning the innovation work, besides to know the positive and negative sides of the strategy applied. The questions were translated into Spanish due to the level of the students.

1. Do you like writing in English?
2. Do you consider writing in English easy?
3. How do you feel when you write in English?
4. Do you think writing in English is important? Why?
5. Do you think the method of checking and correcting your own work helps you in writing skill?
6. Did you feel comfortable using the checklist to assess your work?
7. Did you consider the self-assessment training difficult?
8. Did you have complications when self-assessing your work? Why? Why not?

Rubric

According to Stevens and Levi (2023), the rubric is a construct that allows the individual to have a guide of a scientific or investigative educational process to fulfill, with that purpose each section of a rubric can have quantitative or qualitative considerations in order to assess the performance or knowledge of students. Its purpose is to analyze the learning process over a period of time that will finally be graded according to the given specifications. The second aspect to be considered was the writing content, details, and the sentences required. The third criterion dealt with grammar and communication, and the last aspect was focused on spelling.

Rowlands (2007) highlighted the importance of applying checklists to sustain the student learning process to foster confidence and independence to develop their tasks. Genesee and Upshur (1996) defined checklists as an alternative assessment method that can be used as a register of abilities to evaluate the learners' progress. Furthermore, students can use the checklists to keep track of their progress and perform an effective self-assessment in order to make an improvement in their weaker areas and thus reach the desired objectives.

Data Analysis

After the application of the instruments, data were collected in order to respond to the research questions.

RQ#1. To what extent does self-assessment improve eighth graders' writing skills? The tests were graded and the results obtained were saved in a file, using Excel format to get the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation. The data was used to estimate Cohen's *d*.

RQ#2. What are the students' perspectives about self-assessment to improve writing skills? In order to know the insight of the students, about self-assessment to improve writing skill, it was imperative to elaborate a survey to be more aware regarding the difficulties faced by the students when trying to assess their own work.

Ethical Considerations

Along the time that the present research work lasted, all the important principles were applied by the researcher, in order to guarantee the ethical considerations. As Fisher (2004) stated a set of principles to establish and maintain informed consent in research involving children and adolescents, and he suggested ‘‘the use language that is reasonably understand-able to the learner’’ (p. 834). Moreover, Koulouriotis (2011) indicated the main thing to be considered is the concept of informed consent, and all the participants were aware about the nature of the research being conducted as well as their role in and contribution to the research. Consequently, the authorities, parents and students were very well informed about the content of the research project and advantages of the pedagogical innovation.

The classes and activities were developed with integrity, transparency and respect in a cooperative manner to foster learners to improve their writing skills. The majority of the exercises and tasks were thought to promote active and collaborative participation.

Results

With respect to question one: To what extent does self-assessment improve eighth graders' writing skills? The quantitative data of the tests were analyzed as shown in table 2. With a *t*-test for paired two-sample means, a significant difference was found

between the standard deviation of 2.23 for the initial test in contrast to the final test which yielded a standard deviation of 0.82. Therefore, it shows a differentiation of 1.41. Additionally, the initial mean presents a result of 10.29 and the final mean is 12.13.

Table 2.

Resume of the Results from Pre and Post writing skills Test

	M	N	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-Test	10.2914	10	2.2271	6.375	12.6075
Post-test	12.125	10	0.8186	11	13.75

Note: M=Mean N=Sample SD= Standard Deviation

Figure 1

Pre-test results graph

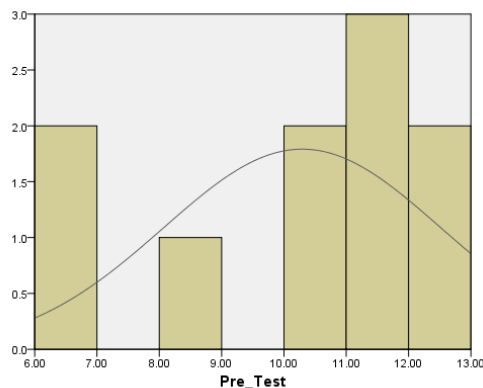
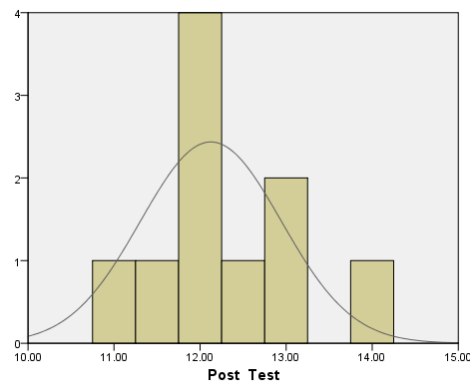


Figure 2

Post-test results graph



In general terms, it can be inferred that a class based on rubrics focused on the self-learning of writing both synchronously and asynchronously can improve the logical and structural performance when relating a sequence of activities or daily routines through the English language. As shown in figure one, the distribution is volatile which results in a high English language writing score of the sample collected. On the other hand, figure 2 shows a normal distribution or a standardized mean within the eighth-grade class of the Balzar school.

Table 3.

Paired t-test statistics for means of two paired samples.

	<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Post-test</i>
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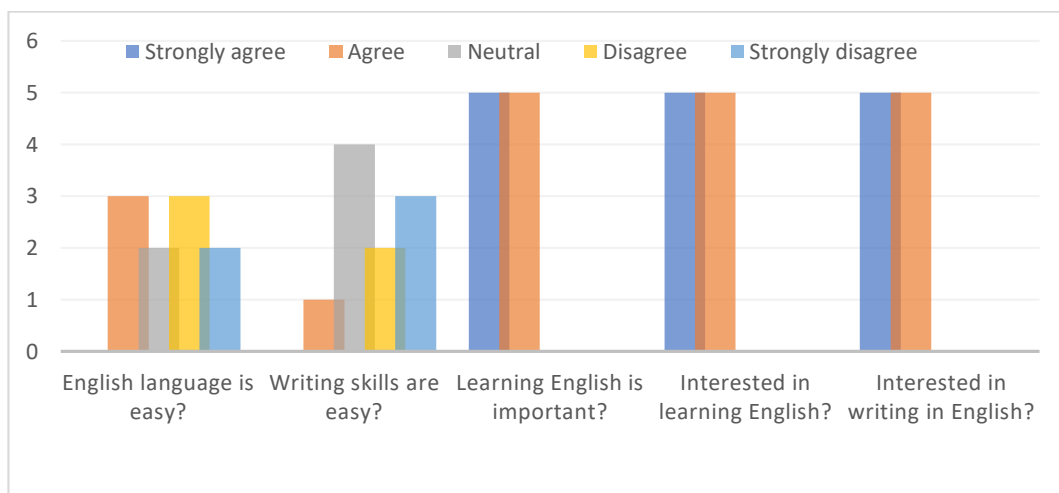
Mean	10.2914	12.125
Variance	4.960087878	0.67013889
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation coefficient	0.440289359	
Diferencia hipotética de las medias	0	
Degrees of freedom	9	
Statistic t	-2.890236637	
P(T<=t) one tail	0.008938689	
Critical value of t (one-tailed)	1.833112933	
P(T<=t) two-tailed	0.017877377	
Critical value of t (two-tailed)	2.262157163	

With respect to question two: What are the students' perspectives about self-assessment to improve writing skills?

As part of the self-evaluation, two surveys were conducted, the initial survey has a Liker scale format and its purpose is to integrate or define the perception that the 10 students have before carrying out the writing skills improvement program, and the second one was done with 10 questions that has a subjective perception with open questions with the purpose of gathering information after having carried out the whole improvement process.

Figure 3

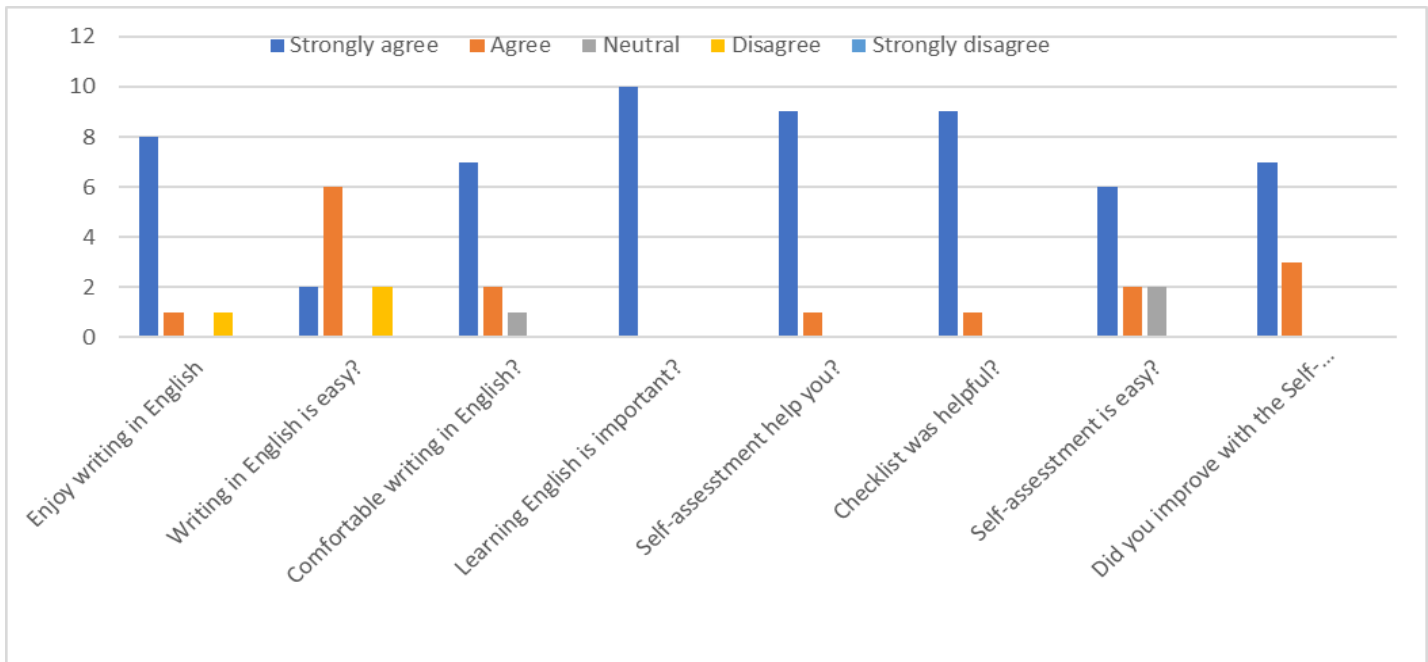
Pre-survey results graph



As shown in Figure 3, five questions were asked about the perception and interest that individuals have in learning the English language with emphasis on writing skills, using a Liker scale where one is in extreme disagreement, two in disagreement, three neutral, four in agreement and five very much in agreement. The first two questions present dispersed results and more neutral answers, it is assumed that the previous knowledge of the language is considered difficult, in addition to the writing skills apparently too. On the contrary, from the third question onwards, all of them show a positive perception with scales of approval and high approval (4-5), that learning English is important, they are interested in learning it and above all they show interest in writing in English.

Figure 4

Post-survey results graph



The approach applied in the final survey, in addition to making a comparison of the perspective and importance of English and writing skills, incorporates self-evaluation as a fundamental basis, with which the student states that the methodology and the learning process of writing was useful and was satisfied with the improvement,

as it shown in the question five and six. In comparative terms, the children still think that writing in English its difficult and some questions had neutral answers, but the significant improvement are they understand the importance of learning English and the self-assessment methodology punctuating with more positive number than negative as it seen on the last two questions. In summary, the perception on comfortable by learning or writing in English realize from neutral to strongly agrees on the 80% of the results.

Discussion

The improvement and change in writing skills is significant both at a quantitative level after having applied pedagogical diagnostic instruments and measurements of writing ability, having identified the main problems in children or eighth grade students. With this, it was decided to structure a program of both synchronous and asynchronous help with a duration of 9 weeks through collaborative self-evaluation. At the beginning the general average or quantitative mean was 10.3 out of 15; then it went to 12.13; additionally, the changes in the standard deviation, which went from 2.2 to 0.81, show a reduction in the dispersion of the group results.

As for the qualitative results, we can indicate that initially the children's perception of the importance of learning English as a language that influences their writing was 68% positive, after the whole process of improvement and self-evaluation that figure increased to reach 92.5%, in addition, to agreeing with the improvement of fluent writing when describing routine activities, found it very appropriate that the tutor does not grade them but that each of them self-evaluates according to the rubric presented.

Findings are similar to the ones reported by Rezai et al (2022) where students compose their evaluation of a self-monitoring of self-reflection to achieve a self-

evaluation with a methodological criterion probe that assertion shows a positive result that the checklist had in the qualitative assessment above 95%.

Additionally, could not be performed techniques suggested within the literature review as verbal retrospective reports or drawing techniques and spoken in addition to technological media tools mainly due to lack of didactic and economic resources that the institution and students preponderate

Contrary to Lam (2020) who indicated that construct of recognition of commands and daily routines with verbs in present simple comparatively, he used a sample of 21 Iranian students and in the present one only 10 were used. However the amount of synchronous and asynchronous reinforcement given was the same between the self-assessment reports the difficulty of writing and grammatical organization was measured, the author used 11 questions in his survey and in the present one only 8 questions were used.

Despite the fact that self-evaluation in the framework of qualitative studies does not present empirical records of no more than 20 years, the findings and results are mostly positive, the problem lies in the contextual situation of each one of them and in the collective background of the samples.

Conclusions

The main intention of this research project was to improve writing skills by applying the self-assessment strategy, in order to give learners, the tools required to monitor their learning progress and acquire the abilities to become independent and proactive. The innovation applied showed promising results, in spite of the weak background knowledge in L2 of the students.

Regarding the improvement of writing skills, it can be concluded that the construction of the reinforcement applied in quantitative terms among the 8th grade students of the school showed an improvement of 12% with respect to the total sample after the initial test and the final evaluation. Additionally, the surveys or the qualitative terms presented a positive evolution at the initial point versus the final evaluation.

Concerning the socio demographic situation, it can be concluded that both didactic and technological resources are limited within the institution, therefore the whole process was written and in the classroom. Nevertheless, the improvement on writing skills accompanied with the self-evaluation and the checklist aspect denoted in the future, the application of a more structured program that can be applied within the regular curricular programming.

Limitations

The limitations refer the little knowledge that the children were able to consolidate in previous grades, the lack of didactic and technological resources. In short, in the rural areas there are no English teachers, since some institutions are multifunctional or polyfunctional and a teacher must teach all classes and even several grades.

It can be considered a limitation the low technological access and connectivity that public institutions such as the one reviewed in the present study. The lack of visual inputs or guide books that some teachers are not provided by the districts. Additionally, his dimensional and family environment with little or no access to familiarize themselves with the English language may have an impact on the result. Finally, the sampling may not be significant, but it is the number of students the school has in the eighth grade.

Finally, pupils could write short paragraphs using time expressions, vocabulary related to personal information and daily routines, and correct punctuation. To conclude, learners applied the self-assessment strategy to evaluate their work and received the appropriate feedback

Recommendations

Firstly, this project was developed thinking in scholars that come from rural areas that means without technological devices. For that reason, it is suggested to implement resources in the public institutions, so that, students from rural areas have the opportunity to learn L2 in school, especially those who comes from single-teacher schools.

In regard to self-assessment strategy, it is proposed that the innovation would be implemented in the institution, because, it has been demonstrated its purpose to enhance the student learning skill. Thus, students will improve their understanding and take responsibility for their education. The activities developed in the lesson plan could be changed according to the background of the learners.

The last recommendation would be trying to work with a larger sample, in order to get more accurate and reliable results. Since the size of the sample was not the appropriate, because only ten students participated in the present innovation, which could influence the results. It might be more effective and precise to work with a larger population.

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Appendix 1

E-portfolio

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Permission of the institution

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Consent letters from parents

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Placement test

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Pretest identifying the writing skill level

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

Lesson plans of the asynchronous and synchronism classes

Available upon request.

Appendix 8

Post test including self-assessment evaluation

Available upon request.

Appendix 9

Perception survey writing skills

Available upon request.

Appendix 10

Perception survey after the self-assessment program

Available upon request.