



The Influence of Peer Assessment on Writing Progress in B1-Level English Students

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Research Report

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The Influence of Peer Assessment on Writing Progress in B1-Level English Students

Writing is a skill that English as a second language learners (ESL) must master to communicate their ideas and thoughts (Leki, 2001). As Saravanan et al. (2021) pointed out, “Writing is a way to deliver ideas, experiences and feeling into written form” However, acquiring this skill takes time and practice, which can be difficult for ESL learners who face additional obstacles to understanding the language. According to Nunan (1999), producing a well-organized, fluent, and lengthy written composition is the most difficult task in the process of learning a new language.

Observations conducted for this study at a Catholic high school in Azuay Province, Ecuador, Bachillerato III students report in conversations having poor writing skills. When trying to write, they faced several common challenges including a limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, problems with sentence structures, difficulty expressing creativity, and a tendency to rely on the sentence structure of their first language (L1). As highlighted by Foroutan et al. (2013) and referenced in Saravanan et al. (2021), ESL students find it hard to learn new words, use language correctly, and write sentences. Additional factors contributing to challenges in academic writing include interference from one's first language (L1), a lack of substantial ideas, and unclear task instructions (Chou, 2016). These elements impacted their writing proficiency and made it more difficult to express their ideas and views.

Peer assessment allows students to improve their writing skills by receiving feedback from their peers. Through this procedure, students are able to evaluate each other's work and help identify areas that need improvement. As stated by McDonald (2015), peer evaluation supports students in developing increased self-awareness, productivity, autonomy, collaboration, and communication skills. Similarly, Topping (1998) asserted that peer assessment can have a positive impact on student learning outcomes by increasing engagement and motivation, improving writing skills, and promoting the development of

critical thinking and analytical skills. Aligned with Yousafzai's perspective in 2024, asserting that engaging in the evaluation of their peers enables learners to enhance their comprehension of the material and cultivate an appreciation for the significance of diversity among them. Finally, peer-assessment engages students in an active process instead of being passive actors into their learning process (Alzaid, 2017).

Therefore, the present study aims to verify if and how peer-assessment contributes to the improvement of Bachillerato III students' writing. Thus, this action research addressed the following research questions: 1) What is the impact of peer- assessment on writing improvement in ESL students? 2) What are the advantages and challenges of peer assessment?

Literature Review

Peer-Assessment

Peer assessment involves students giving feedback, whether it is in the form of formative or summative evaluations, to their fellow students about their work (Chin, 2016). "Peer assessment is a form of collaborative work which promotes social interaction and provides room for students to help and learn from each other's behavior and ideas" (Anson & Goodman, 2013, p. 27, as cited in Almahasneh & Abdul-Hamid, 2019). It promotes active learning and fosters a deeper understanding of the subject matter. By participating in peer assessment, students improve critical thinking and analytical skills as well as acquire a more comprehensive view of their work. Through peer assessment, learners can identify strengths and weaknesses, provide useful input, and propose ways to improve current efforts.

Furthermore, receiving feedback from their classmates in clear and friendly terms can reduce stress which comes from their own teachers' feedback (Liu et al., 2016 as cited in

Double et al., 2020). Likewise, Dewi et al. (2019) showed that peer assessment fosters positive interaction among individuals with different levels of oral and written communication proficiency by exchanging questions, answers, and suggestions.

Nevertheless, peer assessment can bring drawbacks. The authenticity and accuracy were the main concerns about peer feedback highlighted by Topping (2009). Students might not have the required knowledge and expertise to evaluate their peers' work, leading to biased or inaccurate assessments. In addition, personal biases such as friendship or competition may affect students' opinion, which could interfere with the neutrality of the assessment process. When implementing peer assessment in educational contexts, teachers should incorporate appropriate strategies to reduce these issues. To achieve this, it is necessary to define a clear assessment criterion, teach effective feedback strategies and develop a respectful learning environment. Considering these steps, limitations can be reduced. Likewise, Yao and Cao (2012) believed that the most peer assessment issues can be avoided by incorporating proper guidance.

Studies point out that peer assessment improves learners' writing skills (Al-Barakat & Al-Hassan, 2009). Tapia (2020) conducted a five-week study with twenty-five students from a public high school in El Oro Province, where peer assessment was utilized. The findings showed that students' writing abilities improved in several aspects as a result of peer review, including the creation of well-structured sentences, appropriate organization of ideas, a reduction in word repetition and grammatical mistakes. Moreover, students assessed each other's work, which resulted in a more positive perspective towards peer assessment. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and researchers who seek to improve their students' writing skills, these results point out the relevance of using peer assessment in the classroom.

Although peer assessment is not an easy task, it brings valuable advantages by encouraging students to think critically and improving their language results (Falchikov 1986; Hughes 1995; Orsmond et al. 1996 as cited in Lu & Law, 2012). Consequently, providing students with training that improves their ability to assess and offer constructive feedback before their involvement in peer assessment is essential (Sluijsmans et al., 2002). Double et al. (2020) found a positive correlation between increased exposure to peer assessment.

Innovation

The innovation was developed with the aim of enhancing the writing skills of Bachillerato III students through a peer-assessment technique, utilizing an innovative instructional design (Appendix 1). The study was designed to span a total of 12 hours, strategically divided into five synchronous sessions and two asynchronous sessions. This blended methodology facilitated a dynamic learning experience, seamlessly merging real-time interactions with self-paced activities, thereby optimizing student engagement and providing flexibility in the learning process.

In the initial week, the focus centered on constructing well-structured paragraphs and training students to provide quality peer feedback for peer-assessment. This was achieved using a mentor text and a checklist. Additionally, they learned how to utilize the checklist. (Appendix 2). The teacher provided a thorough explanation of the steps involved in crafting a paragraph, incorporating an innovative approach where students identified each part of the article using different colors. Following this, students received training in peer assessment, during which they analyzed an appropriate model of feedback using the checklist. Subsequently, they participated in a practice session with a provided article.

At the beginning of the second week, students received feedback on both their writing and peer assessment from the teacher while engaging in different activities. This feedback session enhanced the learning experience and guided students through their ongoing activities. The week continues emphasizing synonyms, introductory terms, and connectors. Interactive activities such as "Synonym Charades" and "Connect the Dots" were employed to solidify these language concepts. After each peer-assessment session, students engaged in two practices: they received constructive feedback, delivered both in written form and through oral discussions, contributing to a comprehensive learning experience. At the end of the three-week period students crafted a 100-word article on learning and the internet.

Research Methodology

Action research

Action research is a form of inquiry carried out by educators within their own educational settings. Its purpose is to enhance their teaching practice and promote improved student learning outcomes. Efron and Ravid (2013) emphasized the importance of educators actively engaging in research to drive meaningful changes in their classrooms.

Context and Participants

This study was conducted at a Catholic high school in Azuay Province, Ecuador, where the author is currently employed. The study included the participation of 12 students, chosen via stratified random sampling, from a group of 28 high school students, all aged between 16 and 17. The innovation was implemented for the entire class, with data collection and analysis centered on 12 students, comprising nine males and three females. Participants were selected based on their English proficiency levels according to their diagnostic test results (A2 = 33%, B1 = 50% and B2 = 16%), following the method explained

by Hayes (2023) stratified sampling is designed to ensure that the sample selected for a study is representative of the entire population in terms of these specific characteristics.

At the beginning of the academic year 2023-2024, all participants underwent the Cambridge English exam to assess their English proficiency levels, as outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2018).

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research process and its outcomes, this investigation aimed to assess both the quality and quantity of the research findings. The quantitative inquiry aimed to answer the question: Does writing improve as a result of peer assessment? In contrast, the qualitative question sought to explore: What are the advantages and challenges associated with peer assessment? The research protocol encompasses a pre-test, two practice sessions, and concludes with a post-test evaluation, providing a robust assessment framework.

Data Collection

In order to answer the questions, these instruments were needed:

Quantitative data were collected and analyzed using a rubric consistently assessed by the teacher throughout the innovation process, encompassing both pre-test and post-test evaluations. The rubric for evaluating writing, focusing on how to write an article for B1 students, was adapted from the Cambridge writing part 2 rubric (see the rubric in Appendix 3). It includes four main components: organization, language and vocabulary, grammar, and content.

For qualitative data, I continuously recorded observations throughout the research, supplemented by quotes from students collected through a survey (Appendix 4) that delved

into the advantages and challenges they encountered during the research application.

Additionally, the teacher's insights were incorporated.

Data Analysis

To answer research question one, “Does writing improve as a result of the innovation (using the checklist for peer feedback)?” an Excel document was employed to organize the grades from a pre and post-test. Descriptive statistics were then used to look into the details of these scores, including minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. This extensive study revealed a clear picture of the data. Furthermore, inferential statistics were employed to calculate the *p*-value, which made it possible to determine the significance of any observed changes between pre and post-test outcomes. Additionally, the rubric’s four constructs are classified as continuous variables. Specifically, the five levels of organization, language and vocabulary, grammar, and content are considered as ratio data.

In answering the qualitative research question, “what are the advantages and challenges of peer assessment?” the researcher's notes and students' opinions gathered through a brief survey done after the study's conclusion were divided into two categories: the benefits of peer assessment and the obstacles with peer assessment.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are usually accepted as a fundamental component of research. Therefore, it is crucial to notify participants about the study's nature and ensure that they are not exposed to any potentially dangerous situations (Ravid, 2015).

This research followed the ethical requirements outlined below: The researcher first got permission from the school administration, which was given by the high school Director, to involve the students in the study. Subsequently, an invitation was given to the entire senior class, the research aims were explained to the participants, and parental

agreement and authorization were obtained. Participants also were given informed consent and advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. To ensure voluntary participation, only students who voluntarily enrolled were included, with privacy and anonymity measures in place.

Although there were 28 students in the class, not all of them showed a desire to engage, and some parents refused to allow their teenagers to take part. Finally, participants were informed that the collected data will be used for future research and publishing, with their names kept anonymous throughout the research.

Results

The data gathered during this investigation was analyzed in accordance with the two research questions specified in this study. The findings were then discussed in regards to each specific question.

Regarding the first research question, "What is the impact of peer-assessment on writing improvement in ESL students?" table 1 shows descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations.

Table 1

Overall writing improvement

	N	Min	Max	M	SD	<i>p</i> value
Pretest	12	5	19	14	4.6015	0.00
Posttest	12	11	20	17	3.1370	

Note: N= Sample. Min=Minimum. Max=Maximum. M= Mean. SD= Standard Deviation *p*-value

Table 1 shows a considerable improvement in writing proficiency from the pretest to the posttest with the introduction of peer assessment. Specifically, the mean score has increased significantly by three points, suggesting that the participants' writing skills have improved considerably. Furthermore, positive results are shown for both the minimum and maximum scores. There is a decrease in the standard deviation, which suggests a more consistent and targeted improvement across the assessed writing skills. The p -value indicates that this improvement is statistically significant rather than due to chance.

Table 2*Writing improvement by sub-scale*

Construct	N	Pretest				Posttest				
		Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	p value
Organization Introduction / Supporting Details / Closure	12	1	5	3	1.53	3	5	5	0.89	0.00
Language and Vocabulary Synonyms	12	1	5	3	1.22	3	5	3	0.90	0.02
Introductory Terms Grammar Simple Present Connectors	12	1	5	3	1.23	1	5	4	1.19	0.00
Content	12	2	5	4.5	1.12	3	5	5	0.67	0.03

Note: N= Sample. Min=Minimum. Max=Maximum. M= Mean. SD= Standard Deviation p -value

Table 2 shows how peer assessment influences writing proficiency in a variety of constructs. In the first construct of organization (Introduction / Supporting Details / Closure) learners demonstrated improvement, with the mean score increasing from 3 to 5 in the posttest and a decrease in the standard deviation. As well, there was a significant improvement in the content construct, with an increase in the mean from 4.5 to 5 and a lower standard deviation. Overall, the low *p*-values in each construct's paired *t*-test show that peer assessment encourage writing progress among B1-level English students.

However, in the language and vocabulary construct posttest findings did not show remarkable progress, the mean score did not change from the pretest to the posttest (3), but the standard deviation decreased. Surprisingly, the grammar construct improved significantly, with the mean score going from 3 to 4, showing a positive effect on the learners' comprehension of simple present and basic connectors in the entire group.

Through checklist-guided collaborative tasks centered around peer assessment, students were able to acquire the skills required to better organize knowledge and communicate ideas. It also gave the teacher the chance to support the pupils' writing skills and develop their self-awareness. In addition, observations made during class indicated that students were more concerned with making sure their articles included all the necessary information. The impact of the intervention is demonstrated by their questions and evident interest in learning about excellent writing structure.

For the qualitative research question: "What are the advantages and challenges of peer assessment?" the researcher employed a survey to gather relevant data. The survey was done in Spanish, allowing the students to express themselves in their mother tongue.

The survey results indicated that a considerable number of students reported positive experiences while using peer-assessment and the checklist to improve their writing skills.

Here are some survey responses:

“Using the checklist has helped me to see what is missing and what specific aspects to include in my writing.” (S. 7)

“I got the opportunity to participate actively in the process to enhance my writing abilities and develop confidence in providing and receiving feedback.” (S.11)

“I have been able to identify my strengths and weaknesses thanks to the feedback.”
(S. 2)

Although the advantages were evident, students also reported some difficulties. It was challenging for them to give meaningful feedback to their peers without hurting them.

Among the challenges highlighted in the survey data are:

“Accuracy and knowing when to speak up without hurting my partner” (S. 3)

“Not speaking English at my partner’s level” (S. 4)

Despite these limitations, the majority of participants stated that the checklist and peer assessment helped them to improve their understanding of various aspects of writing evaluation criteria. They mentioned:

“It makes grading and feedback easier without ignoring any details” (S. 8)

“Constructive feedback is necessary for growth and advancement.” (S. 4)

“I have a better idea of what they ask me. I am able to improve the structure and organization of the information.” (S. 11)

“I know which criteria will be used for assessment. I stay on the topic and avoid deviating. I consider the organization of paragraphs.” (S. 2)

Furthermore, participants agree that peer-assessment has been extremely important in promoting collaboration and fostering a positive learning environment among peers. They expressed:

“Giving and receiving feedback fosters unity and teamwork.” (S. 2)

“Instead of taking advice as criticism, I view it as useful input” (S.3)

“It encourages cooperation and allows the exchange of thoughts and opinions, improving cohabitation and feeling like an active participant” (S. 8)

“Peer learning is promoted by feedback” (S. 9)

“It fosters teamwork and learning by promoting active participation when we share each other's mistakes and accomplishments" (S. 12)

In conclusion, students expressed feeling more confident after learning how to give feedback and conducting peer assessments using a checklist. They took an active role in their education, reflecting on their mistakes and celebrating their achievements. Because of the advantages they experienced during the innovation process, they also stated that they planned to use it in their future writings. The combination of peer assessment and the checklist not only helped students become more proficient writers but also encouraged collaboration and a positive learning atmosphere among peers.

Discussion

The outcomes of this study are lined up with the current literature on peer assessment in writing skills and offer a new perspective on how it affects the development of ESL students' writing. The post-test results show a statistically significant improvement in writing proficiency following the implementation of peer assessment, which supports prior research findings (Tapia, 2020; Al-Barakat & Al-Hassan, 2009). Peer assessment supports comprehensive writing success among B1-level English students, as evidenced by the

observed gains in several constructs like organization, language and vocabulary, grammar and content. These results support the theoretical framework proposed in the literature review, which suggests that peer assessment encourages active learning and deeper understanding of material (Anson & Goodman, 2013, p. 27, as cited in Almahasneh & Abdul-Hamid, 2019; Chin, 2016).

A comparison of the pre and post-test results shows a significant improvement in students' writing organization with a focus on aspects such as introduction, supporting details, and conclusion. This improvement is reflected in the mean scores, which increased by 2 points from 3 in the pretest to 5 in the posttest (See Table 2). The researcher's emphasis on using the rubric and receiving peer feedback from classmates is in line with the increase in organization. Participants placed a high priority on determining if their article included all the necessary components, as evidenced by their use of different colors to distinguish these sections. The literature supports the efficacy of peer assessment in improving writing skills. Students were given peer-assessment activities as part of their training and supervision before using the checklist, which aligned with research guidelines for preparing students to provide and receive feedback successfully (Sluijsmans et al., 2002). Moreover, the qualitative information acquired from survey replies offers insightful information about advantages and challenges of peer evaluation of writing skills. Participants expressed satisfaction with the checklist-based peer review procedure and highlighted its advantages, which included finding frequent errors, improving one's own writing style, and developing a greater understanding of other viewpoints. These outcomes are in line with previous studies that highlight the beneficial effects of peer assessment on students' analytical and critical skills (Double et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2016).

The survey, however, also pointed out the challenges that participants encountered during peer assessment activities, including difficulties giving honest feedback, and

uncertainties about feedback reception. These challenges are consistent with the potential drawbacks identified in the literature, such as concerns about the reliability and validity of peer feedback (Topping, 2009). Nonetheless, the majority of participants had good attitudes on peer assessment, emphasizing its role in promoting and creating a collaborative learning environment among classmates.

Conclusion

This study found that using peer-assessment approaches improved the writing skills of B1-level high school students. The research sought to address the highlighted issues experienced by ESL learners, particularly in the context of Bachillerato III students (the senior participants) at a Catholic high school in Azuay Province, Ecuador. These challenges included limited vocabulary, grammatical mistakes, problems with sentence structures, and difficulty expressing creativity. The study's objectives were to assess the impact of peer-assessment on writing improvement while investigating associated advantages and challenges.

Through the application of an organized lesson plan and innovative teaching techniques, such as checklist-guided peer-assessment, students made substantial progress in their writing proficiency. The blended learning strategy, which includes synchronous and asynchronous sessions, created a dynamic and flexible learning environment that encouraged student engagement and participation. Incorporating interactive exercises and feedback sessions improved the learning process and helped students develop critical writing abilities.

According to the study's findings, when peer assessment is used properly, it helps ESL students' writing develop. Through the use of mentor texts and checklists, the peer feedback got easier helping students to identify areas of weakness and strength. This strategy improved students' self-awareness and autonomy, it also promoted the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. Additionally, a friendly and collaborative learning environment was

created, with an organized approach that encouraged participants to interact and engage actively. Furthermore, after each session, the teacher provided students constructive feedback, helping them to identify areas in which they needed to improve.

It is interesting to see that there were very few student corrections of grammar or vocabulary errors. This might suggest that employing a more advanced vocabulary to express ideas could be challenging. Future interventions may benefit from putting more emphasis on improving language and vocabulary skills to enhance overall writing proficiency.

Different language skills levels, honest feedback and directness while providing feedback were some of the challenges that the study identified regarding peer-assessment. However, these problems were reduced by giving students appropriate training and guidance, emphasizing the checklist's importance and its use during the writing process.

Limitations

When interpreting the findings, it is important to consider the limitations that the study faced. Due to the small number of participants (12) involved in the innovation, the results must be interpreted with caution. Due to the small sample size, the results may not completely show the diversity of responses and experiences than a bigger and more diverse group would provide. Furthermore, the study was limited by the time. During the innovation period some changes were done, even though the teacher had scheduled each activity for specific dates. This happened because the students had to participate in extracurricular activities during their English hours, which had an impact on their engagement and the implementation of the innovation.

Additionally, in the early stages of the intervention the participants had troubles using the checklist. To overcome these challenges more support and guidance were needed.

Recognizing these limitations is crucial for understanding these results.

Recommendations

Professionals who want to replicate this study should take into account these recommendations based on its limitations. First, a larger sample would provide more information and improve the findings' generalizability. Second, in order to implement the innovation and prevent modifications that can have an impact on student engagement, a longer study period should be considered. Students must receive adequate support when using the checklist to overcome initial difficulties. Its efficacy in various educational environments can be better understood by conducting the study again. Planning for unforeseen situations, as well as monitoring participant involvement both require flexibility. To improve the results and readiness, it is also beneficial to evaluate pre-training requirements for checklist use and peer assessment. These recommendations can help to improve the replication process and better understand how innovation affects writing skills.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Rubric adapted from Cambridge B1 Preliminary.

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Encuesta sobre el uso de la checklist y peer assessment en la destreza de escritura

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Link Portfolio

Available upon request.