Applying Self-assessment to **Improve Teenagers Students' Writing Skill**

Gianella Andrea Paredes Chamorro

Coordinator: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Research Report

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_____
Gianella Andrea Paredes Chamorro
C.I.: 1719357392

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Gianella Andrea Paredes Chamorro
C.I.: 1719357392

Applying Self-assessment to Improve Teenagers Students' Writing Skill

Talking about communication immediately comes to our mind the speaking skill, however, we have to take into account that writing skill is also considered one of the most important skills to communicate with people, especially when we have to send messages, emails, write reports, letters, essays, and so on, which are very common in our life's activities. For that reason, "Through writing, one can explain or describe things and as a result people miles from us can get information by reading the writer message" (Hasanah, 2015, p. 17)

Writing, like all the other skills, needs to be practiced. Students have to practice writing skills since they are kids in the beginning levels. Then, the practice continues when they go to high school, and later when they get a master's degree and throughout their whole lives. It is necessary to practice as much as possible "Moreover, in this competitive world, writing is also one of the skills that is necessary to excel" (Mamarajabova, 2023, p. 149). That is why it is not a simple skill in which you only write isolated information, it must be considered grammar structure, punctuation, sequence, coherence, order, and spelling.

In general, for Spanish speakers, applying writing skills to communicate in L2 is demanding because in Spanish words are pronounced and spelled similarly unlike in English. That is why teachers need to identify a suitable method to help them improve this skill so they can express their ideas accurately. (Rojas, 2022, p. 2)

For that reason, writing has become a challenge for my students when they have to overcome many difficulties while writing a composition, as well as for us, as teachers, to assess students and give deep feedback to each one of them. It really has become a challenge "The challenges faced by the students have made it challenging for teachers to teach writing

skills. The challenges that are faced by the teachers to teach writing skills are difficult to motivate their students" (Mamarajabova, 2023, p. 149).

"Using self-assessment as part of writing courses is key to improving strategic and affective self-regulation skills" (Takarroucht, 2022, p. 157). Consequently, students are going to have the opportunity to assess themselves with the implementation of self-assessment as a strategy to be evaluated, and at the same time help teenagers to improve their writing skills, while the teacher guides them through this whole process.

Literature Review

In this part of the research project, some conceptual frameworks about applying self-assessment techniques to improve teenager students' writing skills are going to be covered. Previous researches have been applied self-assessment with different results, which are going to be highlighted in this section due to the great importance and impact that have been found in improving writing skill with the guide of the teacher. "Through process-based writing learning, teachers can guide students in writing. Teachers can use process-based evaluation tools in writing ranging from planning writing, developing ideas and evaluating writing using assessment rubrics" (Ramadhanti & Yanda, 2021, p. 201)

Writing Skill

Durga and Rao (2018) mentioned that "writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously. Strong writing skills may enhance students' chances for success. Writing is an essential factor of language" (p. 1). Writing skill is a challenge for everybody during their whole life. "In most educational institutions around the world, students are evaluated mainly through writing. They are expected to communicate and share their ideas in examinations, reports, term papers, etc. through writing" (Baresh, 2022, p. 27)

According to Hamp-Lyons (1990 cited in Devia et al., 2018), "writing is a personal act in which writers take ideas or prompts and transform them into self-initiated topics" (p. 50). "Writing is frequently attributed as the most complex skill of language. Perhaps due to some inherent difficulties bound to be faced by every novice writer. Even the highly professional writers might come across similar complexities in their initial drafts" (Gautam, 2019, p. 75).

> The biggest challenge is the lack of proficiency in the English language among ESL students to complete the writing task assigned. Thus, students need vocabulary, grammar, and the ability to structure good sentences is a requirement to compose a writing. Besides that, students feel lost and tough to compose in English since writing requires using many cognitive and linguistic approaches that students are unsure about. (Selvaraj & Aziz, 2019, p. 452)

Self-assessment

Different methodologies have been applied over time to find a better technique to develop writing as a skill. The self-assessment technique is applied to provide students the possibility to evaluate themselves, find their mistakes and get better after the feedback given by the teacher. The application of authentic assessment becomes an obligation for teachers. They must master it as a reference in assessing various language skills.

Self-assessment is used to prepare students for improvement in their lives. Self-assessment is thus linked with the goal of lifelong learning and integrated into various subjects and domains. It has become not only a means to an end (autonomous lifelong learning) but also an end itself (a component of autonomy; Javaherbakhsh, 2010, p. 213). "In addition, numerous theoretical models support self-assessment's benefits to writing, the

development of critical thinking, and the fostering of positive learner behaviors" (Fahimi &
Rahimi, 2015, p. 735)

According to this, Javaherbakhsh, (2010) said "Self-assessment skills help students
gradually develop a critical attitude toward learning throughout their lives and then achieve
perfect autonomy" (p. 213). Self-assessment is giving the students responsibilities for their
learning progress.

Self-assessment is an activity in learning progress that focuses on learners' ability to
improve their skills, especially on writing skills, and it also could make learners understand
themselves. Self-Assessment is a part of self-regulated learning or can be understood as a
study skill through which learners can develop the capacity to think about their learning
critically (Wisnu & Pradana, 2020, p. 15).

Limitations

On the other hand, some researches have showed that the results provided by students
when applying self-assessment using the checklist as a tool, are not always as accurate as
they seem to be, so that, it could be a subjective process. According to Yang (2022 cited in
Cortaza, 2024), stated that "it has a risk of being perceived as an opportunity to inflate their
grades suggesting unreliability. Even when students' self-assessment might not align with
their performance, instructional training enhances the accuracy eventually" (p. 5).

Chan (2010) mentioned three important disadvantages "(1) Self-assessment can be
subjective because students may not be sincere and may even over-evaluate their own
performance. (2) Time consuming for students. (3) Students may not be familiar with the
assessment criteria" (p. 1).

Backward design

A backward design model was used in this innovation process. It started from the learning outcomes to design a lesson plan which allows the instructor to provide the tools to students to improve their writing skill. Wiggins and McTighe (2005 cited in Menendez, 2022), mentioned "Understanding by Design is an approach to designing a curriculum that allows instructors to focus on the desired learning outcomes and provide structure for student learning" (p. 5).

Innovation

The lesson plan implemented in this project took over four weeks divided into three class hours to write a paragraph with at least 50 words. This paragraph should use the simple present tense in both affirmative and negative forms incorporating vocabulary related to sports, family members and likes and dislikes.

According to the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) students from A1 level, "can give information in writing about matters of personal relevance (e.g. likes and dislikes, family, pets) using simple words and basic expressions. They can also write simple isolated phrases and sentences" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 75).

First, students wrote a narrative about their families without any guidance from the teacher to identify their writing skill level. The teacher used a checklist to evaluate student's pre-test. Then, the teacher trained students to improve their writing skills according to the topic given. Furthermore, students worked with some specific activities that developed their structure, grammar and vocabulary. Students were also explained about the use of self-assessment, what it is used for, and its importance to improve their performance after this process.

In the first week, students learned about the family members with pictures of the Simpsons family. Each of the students had to say the name of the family member that the teacher mentioned and they had to label the pictures on the board with the right word. Besides the vocabulary about family members, students learned vocabulary about sports through some games such as hangman and making picture pairs.

In the second week, the teacher asked students to brainstorm about all the different sports they and their families like, so that students remembered the vocabulary learned in the previous week and joined both topics about sports and family member vocabulary. Later, the teacher explained the correct use of grammar with some verbs and students wrote some isolated sentences using the verbs about likes and dislikes and the vocabulary learned. The teacher had to monitor the class and students' activity.

In the third week, students act out different sports to catch the attention of the students. Then, the teacher explained the grammar of the simple present tense and asked students to work individually and write affirmative sentences in simple present. After that, students in pairs had to change the sentences into negative, taking into account the grammar rule of the use of auxiliary and the third person. In this part, students worked with a checklist of the different aspects they had to include in their writings. The teacher trained them on how to self-assess to identify their strengths on writing and what they need to improve.

In week four, students had to write their final and individual task about Their High School Olympic Games. The task had to include the vocabulary previously learned: family members and sports. Finally using the checklist, students assessed themselves.

Research Methodology

Research is concerned with the generation of knowledge, and typically creating knowledge related to a concept, idea, phenomenon, or topic. Action research generates knowledge around inquiry in practical educational contexts. Action research allows educators to learn through their actions to develop personally or professionally (Clark et al., 2020).

Action research helps the teacher to adopt and apply the most appropriate strategy within their environments thereby achieving intended teaching-learning goals and outcomes. The undertaking of action research usually prompts action that may involve interventions on the student, teacher, administrator and policy-related matters. It provides opportunities for the teacher to continually reflect and evaluate research outcomes for the benefit of the learners and their professional development (Lufungulo et al., 2021). Consequently, the research questions were:

1. To what extent does the use of self-assessment improve teenage students' writing skills?
2. Which part of the checklist categories was the most impacted by applying the self-assessment strategy on teenage students of A1 Level?

Participants

Educational researchers should work with an ethic of respect for all the people involved in the research process. No distinction should be made on the grounds of age, caste, color, religion, race, political belief style etc. unless the nature of the work warrants so. (Govil, 2022, p. 18)

That is why the participants of the present study were twelve students chosen at random A1 level in a public high school. They were around fourteen and fifteen years old, males and females, Spanish native speakers from Santo Domingo.

Instruments

The instruments used in this action research were applied to find the students' weaknesses and differentiate the achievement after the innovation plan. "Pre-test-post-test control group designs are well suited to investigating effects of educational innovations and are common in educational research" (Dugard & Todman, 1995, p. 181-198). In the same context, three instruments were used during the research project: a pre-test, a post-test and an A1 level checklist. The tests had four sections, vocabulary, basic grammar, organization and clear ideas.

To answer the first research question, a pre and post-test were implemented. These two instruments were used to assess students' writing skills with the application of the strategy and visualize to what extent the use of self-assessment improved teenage students' writing skills. Therefore, students were asked to write an individual narrative about the Olympic Games in High School with sports and family members using a separate sheet of paper.

To answer the second question, as part of the implementation, a checklist was designed taking into consideration the age, the level and the objective of this research project. The checklist was about the correct use of vocabulary about family members, sports, likes and dislikes, and the use of the simple present tense. "While checklists are flexible evaluation tools that provide evaluators with the freedom to customize the criteria according to their individual and situational needs, even a well-designed checklist has potential limitations" (Senem, 2020, p. 111).

Students were also explained the different aspects included in the checklist to assess themselves and feel confident in identifying their strengths and weaknesses in their writing with the guidance of the teacher. It included some examples of how sentences must have been written.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial stage in the action research process. Like many other

practitioners engaged in research. This phase is considered the most challenging,

as well as the most rewarding. At last, you are about to discover, buried within

the raw data, the answers to your research questions, and satisfy the curiosity that

launched your inquiry journey. (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 165)

Talking about Data Analysis, the results reflected throughout this research project

were analyzed using the pre-test and post-test for quantitative analysis. First of all, comparing

the pre-test results obtained at the beginning of the research when students did not have any

training and at the end of the implementation self-assessment strategy when students have

already gone through an entire prior practice process to differentiate to what extent students'

writing skill was improved. These data were uploaded in an Excel spreadsheet to run

descriptive statistics such as: mean, mode, median, minimum, maximum and standard

deviation and the p-value as an inferential statistic.

To answer the second research question, a checklist was also used to find which part

of the checklist category, by applying the self-assessment strategy, was the most impacted on

students. Students registered their results using the checklist which helped them to identify

their hits and misses, so they could realize and improve them where necessary.

Ethical Considerations

As a very important researcher mentioned "potential participants must be assured of

confidentiality, and should be told clearly what the research is being carried out for and what

it hopes to achieve" (King, 1994, p. 17). For that reason, the high school's name and the

student's names were not mentioned in this research project. Students were also informed

about the purpose of the research and the possible findings.

Furthermore, authorization from students' parents and the high school principal was

key to developing this action research. The activities that were applied in this action research

did not affect students' school performance or scores.

Results

Regarding the first question about to what extent the use of self-assessment improves

A1 level teenager students' writing skills, a Descriptive and Inferential Statistics table with

the results reflected in the pre-test and post-test, is shown next.

Table 1.

Descriptive and Inferential Table: Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

	N	Minimun	Maximun	Mean	Std. Devation	*p.* value
PRE-TEST	12	35	40	37	1.35680	0
POST-TEST	12	44.00	50.00	47	1.67649	

Based on the results shown, there has been a significant improvement between the

pre-test taken by students at the beginning of the process and the post-test after the self-

assessment strategy was applied. It also demonstrates that the continuous use of self-

assessment strategy to improve teenager students' writing skills, of A1 Level is valid.

Table 2.

Descriptive and Inferential Table: Categories Results

		PRE-TEST				POST-TEST				
Categories	N	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD	MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD	P-VALUE
Grammar	12	7	9	7	0.651338947	9	10	9	0.514929	0
Vocabulary	12	7	9	7	0.651338947	8	10	9.5	0.778499	0
Spelling	12	7	8	7	0.452267017	9	10	9	0.514929	0
Content	12	7	7	7	0	8	10	9	0.852803	0
Extension	12	7	9	8.5	0.778498944	9	10	10	0.452267	0

To answer the second research question, we can say that, according to the results in the second table, vocabulary was the most impacted category among students, with a considerable increase in the mean score from 7 on the pre-test to 9.5 on the post-test. Consequently, they improved their writing skill, including also the length of their writing due to the sufficient vocabulary students had to fulfill the aspects required by the rubric to write a paragraph with a minimum of 50 words. Students were awarded for using appropriate vocabulary related to the topic given.

Overall, the outcomes showed that students applying the self-assessment strategy improved considerably in the different categories. The use of the simple present tense rule shows a difference of 2 points in the post-test compared to the pre-test. On the other hand, spelling and content with sequence and coherence show an increase of 2 points on the post-test compared to 7 points on the pre-test. Finally, in extension, there is an increase of 1.5 points from 8.5 in the pre-test to 10 in the post-test.

Referring to the checklist, it is important to describe that in the pre-test students used this tool but, with many difficulties because they were not familiar with the use of it. However, during the process, students were trained and explained what the checklist was used for and the importance of it, then students could assess themselves through the implementation of the self-assessment strategy and overcome their weaknesses in writing.

Discussion

The results provided insight into the research project and portray that they are similar to the results shown by the authors Wisnu and Pradana (2020) about the extent of the use of self-assessment to improve teenager students' writing skills. Despite of the lack vocabulary and knowledge students had, they could deal with them and face their weaknesses to be

better. "In other words, as self-assessment was implemented permanently in the instruction, it may have assisted the students in understanding that they should not be much independent of the teachers' help" (Rezai et al. 2022, p. 194).

Besides, Javaherbakhsh (2010) mentioned in his studies, that self-assessment makes students gradually think critically, developing independence and autonomy with the aid of this innovation to find their errors by themselves. Furthermore, with the guidance of the teacher throughout the whole process of the research project, students assume their responsibility to recognize their mistakes and be honest in assessing themselves.

As Gautam (2019) and Durga and Rao (2018) expressed in their research, writing skill is considered the most difficult and complex skill when a student wants to learn a new language especially because almost everything is evaluated through writing which was highlighted by Baresh (2022). That is exactly what was demonstrated in the results of this research project when students did not reach the goals of the task because, at the beginning of their initial practice, students had to face many challenges. Nevertheless, as the innovation proceeded, they were getting familiar with the strategy and their writing skills improved.

They showed a greater predisposition when using the checklist to assess themselves. In the same context, they also felt more confident and their effort was portrayed to develop the activities positively and get a better performance. It is similar to previous studies by Fahimi and Rahimi (2014) that reflected that one of the self-assessment's benefits was the positive learner behaviors.

Conclusions

Based on the results, and regarding the first research question, it is possible to conclude that the self-assessment strategy contributed to improving students' writing skills significantly throughout the four weeks when the innovation took place. The practice

exercises developed in the lesson plan gave students the ability to improve themselves with the help of the checklist. It showcased a greater rise between pre-test and post-test, especially in the vocabulary used where most students got the maximum score of 10 points with an increase of two points, being the category that impacted most, by applying self-assessment strategy on teenage students of A1 Level.

Grammar was also improved, showing a better comprehension of the Simple Present Tense and the correct form of the words like and dislike. They focused their attention on spelling when writing vocabulary. They were awarded for not having spelling mistakes and for completing the minimum number of words required in the composition.

It is also important to mention, that it was possible to identify, a big difference in students regarding their attitudes toward the activity. As they were my students, beforehand the implementation of this innovation, most of the time during the class development, their attitude was reluctant to carry out the activities. Despite that, the innovation was applied and throughout the self-assessment development, students' attitudes were getting better.

In terms of students' attitudes, autonomy and independence work were evidenced. Students felt more confident and they demonstrated their responsibility during the innovation. Particularly when they were explained about how functional and beneficial is the use of a checklist to assess themselves and recognize their weakness as well as their strengths. Furthermore, students' honesty was shown especially at the end of the research action process, when they had to write their final paragraph and apply the self-assessment strategy to evaluate themselves.

Limitations

Some limitations appeared at the beginning and during the whole action research process. Firstly, there was no specific time or place for applying the innovation plan with only the twelve students who were taken into the research project. As it was conducted during the school year, the whole number of students was always in the same class during the implementation of the innovation. It was a challenge to manage the two groups in the same class and at the same time, apply the self-assessment strategy and continue working on the topics of the annual plan with the rest of the students. Besides, students could not concentrate at all because of the large number of students in the classroom. They had to deal with the noise and many other distractions. Despite that, students made their effort and the results were extremely satisfactory.

Recommendations

One of the recommendations for future research is to apply the self-assessment strategy with students in general, from different ages, social status and public as well as private institutions. Students will feel more confident to fulfill their learning objectives while they can identify their weakness as well as their strengths in writing with the intervention of the teacher to guide them. As students are not familiar with the use of a checklist, it is very important before the implementation, to give students enough training to use the tool as well as explain the benefits of using it to improve their writing skills.

It is crucial to bear in mind students´ limitations due to the large number of students in a classroom, the noise or the pressure of not having enough time to do their writing tasks and perform well. Those characteristics of a classroom should be taken into account for future implementation to have valid and reliable results for students´ learning process to improve writing skills.

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Appendix 1

Pre and Post Checklist Categories for self-assessment

Available upon request

Appendix 2

Plan

Available upon request

Appendix 3

Writing Rubric

Available upon request

Appendix 4

Survey

Available upon request

Appendix 5

E-Portfolio

Available upon request