



The Influence of Self-Assessment in Improving Writing Skills in Pre-A1 Learners

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Research Report

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Written communication plays a key role in our modern world because most information is found in a written way. However, writing is likely to be a difficult task for EFL students to perform because there are some complexities that someone could face while expressing ideas in words. In good written communication, students should pay attention to planning the content, organize their words, and make use of good spelling and punctuation.

According to Mamarajabova and Bakhriddinova (2023), writing has become a challenge for teachers because of the difficulties students face while writing. This includes their low vocabulary level, poor sentence structure, and frequent grammatical and spelling errors. This study also shows that students feel they need more time to perform their writing productions clearly and understandably due to their lack of interest and time to practice their writing in class.

This research project aims to examine the implementation of self-assessment as a strategy to enhance writing skills in pre-A1 learners. Third-grade students struggle with writing full sentences in simple present tense. Spelling mistakes and thinking in their native language often make it harder for them to express their thoughts. Trying to overcome these difficulties takes a lot of time and effort from students.

Therefore, self-assessment is one of the strategies that encourage learners to be able to think about what they are learning and what they can do to improve their learning outcomes (Miqawati, 2020). Participants in this research enrolled in a 4-weeks lesson plan that carried out some activities to practice vocabulary, grammar sentence structure, spelling, punctuation, and organization. The author monitored, reported their progress, and provided feedback to students.

Literature Review

This section presents the conceptual framework related to the study. The following contributions add some core concepts that highlight the significance of this technique in aiding students to enhance their writing productions.

Writing

A challenging part of children's literacy acquisition is writing. Moreover, writing is the primary mean to evaluate students and through which they demonstrate academic knowledge in school. Oliver et al. (2007) showed in their research that almost 20% of children fail to reach the appropriate level of writing according to National Curriculum assessments in the US and UK.

Taking that into account, writing is a difficult skill even in children's first language. The process of writing in an L2 involves an interplay between learners' first language and the target language. Therefore, while students write in their second language, they transform concepts and experiences learned into written communication in the target language (Huh et al., 2020). When writing in L2, students tend to translate ideas and experiences from L1 to L2, making sure that they use the right words and phrases.

EFL educators should design writing tasks that encourage students from an early age to practice the process of writing. Some research has found that students have to construct and analyze particular linguistic forms to improve their language skills. Kos (2023) reported that children from 7 to 11 are in the middle of cognitive and metalinguistic development which helps them understand specific language aspects in their L2.

Self-Assessment

In his research study, Gezmiş (2020) stated that students should be encouraged to self-evaluate their writing to take responsibility and actions in their learning. It is the same as

noticing the types of errors they made and how they can correct those mistakes. Learners can monitor their process of writing while acquiring a second language when they self-assess.

Brown and Harris (2013) defined self-assessment as an evaluative act that is carried out by students individually regarding their piece of work and academic abilities. Teachers should give students strategies to discover and understand what they want to say in a written way. In such a manner, students are more likely to convey genuine information when meaningful tasks are provided. The ability to self-evaluate allows students to notice what they are doing and what actions they can take to improve their performance.

Impact of Self-assessment on Writing

Some research has been conducted by different researchers to prove that self-assessment techniques improve students' ability to write in a second language. Additionally, Widiastuti (2018) carried out some research in which students had to self-evaluate their interactions in a web blog. The findings showed that students improved in various aspects such as organization, vocabulary, and grammar structure. It contributes to the study by underscoring the value of self-assessment in increasing writing performance.

Fathi and Khodabakhsh (2019) also stated that the use of self-assessment activities contributes to improving the writing competence of the participants of their study. However, their research goes beyond self-assessment and digs into the role of peer assessment as well. Within this study, a comparison was drawn between two groups: one group was instructed to self-assess exclusively, while the other group was introduced to the practice of peer assessment. The results imply that the group that used peer assessment outperformed the group that was taught to self-assess their essays. This study focuses on using self-assessment on young learners

because it helps children appreciate their achievements and develop an awareness of their learning journey.

Some studies have found that the use of self-assessment worked better on adults than children. However, around the age of 8 to 12, the ability to self-reflect and self-assess appears to improve (Paris & Paris, 2001). Young learners who experience continuous self-assessment are more likely to increase their ability to self-evaluate their learning. Consequently, this has a convenient impact on their English proficiency (Butler & Lee, 2006).

There exist different strategies for promoting children's involvement in their own learning. Wilson and Conyers (2013) stated that most children are not naturally metacognitive, but all students can benefit from being taught how to monitor their learning. Warash and Workman (2016) developed a study with 4 and 5-year-old learners who were able to self-assess. It demonstrated that with the right tools and a clear goal, students can self-assess their progress. In essence, this metacognition approach works efficiently with young children.

In addition, Yan et al. (2022) stated that teachers play a supportive but not a dominant role. Teachers should implement checklists, rubrics, and structures that encourage reflection in their lessons through different learning activities. Self-assessment can be implemented through direct instruction and modeling. When students work on assignments, checklists serve as a useful reminder of specific expectations. It can help students to stay focused on tasks and develop learning autonomy (Center for Responsive Schools Inc., 2018, p. 157).

However, a recent study showed that students' self-assessments are not always accurate. A recent study showed that most students are used to the judgment of the teacher rather than themselves. To a certain extent, the results indicated that students with different levels of confidence affect their self-assessment. Chen and Zhang (2023) reported different reasons such

as lack of training, unfamiliarity with the tools to self-assess, and limited vocabulary to understand the checklist they used.

A self-evaluation involves the student's perception of their work. Yang and his colleagues (2022) 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. Realistic judgments about their work help students figure out what they need to focus on and what to improve. Educators must guide students in understanding its function and purpose.

Backwards Design

The intervention was planned using a Backward Design model. Wiggins (2011) stated that the learning outcomes begin when educators have a clear understanding of the learning goals. A backward design was employed to harmonize the learning goal with the learning outcomes. The backward design intends to prioritize the planned learning goal instead of just covering some topics in a specific curriculum.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) stated that this approach differs from the traditional design because a teacher must start with the goals. This design involves a three-stage process. First, set the desired results or learning outcomes. Lang (2008) indicated that 'what should students be able to do at the end of this course?' (p.10) is a question that must be answered to begin with. Then, keeping in mind the direction of the goal chosen, evidence should be gathered to measure the results. This evidence is collected through formative and summative assessments and other assignments along the learning process. Finally, the learning plan must give opportunities for students to engage in authentic tasks and practices, therefore, this design ensures that the contributions of this study will resonate beyond the classroom, fostering meaningful learning.

Innovation

The innovation plan (See Appendix 1) consisted of different learning experiences that focused on improving writing skills in third graders. Due to the age of the participants, their proficiency is pre-A1. It is established that ‘students can create simple, isolated phrases and sentences’ (Council of Europe, 2003, p.75). The goal of the researcher was that students learn words about different places, know how to make sentences correctly using the present simple tense and adjectives, and how to spell and use punctuation accurately. All of this helped them to write sentences about places they like without any assistance in the future.

To support the transfer goal, two essential questions were asked over and over throughout the development of the innovation, which were the following:

- How can I communicate my ideas clearly?
- Can I describe my current favorite place?

The final summative assessment task asked students to imagine they were journalists for the school newspaper, sharing their reports with teachers, students, and parents. The newspaper team wanted them to write about the coolest places they had been to. They had to make use of words related to places writing at least five sentences in Present Simple. Sentences explained what activities they like to do there, who they go with, and the reason they like it. Finally, a self-assessment checklist was given, which focused on these aspects: vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and organization.

In the training phase, students were given 8 lessons within 4 weeks which consisted of 16 hours of face-to-face instruction focusing on self-assessment. Students were introduced to the concept of self-assessment and the importance of being aware of what they are doing and how they can improve their performance in the future. The teacher modeled self-assessment by using

a checklist to evaluate a post for her blog, students observed how reflective she was and how she commented on areas for improvement. In lesson 3, the Simple Present grammar structure was reintroduced to students. The teacher gave them activities that would help them build sentences, and encourage them to start writing about places they enjoy going to. It is worth mentioning that this grammar structure was already covered in their school year curriculum. In that way, students got interested in inquiring about more vocabulary they could use to describe places they like. Some useful words including adjectives were given to them to expand their vocabulary. Most of the activities that were developed during this innovation included group work and individual work. Meanwhile, the role of the teacher was to monitor students and provide them with meaningful feedback.

In the following week, students were given a lesson on spelling so they unscrambled some words to form adjectives. After this, they had their first opportunity to practice for the final performance task. At the end of their practice, they self-assessed their work using a checklist. Additionally, they were asked about the importance of spelling words correctly in their reflection time. The objective of the next lesson was to practice sentence structure and punctuation. Students built sentences from prompts focusing on the simple present grammar. An emphasis was also placed on capitalization at the beginning of a sentence and the use of a period at the end of it.

In lessons 6 and 7, students transferred their knowledge into a real-life context. They described their bedroom and a place they visit on Saturdays. At the end of each lesson, they used the checklist to self-assess their work and the teacher motivated them to be reflective on their writing productions and encouraged them to be honest with themselves. The teacher highlighted the importance of being principled when they self-assessed their writing productions.

Research Methodology

Action research is defined by Efron and Ravid (2013) as an inquiry conducted by practitioners that includes not only teachers but other school members, administrators, and every person involved in education. Research is necessary for educators and students because it helps to target factors that affect learning and improve teaching practices.

The present research used a mixed-method action research in which quantitative and qualitative data were considered. By conducting research, new strategies and approaches could come up as a result that supports the learning process in education. It facilitates a model to modify, improve, and take responsibility into practice (Spencer et al., 2020). Using a combination of these methodologies enables the researcher to address the research inquiries on a deeper level. Therefore, the quantitative and qualitative data support the the findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Qualitative research is characterized by exploring ideas and formulating theories or hypotheses through observations expressed in words. In contrast, quantitative research is aimed at confirming a hypothesis by being expressed in numbers, graphs, and tables (Streefkerk, 2022).

Consequently, the researcher carried a qualitative and quantitative data analysis to examine the following questions in particular:

1. To what extent does self-assessment improve the writing productions of pre-A1 learners?
2. Which part of the checklist was most impacted by using the self-assessment strategy?
3. What are the students' limitations during the application of self-assessment to enhance their writing skills?

Participants

The author of this research selected participants from third grade who were at a pre-A1 proficiency level. Participants studied in a private bilingual school located in the city of Guayaquil. Twenty-five EFL students participated in this research. There were altogether 13 girls and 12 boys ranging in age from 7 to 8. All participants' native language is Spanish and each particular lesson from this research was given during the 2023-2024 school year.

Instruments

To answer the first research question, a pre-test was conducted at the beginning of the research. A pre-test is an assessment tool that is given to participants before they experience the innovation that is about to be implemented (Mauldin, 2020). Students were tested on topics they had not mastered yet. The objective to answer this research question is related to how students can improve their writing. Richland et al. (2009) suggested that getting poor results brings more opportunities to improve.

Later, a post-test was administered to the same sample. A post-test is an evaluation given to participants after they have completed the implementation in a research study (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003). Their performance allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the results of the implementation. The pre-test and post-test research design aimed to provide participants with identical assessment measures before and after the intervention. It allowed the researcher to highlight any changes attributed to the treatment. Then, the researcher graded the results from the pre-test and post-test using a rubric that provided quantitative data. This rubric was piloted by the teacher on another assignment before being used in this present study.

To analyze the second research question, a checklist was provided to students. This tool was designed according to their age and level. For that reason, every criterion was detailed in

first person along with three options that measure the frequency of the selected criteria in their performance.

Additionally, concerning the last research question, observations were conducted. The researcher took field notes of the changes and difficulties that students faced during the intervention. First, when they used the self-assessment tool the first time. Then, another observation took place while they were practicing during the implementation along with the last observation when it was concluded.

Data Analysis

The researcher evaluated students' outcomes using a rubric that included the same criteria as the students' checklist. The pre-test and post-test were graded for quantitative analysis. These were uploaded to an Excel spreadsheet. Descriptive statistics were run: mean, mode, median, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation. The *p*-value was also calculated as an inferential statistic.

After the intervention was conducted, checklists were collected to keep evidence on what criteria were more impacted by using self-assessment as a strategy. This research tool also provided valuable insight for understanding the intervention in promoting self-assessment skills in young learners.

Throughout the intervention of the study, field notes were recorded to portray students' limitations encountered during the implementation of self-assessment. (See Appendix 4). Three observations took place where there is evidence of some of the challenges that students faced.

Ethical Considerations

While action research can bring valuable insights and positive changes, researchers should know ethical challenges to safeguard the well-being of participants and maintain ethical

integrity throughout the research process. Efron and Ravid (2013) emphasized that, especially in a school setting, all participants and their legal guardians should be informed of their involvement in a particular study, ensuring confidentiality and privacy. Participants had the right to withdraw without facing any negative consequences. All participants, legal guardians, and tutors engaged voluntarily in this present study.

At the beginning of this research, the head of the school and academic coordinator were informed about the study and later on approved the project to take place with the 25 students in Third grade. Furthermore, a Google form was sent to the parents and tutors asking for their consent for their children's participation in the present research. This document outlined the purpose, procedure, and potential benefits associated with the research. The consent form also highlighted the researcher's commitment to follow ethical guidelines and standards.

Results

Concerning what extent self-assessment improves the writing productions of pre-A1 learners, descriptive statistics tables portray the results of the pre-test and post-test. The following table shows the results of the minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, and *p*-value.

Table 1

Pre-tests and Post-tests Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

	N	Min	Max	M	SD	<i>p</i> value
Pre-Test	25	5	12	8.56	1.47422	0
Post-Test	25	10	15	13.08	1.52534	0

The results revealed an increase in scores in the post-test, indicating that there was a significant improvement throughout the given lessons. The increase in the mean scores demonstrated that practice fosters better outcomes in writing productions among pre-A1 learners.

The implementation of self-assessment contributed to the continuous enhancement of students' writing.

Table 2

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics per Construct

Construct	N	Pre-Test				Post-Test				p value
		Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	
Vocabulary	25	1	3	1.72	0.6137	2	3	2.64	0.4898	0
Content	25	1	3	1.80	0.6454	1	3	2.48	0.6531	0
Punctuation	25	1	2	1.44	0.5066	2	3	2.80	0.4082	0
Spelling	25	1	2	1.84	0.3741	2	3	2.64	0.4898	0
Organization	25	1	2	1.72	0.4582	2	3	2.52	0.5099	0

The results shown in Table 2 reflect that using self-assessment improved different aspects of writing skills which include vocabulary, content, punctuation, spelling, and organization. Specifically, it indicated that in punctuation students improved the most. It displayed a considerable increase from a mean score of 1.44 in the pre-test to 2.80 in the post-test. Overall, the outcomes suggested that students became more aware of using punctuation correctly by checking their work.

Table 3

Frequency of the results of the checklist

Construct	Practice 2				Post-Test			
	Yes	Som.	Not	N	Yes	Som.	Not	N
1. I can use vocabulary about places.	15	4	6	25	17	7	3	25
2. I use the present simple.	8	11	6	25	18	6	1	25
3. I can use adjectives to describe a place.	3	10	12	25	13	10	2	25
4. I can write words with correct spelling.	8	11	7	25	15	8	2	25
5. My writing has correct punctuation.	4	9	12	25	19	5	1	25
6. My ideas are clear and well-organized.	3	12	10	25	15	7	1	25

In response to the second research question regarding the specific impact of the self-assessment strategy on various checklist criteria, it was observed that most of the components

were influenced, the criteria encompassed vocabulary, the use of present simple, spelling, punctuation, and organization. As it was mentioned before, the most improved part was punctuation followed by vocabulary and the use of Simple Present in the content. This affirmed that using self-assessment is a tool to develop better writing productions. By using self-assessment, students were able to see by themselves the areas they were good at along with what they needed to work on. However, as observed in the table before, the researcher did not take into account the checklist from the pre-test as it did not show accuracy due to the unfamiliarity of the tool. After the teacher clarified each criterion and modeled how to self-assess, students became more aware of how to use the checklist.

The researcher closely observed students' experiences with self-assessment by documenting what challenges they encountered during the intervention with field notes. Before the self-assessment technique, students would only think that a grade defined their work and they put little reflection on their final products. However, when students understood how to self-assess and continued practicing, they became more attentive and aware of their writing. Eventually, the final observation revealed an improvement. Students were able to gain independence and overcome challenges that were presented during the intervention.

These results provided insight into the use of self-assessment and some guidance for applying self-assessment as a strategy to improve writing skills in a student-centered classroom. One of the limitations found was that students were unfamiliar with self-assessing their work. They constantly asked the teacher the meaning of each word presented in the checklist. Their lack of vocabulary and the constant dependence on the teacher to understand the checklist, demonstrated that it was a challenge for them. As the intervention proceeded, learners were

getting more engaged in revising and correcting their mistakes by using the tool given. It demonstrated that students overcame their limitations.

Discussion

According to the first research questions, the positive results that were obtained in this study align closely with some authors mentioned in the literature review such as Widiastuti (2018) and Fathi and Khodabakhsh (2019) on the impact of self-assessment on writing skills. This study acknowledges writing as a challenging skill that demands time and effort, especially in an EFL setting as emphasized before, the nature of performing writing is even difficult in students' mother tongue. Taking that into account, the role of teachers was to guide students through the process of writing and promote self-assessment tools for better learning outcomes. As shown in the results, there was a difference from the pre-test of an average of 8.56% to 13.08% in the post-test.

The impact of the self-assessment technique is corroborated by the second research question. The use of this technique in this research improved students' writing, particularly young learners. As Butler and Lee (2006) showed in their study, continuous self-assessment appears to be beneficial for young learners. It comes together in agreement that self-reflection skills tend to improve around the age of 8 to 12 (Paris & Paris, 2001).

This investigation contributes insights into young learners' development of self-reflection skills. Students were able to look into their writing performance realizing the mistakes they made. Furthermore, incorporating self-assessment helped students get better at punctuation. This particular criterion showed improvement because it was easy for students to recognize it as a mistake. Moreover, students looked closely at spelling and the correct organization of sentences in present simple. After practice and the clarification of each of the topics they used in the

performance task. Most of the participants were able to develop autonomy in figuring out what they had to improve. While some students had to improve their organization of ideas, spelling, and punctuation, other students had to work more on vocabulary and grammar to describe their favorite places. However, this research finding highlights the visual nature of spelling and punctuation providing a clear sign of progress for young learners. This feature aligns with what Kos (2023) reported about how EFL young learners can identify specific aspects of their target language.

Compared to the limitations presented in the literature review, the research by Cheng and Zhang (2023) emphasized that teachers play a supportive role in implementing self-assessment. Some of the limitations identified in the study included students' lack of autonomy to understand the checklist. Due to their age and level of English proficiency, students depend more on the teacher to deal with an unfamiliar tool or challenge they encounter in the classroom.

Additionally, another perspective from Yang et al. (2022) acknowledged the risk of students overestimating their work influenced by confidence levels and a tendency to rely on teacher judgment rather than self-evaluation. It was evidenced at the beginning of innovation that some self-assessments were inaccurate compared to the rubric that the teacher used to grade them. The teacher needed to clarify that they must be principled, as it is one of the IB attributes they should practice and aligns with the learning profile of the PYP program the school is part of.

Conclusions

The research aimed to prove that self-assessment improves the writing skills of pre-A1 students, focusing particularly on vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and organization. All the data collection tools used in this study reflect the positive impact this self-evaluation

technique has on students' writing abilities. It reflects a better idea of how students get more involved in their learning when evaluating their writing productions.

Reporting on Q1: *To what extent does self-assessment improve the writing productions of pre-A1 learners?* This study contributes to the potential benefits of integrating self-assessment in EFL lessons for young learners. This research highlights the use of self-evaluation in young learners as a lifelong learning habit that enhances language proficiency. Starting at a young age is beneficial because it helps children develop a mindset of continuous improvement.

Regarding Q2: *Which part of the checklist was most impacted by using the self-assessment strategy?* The findings indicated an improvement in various criteria, emphasizing punctuation. The visual progress in punctuation skills, as shown in the pre-test and post-test outcomes indicated the effect of self-assessment. Students were able to check their writing with the structured criteria they used in the checklist. Subsequently, this led to an increase in their autonomy and gain of confidence when writing in their non-native language.

Finally, on Q3: *What are the students' limitations during the application of self-assessment to enhance their writing skills?* Teachers are in charge of providing students with tools that help them overcome difficulties with any specific language skill. This study encourages future researchers to explore other tools that could lead to better ways of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language. Visual aids and explicit instruction are suggested to enhance comprehension, particularly in young learners.

Limitations

Some of the limitations encountered in this study include the short amount of time for delivering the lessons, and being a new teacher in the school where the research took place. First, there was restricted time available for giving the lessons planned. As the study was conducted

within the school year, other curriculum requirements needed attention as well. The activities included in the innovation plan had to be integrated into other lessons from the scope and sequence of content that the school's curriculum covers.

Lastly, being a new teacher in the school where the research took place added challenges. The constant demand for administrative work had an impact on the researcher's ability to dedicate more time to writing comprehensive reports of the study. This limitation affected the depth and detail that could be included in the documentation of the research.

Recommendations

The researcher encourages educators to include self-assessment in their lessons as a tool that will increase students' performance in the skill they want to tailor. Teachers can make use of self-assessment at the end of a lesson to have a perception of how students think they performed. This could be implemented according to any curriculum demands.

More studies should be carried out in this field to give teachers more updated strategies that would help students improve their language skills. Specifically on young learners due to the small amount of research on pre-A1 learners. Addressing problems at an early stage guarantees better learning outcomes. These studies should also focus on strategies that enhance students' confidence when learning another language.

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Appendix 1

Lesson plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric used in the research.

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist to self-assess.

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Field notes

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Grades report

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

E-portfolio

Available upon request.