Universidad Casa Grande

Peer-Assessment Influence on EFL Writing Skills

Luis Rodolfo Solórzano Saldarriaga

Coordinator: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Research Report

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-19-N˚.140-2020. Cohort 2022 - 2023. Author's email: luissolorzano@casagrande.edu.ec.

Guayaquil, March 25th, 2024.

Peer-Assessment Influence on EFL Writing Skills

One of the main challenges of mastering English as L2 is writing, which is the case of participants of this study. This research was developed to improve the participants' English language writing through the application of peer-assessment. Writing is one of the four skills of L2 and it is required that students use a correct grammatical structure when writing a text, and essay, among others. Mastery of writing in L2 allows personal and professional development that will serve as motivation factors for success.

Students experience difficulties when writing in L2 due to the use of vocabulary, grammatical structures and connectors, among other aspects of writing. In written production, each student has previous experience, which is why for some students it is easy to create a text, while for others it can probably be very difficult. This was evident in the participants when they were doing their activities.

Due to the information obtained about the writing difficulties presented by the participants of this study, writing being part of the problem for the acquisition of an L2, this research has been designed to improve this skill by applying different peer-assessment tasks proposed in the research. The activities encourage creativity in participants as well as the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical structure.

This approach aims to develop a set of activities applied to writing skills that allow participants to work as a team, provide feedback and convey their thoughts and ideas through the use of peer-assessment. Therefore, this research focuses on proposing peer-assessment to improve students' writing.

Literature Review

Peer assessment, a commonly used educational method, has become a way to improve EFL writing abilities. This literature review focus in the influence of peer-assessment (independent variable) and on EFL writing skills (dependent variable), emphasizing its influence on different facets of writing, along with the advantages it offers for students to implement it.

Peer-Assessment

Peer assessment throughout the learning process helps students evaluate and provide meaningful input to improve writing skill in their classmates. Reinholz (2015) supported that a potential advantage of peer-assessment is that students play the role of the assessor and are at the same time assessed, they can benefit from it more than by only being assessed. This strategy helps students develop skills by providing feedback on writing errors and successes to their peers. According to Wiggins (2012), "Feedback is information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal ... Helpful feedback is goal-referenced; tangible and transparent; actionable; user-friendly (specific and personalized); timely; on-going; and consistent" (p. 11).

The role of the teacher in peer assessment is to facilitate the process and provide guidance to students as they evaluate each other's writing (Topping, 2009). The teacher should establish clear guidelines for the peer assessment process, including the criteria to be used for evaluation and the expectations for feedback (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). The teacher should also model effective feedback techniques and provide examples of high-quality writing to help students understand the standards they are aiming to achieve (Wiggins, 2012). In addition to facilitating the process, the teacher should also provide support to students as they engage in peer assessment (Topping, 2009). This may include answering

questions, providing feedback on students' own writing, and helping to mediate any conflicts that arise during the process.

Benefits of Peer-Assessment

Peer evaluation allows participants to evaluate the work done by their peers. This approach allows participants to improve their critical thinking skills, participate in the evaluation of writing, and provide and receive appropriate feedback. Peer evaluation also gives participants motivation and responsibility when evaluating themselves among peers since it is a team effort and at the same time allows them to promote their own learning that can be shared among them. In addition to fostering a pleasant community work environment, collaboration help and develop writing skill. Some of the benefits of using peer assessment in the classroom are:

1. **Encourages critical thinking:** Peer assessment motivates students to critically analyze the work of their peer. It enables them to develop their analytical and evaluative skills by comparing and contrasting their work with that of their peers. This type of thinking is essential for students as it prepares them for the future where they will need to evaluate information critically. Studies have shown that peer assessment encourages students to think more deeply and critically about the content they are studying (Topping, 1998).

2. **Facilitates reflective practice:** Peer assessment encourages reflective practice, allowing students to reflect on their work and the work done by their classmates, allowing them to identify strengths and weaknesses in their writing ability. This type of reflection promotes metacognition, which is essential for students to become self-directed learners (Boud et al., 985). Research has shown that peer assessment facilitates the development of reflective practice in students (Boud & Falchikov, 1989).

3. **Improves feedback skills:** Peer evaluation supports the participants in developing their ability at the moment to give and receive feedback from classmates. It encourages them to identify areas of improvement in their peers' work and provide constructive feedback. This type of feedback is valuable for improving the quality of students' work and is an essential skill in the workplace (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000).

4. **Encourages responsibility for learning:** It enables them to take ownership of their work and be accountable for their learning outcomes. By evaluating the work of their peers, students become more aware of the criteria used to assess their work, which improves their understanding of what is required of them (Topping, 1998).

5. **Fosters collaboration and community:** It allows students to collaborate and gain knowledge from one another. By evaluating their peers' work, students become more engaged in the learning process and develop a sense of community (Boud & Falchikov, 1989).

6. **Limitations:** Despite the advantages of peer evaluation, it is important to recognize the possible challenges that may arise. A limitation that may arise is the student's experience with prior knowledge, which may affect the development of the evaluation. Also, some students may feel uncomfortable offering constructive criticism or feedback, due to the individual differences that may exist between them. It generally occurs at the beginning of a study due to the students not fully trusting their peers (Tapia, 2020).

Writing Skill

Writing is closely linked to other skills. Why is writing important to students? According to Wise (2007), "There is no doubt writing is an essential public relations skill" (p. 37). When students are engaged in reading a text and subsequently respond to questions

regarding its content, the process involves summarizing the information. Similarly, ideas are usually discussed before writing and listened to before writing. Whether students are writing an exam, a letter to a friend, a newspaper article or simply filling in a form, it is important for them to communicate and this depends on their ability to structure and organize words and sentences into a meaningful whole (Acuña, 2019).

Crafting written content can be particularly challenging for individuals who are not native speakers, as they are anticipated to generate written materials that showcase their command of the mentioned elements in a language that is unfamiliar to them. According to Puspa (2016, p. 3081), "Usually elementary learners of English language encounter more difficulties to cope with writing skills than the rest of the three skills". Additionally, the instruction of writing has traditionally focused on the end result rather than the ongoing process. Consequently, educators prioritize aspects such as grammar and punctuation over the critical aspects of making decisions regarding content and the structuring of ideas. Students are often introduced to writing rules at an early stage, but sometimes this approach focuses too much on the technical aspects, leaving their ability to express ideas underdeveloped.

Innovation

This innovation was carried out in a private educational unit. The participants were students from the third baccalaureate year. They were evaluated for 9 hours, divided into 3 hours per week. The method used in this project was peer-assessment. The aim of the assessment was to improve writing production at a B1 level. This activity was carried out asynchronously using institutional mail and the Canva platform.

The role of the student who applies peer assessment to improve his or her writing skills was to participate in the process of evaluating his or her peers' writing and providing feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). It should be noted that before participants apply this innovation, they were trained on the importance and benefits of peer-assessment. They

were also trained to use a checklist to provide feedback on the writing activity (see Appendix 1).

The participants used the established criteria to evaluate the quality of the writing, in this way the participants provided constructive comments which were specific, practical, and focused on helping their classmates improve their writing skills. As the student participates in the peer-assessment process, he or she must also take an active role in seeking feedback on his or her own writing (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This involved asking their peers for feedback, reflecting on the feedback they received, and using it to improve their writing. By actively participating in the peer assessment process, participants were able to develop their own writing skills and at the same time help their peers improve their writing.

Research Methodology

Action Research refers to the systematic process and set of techniques employed by researchers to plan, conduct, and analyze investigations in order to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon, answer specific research questions, or test hypotheses. It is used to collect, organize, interpret, and draw conclusions from data. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017, p.4), research methodology is the "strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes." Researchers adopt various methods, including quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, based on their research goals and the nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

This research employs action research methodologies, incorporating measurement tools for the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The aim is to address the following research queries:

- What is the influence of peer-assessment on student's writing skills?
- What were the students' standpoint about peer assessment to improve their writing skills?

Context and Participants

The sample was 10 participants belonging to the private educational unit. Five men and five women participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 17 to 19 years old. This group belonged to the Third baccalaureate, who has 3 academic hours in the English language per week. According to the placement test conducted by the Language Centre, and previous levels passed by some participants, these students have reached a consolidated level B1 as established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Instruments

In order to answer the first question: *What is the influence of peer-assessment on student's writing skills?* The instruments used in this action research were a pre and post-test created based on the research questions. A rubric designed by the researcher was implemented to grade the tests. The pre and post-test focused on participant's development of the writing activity. In the pretest, participants created a story map in order to write a composition about their personal life experiences during their last vacation (100 to 150 words) and submitted it to the teacher. In the post-test, students wrote a story about life experiences for third grade audience (among 150 to 200 words), according to the plan designed (See the appendix 2).

The assessment rubric for evaluating the task was created utilizing the Cambridge B1 English Writing Assessment Scale (refer to Appendix 3). It consisted of four criteria, each descriptor assigned a score ranging from 1 to 5, where five represented the highest grade and one indicated the lowest.

In response to the second research query: *What were the students' standpoint about peer assessment to improve their writing skills?* Pre and post surveys were applied to understand students' standpoints on peer assessment and its influence on their writing skill. According to Cohen et al. (2017), "Surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared" (p.334).

Data Analysis

In order to obtain information for the first question of this research, descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. The pre and post grades' descriptive statistics encompass the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation.

Similarly, the sample *t*-test allowed comparison of the ten participants' scores on the pre- and post-test. This analysis was developed in an Excel spreadsheet with the respective formulas. Then, the data obtained through the second question by pre and post-test surveys were compared to obtain results according to learners' standpoint (See appendixes 4 and 5).

Ethical Considerations

It is important to implement some ethical considerations in action research. The principles of ethical considerations are a set of resources that guide the plans, designs, and practices in an investigation or action research (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). The researcher requested the authorization of the academic department of the institution a letter of consent, providing a comprehensive explanation of the research proposal. This was done to ascertain the ethical acceptability of the research goals and design, ensuring compliance with the institution's principles (See Appendix 6).

After obtaining approval, participants received information about the study's purpose, advantages, potential risks, and funding before deciding whether to participate or not. Then, they were asked to willingly engage in the research. Since they were all minors, parents'

permission was requested to carry out the project. This research is based on data protection

principles and privacy rights (European Data Protection Supervisor, 2019). Consequently, to

guarantee privacy and confidentiality throughout the process, the names or personal

information of the participants in this project are not detailed.

Results

To address the first question: *What is the influence of peer-assessment on student's*

writing skills? The results demonstrated that the peer assessment has the potential to impact

students' writing abilities. The pre-test and the post-test was applied, evaluated, and analyzed;

it allowed to know the capability from the students in their writing skill.

In the pre-test, the students got an average score of 16.5, it showed the writing level

from the students (See Appendix 7). In contrast, the post-test generated an average score of

19.1 (See Appendix 8). The variance amounted to 2.6, indicating a positive rise following the

implementation of the project, during which students enhanced their scores. The application

of the *t*-test revealed a *p*-value of 0.00, indicating a statistically significant disparity between

pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test results.

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*	*p-value*
Pre-test	10	12	17	16.5	2.46	
Post-tets	10	20	20	19.1	0.99	0.00
Valid N (listwise)	10					

In response to the second research question: *What were the students' standpoint about*

peer assessment to improve their writing skills? The ten participants were evaluated

anonymously, since this allowed them to be given more confidence when providing answers

to the questions in the evaluations before and after the application of the peer evaluation. In the first survey, it was found that 40% of participants rated their writing skills as excellent, while 30% considered them very good, and another 20% mentioned them as good, 10% indicated having fair skills.

Regarding experience with peer evaluation, 40% of the students declared having participated in activities of this type, while the remaining 60% had no experience on the subject. When asked about the perceived impact of peer assessment, it was found that 40% of students expected a significant improvement in their writing skills through this method. While 60% were not sure. In addition, various benefits expected by participants from peer evaluation were identified, such as an improvement in the clarity of expression of ideas 30%, grammar and syntax 20%, the organization of content 20%, and creativity in writing 30%. Regarding preferred learning methods, 80% of participants mentioned agreeing with traditional instructor-led methods. 10% opted for self-directed learning, and the remaining 10% preferred a combination of both.

After participating in peer assessment activities to improve writing skill, changes in students' perceptions were observed. In terms of perceived improvement in their writing skills, 50% of participants reported moderate improvement, while 40% noted substantial improvement, and 10% experienced slight improvement.

In confidence gained from their writing skills, 30% of participants experienced a moderate confidence increase, and the remaining 70% experienced a significant confidence increase. Regarding the effectiveness of the feedback provided by colleagues, 60% rated it as effective, while 30% considered it very effective, but only 10% perceived it as somewhat effective. In relation to the preference for peer evaluation, 60% of the participants expressed a preference for this method, 30% were neutral in this regard, while the remaining 10% did not prefer this method.

Finally, regarding recommendation for others, 70% of the participants would be willing to definitely recommend peer assessment as a method to improve writing skills. Another 10% would not recommend this method, and the remaining 20% remained neutral on the matter.

To sum-up these results, the students felt more confident about their writing skills since by receiving feedback they could noticed where they needed to improve. They also became more interested in learning topics to improve writing and thus avoided errors in the grammatical context. Most students liked this way of receiving feedback because it is more dynamic, more social when interacting with peers and providing support. It is important to emphasize that for there to be a good result, students must know in advance how to provide feedback and know what the main errors they can find, in this way they can improve their writing skill.

Discussion

Peer assessment helps improve writing by allowing peers to review their writing and judge each other's work using learned rules. This way, participants can give good feedback that helps writers improve. Some research has shown that reviewing someone else's work can help improve writing. For example, a study by Topping (2009) found that this way writing can be improved and students like it more. Additionally, a study by Liu and Carless (2006) found that judging the work of others can help students understand how writing works and helps them give and receive feedback.

Peer- assessment gives participants a lot of ideas about how to get better at writing and how to find what they need to do better. Furthermore, judging another person's activity can help participants notice mistakes they may have made as well.

But it is important to know that judging the work of others can be difficult. For example, students may not want to tell the truth about what they think if they are worried

about hurting their friends' feelings, or they may not know how to give good feedback. To solve this problem, it is good to indicate the rules for judging and help students who are new to this.

<p align="center">**Conclusion**</p>

The peer assessment application was designed for a group of young students with an English level of B1. This sample of students allowed to know the level of their writing ability according to their current curriculum. Through this project it was possible to implement a grading rubric in which the student got a fair grade according to their performance in the mentioned skill; however, the observations and feedback made by their peers allowed them to improve their organization in the writing process. In addition, it is valuable to be able to count on proper monitoring and positive support from the teacher when applying peer-assessment to develop writing skills. In this context, despite the small sample size, it was possible to obtain important results from the tests carried out, which provided significant statistical data that helped give a better vision to two questions.

Limitations

Although peer-assessment is a very useful tool when implementing it in classrooms, in this project, when applied to writing, it has had some limitations. Starting with the quality of the feedback that each participant can provide regardless of the knowledge acquired. In some cases, it can present as not remembering what was learned and not being able to provide timely and accurate feedback, resulting in not being able to give constructive comments when reviewing another colleague's work.

There are also prejudices, which can be influenced by friendship or rivalry between colleagues. This can lead to an unfair and dishonest peer assessment, which could affect the proper development of the evaluation. This leads to a lack of responsibility and commitment

to make a good assessment of the work prepared by the other partner, causing a lack of motivation and commitment on the part of the other participant.

Confidence is also part of these limitations; some students experience discomfort or insecurity when presenting their writing to their peer evaluator, and some participants also experience it when offering comments or feedback to their peers, especially if they do not do it correctly. They consider themselves not very skilled in writing. This discomfort can harm the active participation of students, reducing the benefit of the peer assessment process.

On the other hand, time is also one of the crucial factors when applying peer assessment, this can take a long time when reviewing the drafts and can present as a challenge since as a teacher you only have 45 minutes in one-hour class both to explain and review content as well as to carry out the peer assessment.

When recognizing these limitations, it is important to mention that the teacher's participation is essential when applying the evaluation, since being the main head of the classroom, he must address them effectively, allowing a good peer assessment development and maximizing the potential of the writing by giving the participant confidence in becoming a better writer.

Recommendations

It is important to know that to improve students' writing skills we must instruct them correctly so that they can give appropriate feedback to their classmates. First, the teacher must ensure that the student knows the instructions correctly and that they have been clear so that the participant can correctly evaluate his or her partner's work. This involves the teacher's planning where The evaluation criteria and feedback are raised the topics that will be addressed to carry out a correct evaluation of writing.

Second, it is crucial to know that all participants feel prepared to put their learning into practice and to be able to give feedback that helps improve the writing of their

classmates. A dynamic and trusting environment should also be prioritized so that all participants feel safe in teamwork. In this way, we can ensure that everyone can participate in the peer evaluation with respect and responsibility for the comments and feedback they will provide.

Motivation is also a key point in participating in peer assessment as by instilling this in participants they will work harder to improve their writing during the teaching process. Creating a supportive environment in which the teacher, being the main head of the classroom, helps the student feel comfortable guiding and giving honest feedback, which will serve to generate changes in writing. In this part it is important to promote active listening, constructive criteria and encourage the student to do their work in the best way.

It is also important to emphasize that the use of technology in peer evaluation is very important since the student can have step-by-step monitoring by the teacher to facilitate collaborative work between student teacher and teacher student and thus be able to guide in the shortcomings that the student has when having to give correct feedback. Finally, by following these suggestions, students will be able to improve their writing potential and become better writers, thanks to the support that the teacher can give them and thus have a more pleasant process during class sessions.

References

Acuña, E. (2019). *The collaborative learning and the writing skill.*

https://repositorio.uta.edu.ec/jspui/bitstream/123456789/30320/1/THESIS%20EVELI
N%20ACU%C3%91A.pdf

Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (1985). What is reflection in learning? In R. Boud, D.

Keogh, & D. Walker (Eds.), *Reflection: Turning experience into learning* (pp. 7-18).

Routledge.

Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (1989). Quantitative studies of student self-assessment in higher

education: A critical analysis of findings. *Higher education*, *18*(5), 529-549

https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00138746

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). Research Methods in Education (8th ed.).

Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and

mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS). (2019). *Annual report.* Publications Office of

the European Union. https://www.edps.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publication/2020-
03-17_annual_report_2020_en_0.pdf

Falchikov, N., & Goldfinch, J. (2000). Student peer assessment in higher education: A meta-

analysis comparing peer and teacher marks. *Review of Educational Research*, *70*(3),

287-322. Doi:10.3102/00346543070003287

Fleming, J., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2018). Methodologies, methods and ethical considerations

for conducting research in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-

Integrated Learning*, *19*(3), 205-213. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1196755.pdf

Liu, N. F., & Carless, D. (2006). Peer feedback: the learning element of peer

assessment. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *11*(3), 279-290.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/253967244_Peer_feedback_The_learning_e
lement_of_peer_assessment

Mertler, C. A. (2019). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators* (5th
ed.). Sage Publications.

Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated
learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher
Education*, *31*(2), 199-218. https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/innovation-in-psychology/wp-
content/uploads/sites/24/2013/11/Nichol_2006.pdf

Puspa, S. (2016). The implementation of think pair share to improve students' writing ability
at the seventh grade of SMPN 2 bungkal in the academic year of 2015/2016.
Muhammdiyah University of Ponorogo. http://eprints.umpo.ac.id/id/eprint/2496

Reinholz, D. (2015). The assessment cycle: a model for learning through peer assessment.
Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 41(2), 301-315.
https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1008982

Tapia, J. (2020). *Improving Writing Skills through Peer Assessment.*
http://dspace.casagrande.edu.ec:8080/handle/ucasagrande/2263

Topping, K. (2009). Peer assessment. *Theory into Practice*, *48*(1), 20-27.
https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840802577569

Topping, K. (1998). Peer assessment between students in colleges and universities. *Review of
Educational Research*, *68*(3), 249-276. https://doi.org/10.2307/1170598

Wiggins, G. (2012). Seven keys to effective feedback. *Educational Leadership, 70*(1), 10-16.
https://asdn.org/wp-content/uploads/Wiggins-Seven-Keys-to-Effective-Feedback-
Article.pdf

Wise, K. (2005). The importance of writing skills. *Public Relations Quarterly*, *50*(2), 37.

https://www.proquest.com/openview/f2bd6a42441a40dffb9d9176abc54620/1?pq-

origsite=gscholar&cbl=49209

Appendix 1

Checklist used by students to peer assessment

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Writing Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 4
Student Pre-test Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 5
Student Post-test Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 6
Institutional consent letter

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

Pre-Test Scorer

Available upon request.

Appendix 8

Post-Test Score

Available upon request.

Appendix 9

Link to the Portfolio

Available upon request.