

The Effects of Self-assessment on the Students' performance in the Writing Process

تأثيرات التقويم الذاتي على أداء المتعلمين خلال عملية الكتابة

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ABSTRACT

This research study aims at promoting the incorporation of self-assessment in the writing classroom in order to advance students' quality writing. To this end, two data collection methods were used; a self-assessment checklist and a practitioner researcher's diary. Twenty students assessed their writing using yes/no checklists during three phases of writing. The diary served reflective purposes to address the students' needs and inform instruction in the writing classroom. Findings indicated that when the students were trained in self-assessment and were provided with accurate criteria to achieve learning goals, they could make positive gains. In addition, self-assessment represented clear guidelines to reach the final outcomes of their writing tasks. Change occurred in the writing classroom since reflection-on-action was used to cater for the students' needs and contributed to new roles for both; students and teachers.

Keywords: Criteria; Performance; Reflection-on-action ; Self-assessment; Writing process.

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة الميدانية إلى ترقية دور التقويم الذاتي في تدريس مهارات التعبير الكتابي من أجل المساهمة في رفع مستوى تعلم الطلبة في هذا المقياس. لقد اعتمد البحث على وسيلتي بحث: شبكة التقييم الذاتي وسجل الأستاذ الباحث. شارك عشرون طالبا في تقييم انتاجاتهم الكتابية معتمدين على شبكة التقييم الذاتي خلال ثلاث مراحل من الكتابة. أما الهدف من سجل الأستاذ الباحث فكان لتلبية حاجات الطلبة التعليمية فيما يخص التعبير بالانجليزية وتحسين تدريس المادة على صعيد آخر. أثبتت النتائج أن تدريب الطلبة على التقويم الذاتي وتزويدهم بمعايير دقيقة حول الأهداف المرجوة ساعد في تحقيقها. وقد أبرزت النتائج دور التقويم الذاتي في توجيه الطلبة لبلوغ الهدف التعليمي. وقد ظهرت سمات التغيير في دور الأستاذة والطلبة نتيجة التبصر حول أداء الطلبة خلال عملية التقويم الذاتي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المعايير؛ التقويم الذاتي؛ التبصر؛ التعبير الكتابي

Résumé

Cette recherche vise à promouvoir l'intégration de l'auto-évaluation dans la classe de l'expression écrite afin d'améliorer la qualité de l'écriture des étudiants. A cette fin, deux méthodes de recherche ont été utilisées : une auto-évaluation grille et un journal de chercheur praticien. Vingt étudiants ont évalué leur écritures à l'aide de grille au cours de trois phases de l'écrit. Le journal a servi la réflexion pour répondre aux besoins des étudiants et pour informer l'enseignement dans la classe d'expression écrite. Les résultats ont indiqué que lorsque les étudiants étaient formés à l'auto-évaluation et recevaient des critères précis pour atteindre les objectifs d'apprentissage, ils pouvaient faire des gains positifs. En outre, l'auto-évaluation représentait une approche directrice pour atteindre le résultat final de leur tâches de rédaction.

Des changements sont survenus depuis que la réflexion sur l'action a été utilisée pour répondre aux besoins des étudiants et a contribué à de nouveaux rôles pour les étudiants et l'enseignante.

Mots-clés : critères ; performance ; réflexion ; auto-évaluation ; l'expression écrite.

INTRODUCTION

Quality teaching and learning are closely related to effective classroom assessment. Therefore, assessment is a key factor in making change in the language classroom. In this regard, many scholars advocate the implementation of formative assessment in daily instruction since it can provide teachers and students with descriptive feedback that can be used to address students' needs and to adjust teaching (Black & Wiliam, 1998). However, teachers do not always have sufficient time to effectively respond to every student's writing to provide effective feedback (Andrade, 2010). Hence, teachers can empower their students to take an active part in their writing via self-assessment. When engaged in assessing their own writing, the students become well-aware of quality criteria that would guide them towards achieving their learning goals. As a matter of fact, this study aims at uncovering the potentials of self-assessment in advancing students' learning in the writing process. Thus, this empirical study seeks to address the following research questions:

- 1-Does self-assessment assist the students in achieving learning goals in the writing process?
- 2-Does self-assessment inform the practitioner researcher about the students' needs?
- 3- Does self-assessment make change in the practitioner researcher's practice in the writing classroom?

Based on the above research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated to be tested:

- 1-Self-assessment provides the students with a roadmap towards achieving their learning goals.
- 2-The process of self-assessment highlights clues about the students' needs in writing.
- 3-Self-assessment is a key factor to make change in the writing classroom.

1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Self-assessment refers to the engagement of learners in judging the quality of their current performance (Boud & Falchikov, 1989, p. 529), and if this performance meets any stated standards, goals or criteria (Andrade, 2010; Boud, 1995, p.4). Self-assessment functions formatively when the students work on their task and use self-assessment to revise and make adjustments simultaneously (Andrade & Boulay, 2003; Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009, p. 13), and when the students are actively involved in reflecting upon their performance and making decisions to achieve learning goals (Hughes, 2003). Thus, self-assessment included in the process of learning has the potential to foster effective and deep learning (Kathpalia & Heath, 2008, as cited in Sajedi, 2014, p. 1643; Taras, 2010), to encourage independent learning (Gardner, 1996, p. 18), to promote students' autonomy (J. Brown & Hudson, 1998), metacognitive competencies (Zimmerman, 2002), and to provide a basis for lifelong learning (Sadler, 1998).

Brookhart (1998) states that the notion of self-assessment is not novel in the assessment field since many authors advocated the use of self-evaluation during the 1930's and 1940's. However, advocates of students' independence and autonomy undermined the roles of teachers, noting that students were able to make learning gains without the assistance of their tutors during the 1970's and the 1980's (Cowan, 2006; Reynolds & Trehan, 2000, as cited in Taras, 2015, p. 3), and that it may replace the tutors' assessment (Taras, 2015, p. 5). According to G. Brown and Harris (2013, p. 367), a strong interest in self-assessment as an essential aspect of formative assessment has been supported by several researchers including (Andrade, 2010; Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2010; NCTE, 2013) during the last two decades.

1.1.An Overview of Empirical Research on Self-assessment

Self-assessment plays a powerful role in advancing achievement and learning gains (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; G. Brown & Harris, 2013, p. 367; Taras, 2010). The most prominent aspect of self-assessment is that it engages the students in a process of comparing their current performance

with a set of goals or criteria (Andrade, 2010; Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This can be done through a variety of tools such as checklists (Clarke, Timperley & Hattie, 2003; Lauzon, 2019), rubrics (Brookhart, 2013; Stevens & Levi, 2005), marking guides and model answers (Todd, 2002).

Purwanti (2015, p. 102) asserts that an extensive body of research studies on self-assessment have been undertaken in higher education because university students are believed to be able to monitor their learning compared to young learners.

Several studies highlight the fact that when the students take an active part in assessment, they achieve positive learning gains (Barling, 1980; Ross *et al*, 2002; Sadler & Good, 2006). Furthermore, McDonald and Boud (2003) conducted an experimental study about the impact of self-assessment training on the students' performance in external examinations. High school teachers were trained in how to develop their students' self-assessment skills. The experimental group involved 256 students. They undertook formal training for three terms throughout their academic year. The control group did not receive any notions about self-assessment. The results indicated that trained students topped the overall results in every curriculum area.

1.2. Self-assessment in the Writing Classroom

In this section, we examine empirical studies of student self-assessment carried out in the writing classroom. We selected these studies with regard to the relationship between self-assessment and quality performance.

Self-assessment functions formatively when the students can use feedback to adjust their performance. The feedback model proposed by Hattie and Timperley (2007) is congruent with the effectiveness of self-assessment since the students are well-placed within this model, particularly by asking and reflecting on these questions: where am I going? How am I going (or doing)? And what is next?

Moreover, self-assessment promotes quality learning when key conditions are favoured in the writing classroom such as access to clear criteria about the requirements of the task, training students in self-assessment, assisting students during self-assessment, providing students with opportunities to revise and modify their performance (Goodrich, 1996, as cited in Andrade & Brooke, 2010, p. 76).

In their study about the impact of self-assessment training on the students' narrative writing, Ross *et al* (1999) found that weak students could improve their writing gradually since self-assessment provided them with accurate feedback about their weaknesses. Besides, training the students in self-assessment improved their narrative style at the level of integrating story elements and developing a narrative voice.

When provided with explicit criteria about the requirements of a writing task, the students become well-aware of their performance. Andrade *et al* (2008) concluded that using rubric-referenced self-assessment in the elementary writing class enhanced the pupils' revision skills of multiple drafts and improved the quality of their writing, particularly content, organisation and voice. In the same vein, Andrade *et al* (2009) investigated the impact of rubric-referenced self-assessment on students' self-efficacy in writing. The major aim of this study was to measure the participants' self-confidence in their writing aptitude regarding these rubric items: content organisation, forming a paragraph, voice, tone, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions (Spandel & Stiggins, 1997, as cited in Andrade & Brooke, 2010, p. 82). The results concluded that girls were more self-efficacious than boys since girls' main interest was to master the task at hand, whereas boys tended to seek approval for progress from outside sources such as teachers and peers.

In the EFL context, several studies investigated the role of self-assessment in the writing classroom. For instance, Oscarson (2009) noted that in her case study, the teacher and upper secondary school students had positive attitudes towards the implementation of self-assessment in the EFL classroom since the students could assess their writing using criterion (Teacher's grades). Besides, the students tended to focus on correcting grammar and spelling mistakes more than other

elements such as word choice, sentence structure, the paragraph and punctuation. In Lam's study (2010), students were required to review all their drafts but selected one for self-assessment towards the end of the semester. The results suggested that the students were motivated to deal with self-assessment, mainly when they are taught about new genres and challenging learning situations.

Other related studies highlight different approaches to the incorporation of self-assessment in the writing class. Xu (2016) investigated the implementation of analytic scoring rubric in a class of 36 second year undergraduate majors in public relations. The participants were required to assess their essays in relation to content, organisation, vocabulary, language use and mechanics. The students judged the overall quality of their writing and showed considerable improvement in content, organisation and mechanics. They also improved their word choice and language use but not to a great extent.

In the Algerian context, the researchers could locate few studies about self-assessment including developing the students' writing by using self-assessment through portfolio (Chelli, 2013), teachers' attitudes towards students' self-assessment (Kadri and Amziane, n.d), accuracy in teacher assessment and student self-assessment (Kadri, 2018), and using teacher's self-assessment in the writing classroom (Sahli & Bouhass Benaissi, 2019).

Literature about self-assessment in higher education is considerable. However, Taras (2010) noted that, "student self-assessment has a long and complex history sustained by the passionate few. Despite theory, empirical research and proven practice demonstrating that it is central to [quality learning], it is still a minority practice." Furthermore, there is a dearth of research on the impact of self-assessment on students' achievement in writing in the Algerian context. Hence, this research study extends research on the implementation of self-assessment in the EFL writing classroom in order to reinforce assessment for learning practices and to entitle the students to an active role in their writing.

2. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND PROCEDURES

To get reliable account of this case, two data collection methods were selected to investigate the research questions: self-assessment checklist and a practitioner researcher's diary.

2.1. Context and participants

This study took place in the academic year 2018/2019 in the Section of English at the University of Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret, Algeria. The practitioner researcher taught the module written expression for two years. Moreover, she supervises Master's students in didactics of English as a Foreign Language. The second researcher is a professor in Applied Linguistics. She assisted the practitioner with constructive feedback throughout the theoretical background of this study. Then she provided the researcher with guidelines about the process of self-assessment and the diary entries.

The participants of this study are also full-time second year students, aged between 18 and 23 years old. A total number of 20 students took part in the process of self-assessment (12 females/ 8 males).

2.2. Instruments and procedures

The instruments used in this study incorporated students' self-assessment checklists and practitioner researcher diary.

2.2.1. Conducting the self-assessment process

Self-assessment should occur in a supportive environment. In this vein, the practitioner researcher explained to her students the notion of self-assessment and its role in lifelong learning. Then she informed them about the self-assessment procedure (short term objectives, checklist, knowing the criteria of quality achievement, and how to assess their written performances).

The researcher used 'strong self-assessment model', which is characterised by the following criteria (Taras, 2015, as cited in Wride, 2017, p. 80):

1-Students carry out self-assessment using marking sheets provided along with criteria and required standards.

2-Tutor provides feedback using the grading criteria, but without providing a mark or a grade.

3-Students may gain peer feedback and use all feedback received into account, revise and re-grade their work before final submission.

At this stage, the students were trained in assessing an informal e-mail since it is a requirement for effective self –assessment (McDonald & Boud, 2003). The e-mail was selected from Cambridge English Language Assessment Handbook for Teachers (2016 Exams). The materials of the e-mail include: A worksheet with the rubric for writing an informal e-mail, a worksheet with an adapted Cambridge English Language Assessment Writing Marking Scheme.

The selection of the type of the written task for the students' self-assessment was based on Cambridge English First: Handbook for Teachers (B2 Level) general recommendations for the written paper (Cambridge Assessment, 2016, p. 30). Thus, the topic should be related to the students' interests and experiences. Besides, the students should be familiar with the theme so as to generate relevant ideas. In this context, the practitioner researcher chose the theme of 'writing about their experience at university so far'. This topic is broad so that the participants would have great deal of information to write about (Juzwiak, 2012, p. 21). The assigned topic corresponds to the transitional period from high school to university. Hence, the theme represents an opportunity for them to write about daily life at university.

2.2.2. The practitioner researcher's diary

The practitioner researcher opted for a diary to reflect on her students' performance during the self-assessment task. This kind of reflection is called reflection on action. It was coined by Schön (1983) in his book the Reflective Practitioner. Reflection on action is practised once the action has already taken place and the practitioner is in a position to think about the suitable techniques (strategies/ interventions) that s/he should implement to solve the problem (Bilash, 2011). In this respect, reflection on action addressed students' needs in writing and change of practice in the writing classroom.

2.2.Data Analysis and Interpretation

Included in this section are the correlation between the participants' self-assessment and the teacher assessment, and themes from the practitioner researcher's diary.

The relationship between the participants' self-assessment and the teacher assessment is calculated using the mean and the standard deviation (SD). The aim of this comparison is to identify the extent to which the students could meet the checklist quality criteria throughout the three stages of writing. Table (1) highlights the results of self-assessment and teacher assessment. The magnitude of these correlations is larger than the critical value ($p \leq 1$). This fact indicates that the obtained results are statistically significant i.e. the students' assessment is closer to the requirements of the task.

	The statement				
	Stage 1: Pre-writing (Clustering)	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	I identified the main idea of the assigned topic	1	0	0.9	0.3
2	I formulated 4 ideas related to my main idea.	0.9	0.3	0.65	0.47
3	I formulated 4 examples related to my ideas.	1	0	0.75	0.43
4	I provided 1 specific detail to each example.	0.75	0.43	0.65	0.47
	Stage 2: Paragraph Outline				
5	I formulated the topic sentence.	0.9	0.3	0.9	0.3
6	I provided 3 supporting ideas.	0.9	0.3	0.8	0.4
7	I provided 1 example for each supporting sentence.	0.85	0.35	0.8	0.4
8	I formulated the concluding sentence.	0.95	0.21	0.85	0.35

	Stage 3: Editing				
9	My paragraph has an indentation and a title.	0.9	0.3	0.65	0.47
10	My paragraph has a topic sentence, 3 supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.	1	0	0.9	0.4
11	My topic sentence has a topic and a controlling idea.	0.95	0.21	0.8	0.4
12	I used transitional words and expressions.	0.85	0.35	0.75	0.43
13	Verb tenses are used appropriately.	0.9	0.3	0.6	0.48
14	My sentences are complete in form and meaning.	0.95	0.21	0.7	0.45

Table 1: The correlation between students' self-assessment and teacher assessment

The statistics displayed in Table (1) show great agreement between the scores generated by the students and the teacher for the three writing assignments (clustering, the outline and editing). The findings suggest the students are able to assess their own written performance accurately since the majority could assess the quality of their writing in relation to the checklist criteria.

The main factors that facilitate students' self-assessment lay in the following factors. To begin with, before taking part in assessing their own written works, the participants were continuously reminded of the objective of every lesson and were trained in assessing a piece of writing. In addition, the participants changed their attitudes towards marking their written work since they used to think that writing is assessed on content only. Thus, they become familiar with the components that any teacher of writing would consider when s/he responds to their writing. For instance, the practitioner emphasised the requirements of the assigned topic including: responding appropriately to the assigned topic, the structure of writing, and the choice of words and the tone of the writer.

Secondly, the accuracy of the self-assessment checklist plays a vital role in the assessment process. The checklists include a description of every criterion rather than a broad term that may confuse the students while assessing their work such as content, organisation and language mechanics.

Moreover, the practitioner researcher did not involve her students in self-assessment without preparing them for this task i.e. during the session of written expressions, the participants developed prior knowledge in the areas to be assessed in such as pre-writing techniques (Freewriting, brainstorming, and clustering). Furthermore, the sessions of written comprehension familiarised them with basic outlining. They also dealt with a lesson about the importance of editing throughout their academic career. Finally, self-assessment functions effectively in appropriate conditions such as timing. Throughout the study, the students assessed their work when they were working on their tasks. This fact enables them to make adjustments to their performance and to get timely feedback from their teacher. Timely feedback is suitable in this case since the participants were provided with immediate remarks so that they could adjust their work.

As far as the practitioner researcher's diary is concerned, results of reflection on action assisted the practitioner researcher in adopting a reflective attitude towards her practice. The diary entries were analysed using some adapted categories by Ho and Richards (2008). Two themes were highlighted throughout the study: informing teaching and students' needs, and new roles in the writing classroom. First of all, keeping a diary entitled the researcher with a new role since she assumed the role of an observer. She provided her students with descriptive feedback to modify their performance at the level of content and organisation. She also addressed other issues (Writing style and elements of good writing) that took place during the self-assessment process. The observations gave the practitioner researcher clues to make decisions in order to respond to her students' needs.

At the clustering stage, the students could not identify the context of writing (Purpose, audience and tone). Thus, when reflecting on this incident, the teacher designed a written comprehension session in which the students learned about these concepts. In addition, the teacher taught them about the kinds of topics (Narrow, limited and broad) so that they know how to

generate relevant ideas to respond to the assigned topic. At the outlining stage, the researcher noticed that the majority of her students did not formulate interesting titles for their paragraphs. So, the practitioner researcher responded by introducing the elements of creating catchy titles for her students.

Taking into account the students' needs empowered the practitioner researcher to step out of her comfort zone and make some decisions rather than following the syllabus blindly. Planning lessons was based on evidence from students' learning in order to close learning gaps and start another reflection cycle.

The reflective diary also served change in the writing classroom since the practitioner researcher focused on patterns related to her performance and to the students' roles in their own learning. Self-assessment positively contributed to the shift from delivering knowledge and assigning activities into developing a tendency to engage the students in their learning and reflecting on whether they met criteria and learning goals. Moreover, a motion towards student-centeredness emerged since the mode of teaching started revolving around students' performance and needs rather than around teacher's explanation and dominating the classroom discourse.

Conclusion

This research study highlighted significant results about the implementation of self-assessment in the writing process. Through the obtained findings an argument can be made concerning the effectiveness of self-assessment checklists and the practitioner researcher's diary as tool of positive change in the writing classroom. In accordance with Andrade's (2010) research, the use of criteria and quality standards favoured students' writing throughout a unit of instruction. Furthermore, students' performance gave the researcher clues about their current state of learning and empowered her to reflect and cater for her students' writing needs.

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