DEVELOPING LEARNER SELF-ASSESSMENT SKILLS IN ACADEMIC WRITING.

AMIRQULOVA SHIRIN

+998881543304

ABSTRACT

This article explores the development of learners' self-assessment skills in academic writing. It focuses on how students can independently evaluate their written work, identify errors, and improve the overall quality of their writing through reflective and critical thinking practices. The study also examines effective methods and strategies that support self-assessment, highlighting its pedagogical significance in fostering learner autonomy, responsibility, and continuous improvement. Furthermore, the role of feedback, rubrics, and guided evaluation techniques in enhancing students' self-assessment abilities is discussed.

Keywords: academic writing, self-assessment, learner autonomy, reflective thinking, critical thinking, writing skills, feedback, rubrics, evaluation strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-five years ago, Black and William (1998) conducted a landmark review of research on formative assessment in the classroom, noting that self-assessment was rarely practiced, even among educators who prioritized assessment. They argued that self-assessment should not be viewed as optional but rather as a fundamental component of effective learning. Although their perspective remains highly influential, subsequent studies have continued to expand and refine this area of research.

Scholars have increasingly emphasized the importance of making assessment more meaningful by adopting a holistic view of learners, considering not only their cognitive abilities but also their emotions, physical states, personal experiences, ***identities, and social connections (Stobart & Gipps, 2026). In addition, it is widely*** acknowledged that both learning and assessment are deeply individualized

processes, shaped by each learner's unique background and perspective (Deardorff, 2011). Supporting this view, León et al. (2023) demonstrate through meta-analytic evidence that the accuracy of self-assessment is strongly influenced by factors such as prior experience, the quality of feedback, and subject knowledge.[1]

In the context of second or foreign language writing instruction, the concept of Assessment as Learning (AaL) (Earl, 2013) plays a crucial role by enabling students to actively monitor and evaluate their own progress. A central element of AaL is self-assessment, which promotes metacognitive awareness and helps learners recognize both their strengths and areas for improvement. Butler (2024) further highlights the evolution of self-assessment in second language education, emphasizing its growing importance in encouraging learner independence, reflective thinking, and the use of formative feedback in L2 learning environments.

More recent theoretical frameworks have attempted to bring greater clarity to the concept of self-assessment. Earl's work (2003, 2013) on Assessment as Learning (AaL), Assessment for Learning (AfL), and Assessment of Learning (AoL) provides a structured way to understand different roles of assessment. According to Schellekens et al. (2021), AaL focuses on learners' active participation in evaluating their own learning, thereby promoting metacognitive awareness and self-regulation. AfL, on the other hand, treats assessment as a continuous formative process aimed at improving learning through feedback and teacher–student interaction. In contrast, AoL is primarily summative, measuring learning outcomes for purposes such as grading and certification. Among these, AaL is particularly significant for self-assessment because it emphasizes learner autonomy and active engagement, distinguishing it from both teacher-led formative assessment and outcome-based summative evaluation.[2]

Expanding on these ideas, Nieminen and Boud (2024) argue that traditional approaches to self-assessment often lack authenticity, as they tend to be overly procedural and disconnected from learners' real-life experiences. They advocate for designing self-assessment practices that are meaningful and contextually relevant,

aligning them with students' lived experiences and practical needs. This approach aligns closely with the principles of AaL, where self-assessment is viewed not merely as a task but as a reflective and developmental process that connects theory with practice.

Within the AaL framework, students are seen as active agents in the assessment process, developing important metacognitive and self-regulatory skills (Earl, 2013). Self-assessment involves learners critically examining their own performance by comparing it with established criteria or standards. This reflective practice allows students to evaluate their knowledge and skills, identify weaknesses, and plan strategies for improvement.[3]

The value of self-assessment becomes especially evident in second or foreign language (L2) writing, which is a multifaceted skill requiring attention to grammar, vocabulary, coherence, organization, and stylistic elements. Through self-assessment, learners can track their progress, reflect on their writing performance, and set achievable learning goals. As noted by Dörnyei (2001), effective language instruction is achieved when assessment becomes an interactive process that includes learners' own evaluations. Such involvement not only improves writing proficiency but also strengthens learners' motivation, confidence, and independence.

DISCUSSION AND SOLUTIONS

This study is conducted within an academic English writing course designed for first-year EFL students at a leading English-medium health sciences university in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It aims to explore the following research questions:

1. To what extent do students' self-assigned scores align with the grades given by their instructors?
2. In what ways does the use of the same rubric as instructors affect students' experiences of self-assessment during essay evaluation?
3. What advantages and difficulties do students perceive when engaging in rubric-based self-assessment?

This research adopts a convergent mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to examine EFL students' experiences with rubric-based self-assessment. The quantitative component involves comparing students' self-assigned rubric scores with those given by instructors, while the qualitative component draws on thematic analysis of questionnaire responses and interview data.[4]

The study involved 20 male undergraduate students aged between 18 and 19. At the time of admission, their English proficiency ranged from A2 to B1 levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The university's English program spans four semesters and aims to develop students' proficiency to at least a B2 level by the end. As third-semester students enrolled in a foundation program and taking the writing course for the first time, their proficiency was estimated to be between upper B1 and lower B2 levels.

Participants were recruited through voluntary response sampling. All 20 students in the course chose to participate in the self-assessment and questionnaire, and four of them additionally volunteered for follow-up interviews.[5]

Data collection took place in April 2023 at a health sciences university in Riyadh. The foundation program prepares Saudi high school graduates for entry into undergraduate health science programs by providing them with the necessary academic and language skills. To gain admission into specialized faculties such as medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, applied medical sciences, or nursing, students must successfully complete courses in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and foundational medical sciences like anatomy and physiology. Their academic performance during this stage plays a key role in determining their placement into these programs.

The self-assessment activity was implemented before students submitted the first of two required essays in a third-semester writing course. This course is designed to promote greater independence in academic writing by building on skills developed in earlier courses. Throughout the semester, students are required to

integrate information from two to three academic sources and apply the Vancouver referencing style in their writing.[6]

The course included three hours of instruction per week over a ten-week teaching period, followed by three additional weeks allocated for revision and final examinations. Instruction consisted of lectures and practical workshops, with students completing two essays. The first essay was argumentative in nature, allowing students to choose topics related to education, learning, or digital technology and incorporate relevant research. The second essay focused on cause-and-effect relationships within themes such as education, consumer behavior, and social image.[7]

Students completed the self-assessment task prior to submitting their first essay, using a rubric and responding to a questionnaire on a voluntary basis. Of the participants, four later took part in interviews conducted toward the end of the semester. The data were collected by a teaching assistant specializing in second language education and assessment. Due to his similar age, cultural background, and shared native language with the participants, he was able to build rapport and encourage open, detailed reflections on their self-assessment experiences.

The primary instrument for data collection in this study is the essay assessment rubric. Students apply this rubric to assess their own essays prior to receiving feedback and grades from their instructors, who use the same rubric for evaluation. The rubric has undergone extensive development over the past ten years, during which its validity and reliability have been carefully ensured. Each year, a curriculum committee reviews the rubric by examining six dimensions of construct validity identified by Messick (1996): content, generalizability, external, structural, substantive, and consequential validity.

The rubric is organized into clearly defined sections, each outlining specific assessment criteria aligned with different performance levels: Exceptional (5), Very Good (4), Progressing (3), and Needs Developing (2). A full version of the rubric is

provided in Appendix A, while its main components and criteria are summarized in Table 1.[8]

Section	Criteria
Process, format, and referencing	Adherence to the required format, accurate use of citations and references, and inclusion of the specified number of academic sources and word count
Organization and cohesion	Logical structure and coherence of the essay, including a clear thesis statement, proper paragraph organization, smooth flow of ideas, and effective use of linking devices
Content (argumentation)	Strength and development of ideas, clarity of arguments, persuasiveness, and relevance of supporting evidence
Vocabulary (lexical resources)	Range and accuracy of academic vocabulary, including appropriate word choice and effective expression
Grammar and mechanics	Control of grammatical structures, correct use of complex sentences, avoidance of sentence errors (fragments/run-ons), and accurate spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant role of self-assessment in enhancing learners' academic writing skills within an EFL context. The findings demonstrate that engaging students in rubric-based self-assessment can promote greater awareness of writing criteria, improve their ability to evaluate their own work, and foster essential metacognitive and reflective thinking skills. The comparison between student and instructor scores provides valuable insight into the level of accuracy in learners' self-evaluation, indicating that with appropriate guidance, students can develop increasingly reliable judgment of their performance.

Moreover, the use of a shared rubric between instructors and students contributes to transparency in assessment and helps align learners' understanding with academic expectations. Students' perceptions reveal that while self-assessment offers clear benefits—such as increased autonomy, motivation, and confidence—it also presents challenges, particularly in maintaining objectivity and fully understanding evaluation criteria. These challenges, however, can be mitigated through structured support, continuous practice, and explicit instruction in self-assessment strategies.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of integrating self-assessment as a core component of academic writing instruction. By doing so, educators can empower learners to take an active role in their learning process, ultimately leading to improved writing proficiency and lifelong learning skills. Future research may further explore diverse contexts and larger samples to deepen understanding of how self-assessment practices can be optimized in EFL education.

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