



Improving Descriptive Writing through the Use of Self-Assessment in A1 EFL High School Students

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Abstract

This research investigated the effect that using self-assessment had on improving descriptive writing. The project was applied to thirty EFL students at an A1 level in a public school in Ecuador. The participants received instruction on how to use a rubric to self-assess their writing. Students' writing was about picture's descriptions by using vivid adjectives and spatial order words. Data were collected from pre and post-tests, interviews, field notes, and students' self-reflections. Results showed improvement in the students' descriptive writings. A large Effect Size of 2.41 showed significant difference between pre-tests and post-tests. Outcomes corroborated that self-assessment had a positive effect on student independence. Regarding the results presented in the analysis, the researcher concluded that using self-assessment improves descriptive writing in EFL students and it is an effective and useful tool for student evaluation and teachers' practices.

Keywords: self- assessment, self-reflection, student autonomy, descriptive writing, elementary school EFL students.

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Resumen

La presente investigación describe el efecto que usar autoevaluación tuvo en mejorar la escritura descriptiva. El proyecto fue aplicado a 30 estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera con nivel A1 en una escuela pública del Ecuador. Los participantes recibieron instrucción en cómo usar una rúbrica para autoevaluar la escritura de las descripciones de las fotos que les fueron asignadas, usando adjetivos llamativos y vocabulario de orden espacial. La información fue recogida de pre y post evaluaciones, entrevistas, notas de campo y reflexiones hechas por los estudiantes. Los resultados demostraron mejora en la escritura descriptiva de los estudiantes. Cohen d 2.41 demostró una diferencia significativa entre pre y post evaluaciones. Los resultados corroboran que el uso de la autoevaluación tuvo un efecto positivo en el desarrollo de la independencia de aprendizaje en los estudiantes. De acuerdo a los resultados presentados en el análisis, el investigador concluye que el uso de autoevaluación mejora la escritura descriptiva en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. La autoevaluación es una herramienta útil y efectiva para la evaluación de los estudiantes y las prácticas de profesores.

Palabras clave: auto-evaluación, reflexión, autonomía en estudiantes, escritura descriptiva, estudiantes de escuela de inglés como lengua extranjera.

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Improving Descriptive Writing through the Use of Self-Assessment in A1 EFL Students

Holec lists some conditions where learners take responsibility for their own learning, and these include determination of objectives, selection and grade of content, selection of methods and techniques, monitoring the procedure of acquisition, and evaluation of what has been acquired (as cited in Kaur, 2013). These conditions are common in communicative teaching classrooms where the approach is learner-centered. Alonazi (2017) states that the teacher role must be that of a facilitator of the process and not just the source of knowledge. In this way, teachers help students to gain autonomy. According to Alonazi, Saudi students tend to lean notably on their teachers. Students in Asia believe that teachers have the highest responsibility in their learning (Orawiwatnakul & Wichadee, 2017). Traditionalist teaching and culture seem to be factors that affect students' autonomy.

According to Education First (2018), English skills are low in Latin America. Ecuador is one of the countries ranked with a low level in the target language. In the school where this study was conducted, EFL students at the high school only dedicate four hours per week to learning English, even though the required instructional time demands five hours (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). Most of the time there are no English teachers at elementary levels, resulting in a mix of students with a low English level or no English at all in high school.

According to Carter (2015) descriptive writing is one of the first writing tasks students should perform. This researcher's experience has been that in previous years, eighth grade students did not have the opportunities to learn how to create a descriptive sentence using vivid details. In addition, the students did not use or know about any instrument to self-assess their work. These students rely completely on the teacher and do not learn on their own. Brown and Lee (1994) stated the importance of learners using self-assessment to monitor their own performance correcting or adjusting their work, even if the learners are still in the process of acquisition. In order to get them to their appropriate level and improve their

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descriptive writing by helping them become independent learners, the researcher considered self-assessment as a strategy to enhance autonomy.

Several authors mention that self-assessment is a good assistant for learning, gaining academic control, and acquiring awareness of their tasks' quality (Brown & Harris, 2014; Peñaflorida, 2002; Yates & Hattie, 2013). There have been similar studies using self-assessment on EFL learners, namely Heidarian (2016) who conducted a research about the effect of using self-assessment in Iranian EFL learners' writing. The author stated that self-assessment is worthwhile in EFL writing because students can detect their strengths and weaknesses and improve from there on their own. The results in Heidarian research showed a positive connection between writing and self-assessment. He found that self-assessment improved students writing and their motivation. Punhagui and Souza (2013) studied the actions through self-assessment activities on Brazilian students and results showed improvement. Also, Ramírez and Guillén (2018) obtained good outcomes with the implementation of self-assessment. The authors mentioned that the use of self-assessment in a university from Mexico increased the participants' writing skills. Notably the referred studies about self-assessment were conducted with EFL learners from upper high school and even university levels. A gap in the research exists concerning self-assessment in elementary EFL levels.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), A1 students "can write simple phrases and sentences about themselves and imaginary people, where they live and what they do" (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 76). Suriyanti and Yaacob (2016) stated that descriptive writing should gain mastery in the beginning of the high school years, expressly in grades seven, eight and nine. This is an important fact that is mostly unknown for many teachers in the country. According to Education First (2018), the English level in 2018 in Latin America had better language domain at ages from 21 to 25, which

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shows that university education is improving. Writing is one of the skills that gets more attention at a university level. The researcher proposes that a good way to gain mastery in descriptive writing in the beginning of the high school years is through the use of self-assessment.

The current study investigated the effect of self-assessment on descriptive writing on EFL A1 level students from a public school in Ecuador. This study will permit other teachers in the country to realize how this practice contributes to the students' learning autonomy and writing improvement. The long-term aim is to have learners work by themselves on their writing with minimal instruction.

Literature Review

Concepts and theories related to the present research are presented in this section.

The Process-based Approach and the Writing Process

In the beginning, educators taught writing using a product-based approach. Brown mentioned that this approach focused on the product instead of the process (as cited in Listyani, 2018). Krahnke and Christison indicated that the product approach makes students passive (as cited in Lincoln & Ben, 2015). According to Murray, writing should be considered as a process (as cited in Haiyan & Rilong, 2016). The process approach is based on interaction, it is learner-centered, and it demands learner's complete participation (Haiyan & Rilong, 2016). Also mentioned is that the process approach increments learners' interest, self-efficacy, and motivation when it refers to writing (Zhou, 2015).

The writing process is a model that is the most recognized in classrooms (Díaz, 2014). This process is considered as recursive instead of linear. It is also said that this is the same process that actual writers use at the time they are writing (Faraj, 2015). Zhou (2015) mentioned that through the writing process learners can openly "discuss the topics with peers

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or in group, share ideas, communicate with peers and the teacher and get feedback from them. Students, even those who are not good at writing, can learn how to write” (p. 90).

Graves enlisted five stages of writing process that are prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (as cited in Faraj, 2015). These stages are made of a sequence of steps a writer follows to create a writing piece (Haiyan & Rilong, 2016). Karatay indicated that in the prewriting stage, ideas, and topics are developed (as cited in Bayat, 2014). Bayat (2014) also stated that in the drafting stage the ideas are transcribed onto the paper. Simpson stated that in the revision stage the ideas and organization are polished or modified (as cited in Bayat, 2014). The editing stage is for correcting the logical coherence and continuity in the paragraph (Bayat, 2014). Finally, Bayat concluded that the publishing stage is when the writing piece is shared with others.

Self-assessment is an important technique that writers use in the revision and editing stage. Bourke and Mentis mentioned that through self-assessment someone can assess their performance using determined or standardized criteria (as cited in Ndoye, 2017). This type of assessment reinforces a self-regulated space (Ndoye, 2017). Using self-assessment increases awareness in the process and improves writers’ practices.

Descriptive Writing

Learning to write in the native language could be challenging; acquiring the skills in a second language could be even more difficult (Obeid, 2017). According to Carter (2015), a descriptive paragraph is generally one of the first tasks learners develop in writing classes. In agreement with Suriyanti and Yaacob (2016) descriptive writing should gain mastery in the beginning of the high school years, expressly in grades Seven, Eight and Nine. Spencer stated that descriptive writing is based on rich details and imaginative language. Readers can create a clear image of what they are reading as they use their own words (as cited in Suriyanti &

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Yaacob, 2016). Sinaga (2017) indicated that through descriptive writing, a student “may describe things, perceptions and feelings about something” (p. 70).

Another author manifests that descriptive writing vividly creates a picture of people, places, or objects; so readers can bring to mind the image and understand the writer’s point of view (Sanjaya, 2013). Johanessen proposed that teachers need to provide learners vivid examples to a great extent (as cited in Suriyanti & Yaacob, 2016). Carter (2015) stated that the first descriptive writing task for learners could be demanding. According to Ratminingsih, Marhaeni, and Vigayanti (2018), students’ perceptions about writing are similar in the EFL contexts. Students find writing challenging to perform. The authors maintain that learners find it difficult to start writing by transferring the words they have in their minds onto the paper. Ratminingsih et al. (2018) stated that using self-assessment in other EFL contexts proved to be a positive tool to improve writing and EFL learners have evidenced positive perceptions on using self-assessment in their writing tasks, too.

Self-assessment

Brown and Lee (1994) mentioned the importance of learners monitoring their own performance to correct or adjust their work, even if the learners are still in the process of acquisition. Later on, Brown and Abeywickrama (2004) pointed out that self-assessment justifies its theory from well-founded second language acquisition principles. These principles are associated to the capacity to determine personal goals, autonomously monitor, and to promote intrinsic motivation (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2004). The goal of using self-assessment is to make students more independent and make them be aware of how they are fostering learning (Ndoye, 2017).

Reflection is part of self-assessing and it is important in learning. Some authors stated that reflection happens when students reflect on how their work meets set criteria; they examine the effectiveness of their efforts, and plan for enhancement (Rolheiser, Bower, &

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Stevahn, 2000). Reflection links to metacognition, to the ability to self-evaluate, and to the development of critical thinking (Rolheiser et al, 2000). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, metacognition refers to understanding and being aware about their own thinking process (Oxford University Press, 2019). Metacognition has two processes, the first one about knowledge and skills and the second one about regulation, which includes self-monitoring and self-evaluating (Rolheiser et al, 2000).

Autonomy

Yates and Hattie (2013) referred to how students learn and identify the gaps in education. The authors mention the relevance of promoting student's self-efficacy. Hattie (2012) mentioned the importance of making students' learning visible to teachers; he also stated how significant it is for students to learn to become their own teachers. Goal setting is a key part of self-assessment. Hattie (2012) defined the goals as learning intentions; Hattie stated that teachers must be clear about what they want learners to master. Hattie added that an important feature of learning intentions is that at the end of the lesson teachers should refer to the goal and help students discern how much closer they are to the achievement of the criteria. Students' daily self-reflection on what they have done at the end of the class will contribute to realize how close or far they are from mastering the goals. In addition, this reflection will help students establish what things they must do to obtain proficiency in what they are learning. Hattie (2012) also emphasized the significance of asking questions to reflect about the goals not only before but also after the lessons.

Rolheiser determined four stages of teaching students how to self-assess (as cited in McMillan & Hearn, 2008). The four stages are establishing criteria, teaching students how to apply criteria, providing feedback to students on application of criteria, and setting learning goals and strategies. Four stages that are gradually implemented in three different levels: beginning, intermediate and full (as cited in McMillan & Hearn, 2008).

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There are researchers that do not trust in the application of self-assessment. For instance, Boud and Falchikov (1989) and Kent (1980) doubted that students can evaluate their competences appropriately without increasing or decreasing their performance grades (as cited in Oi, 2014, p. 147). On the other hand, Oi (2014) found out that the scores of oral self-assessment of Japanese students were difficult to relate with the teacher's assessment scores but only in one component: Language Use. The same author believed that self-assessment in writing is easier for students to develop in order to have a consistency between assessments. Therefore, the researcher proposed that through the implementation of self-assessment in writing, students will increase their learning, gain motivation, and autonomy (Gashi-Shatri & Zabeli, 2018).

Backward Design

Wiggins and McTighe (2011) stated that using backward design promotes thinking and inquiry. Backward design demands aligning the learning goals with the learning plan and assessment, for this reason the authors manifested "if that's the goal, then what follows for assessment and instruction?" (2011, p. 51). The authors asseverated that "the most successful teaching begins, therefore, with clarity about desired learning outcomes and about the evidence that will show that learning has occurred" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p. 7). Understanding by Design reinforces this asseveration when planning a curriculum unit through a three-stage backward design process with the purpose of having a performance task that stands in need of transfer (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

The present research implemented self-assessment to promote student autonomy and improvement in writing, the following research questions emerged:

1. To what extent does self-assessment affect descriptive writing?
2. What are the advantages and challenges of self-assessment for A-1 students?

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3. What will students' perspectives be of using self-assessment to learn to write descriptive paragraphs?

Innovation

The innovation consisted in improving descriptive paragraphs by applying self-assessment through the use of a rubric and answering post lesson reflection questions (See Appendix 1). Students used journals in Moodle to work on their tasks. The platform was a repository of examples of descriptions for students to have as a reference. It was expected that students would improve descriptive writing, understand the importance of self-assessment in their learning process, and increase their autonomy.

At the beginning, the group wrote a descriptive paragraph using a picture, which was considered as a pre-test. The paragraph was scored with a rubric (See Appendix 2). After the test, the first step was to learn to write a good descriptive paragraph. Once students understood the steps involving how to write a good paragraph, they were taught to use a rubric to self-assess their writing (See Appendix 3). Then, students were expected to use the rubric to self-assess each time they wrote a descriptive paragraph. Students looked at some pictures to write paragraphs about them. There was a checklist to help students remember the requirements of the tasks (See Appendix 4). However, it was not mandatory to use the checklist through the process. It was optional for the students. The purpose of the checklist was to confirm if the elements described on the rubric were included before submitting the descriptive paragraph to be graded. There were examples of descriptions on the Moodle using spatial order and vivid adjectives, vocabulary with pictures for reference, and the pictures students used for describing.

A writing sample was collected at the end of the innovation to assess if students had improved in writing descriptive paragraphs. The lessons were planned using backwards design with authentic activities like describing what real people are doing through looking at

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pictures (See Appendix 5). In the performance task, students pretended to be writers' assistants in a paparazzi company. The descriptions were posted in a blog.

Methodology

This was an action research with analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The study lasted five weeks. The innovation was applied using a backward design lesson.

General Objective

To describe the effect of facilitating descriptive writing through the use of self-assessment.

Specific Objectives

- Describe the effect that self-assessment has on descriptive writing
- Describe the advantages and challenges of self-assessment.
- Describe students' perspectives of using self-assessment to learn to write descriptive paragraphs.

Participants

The researcher selected participants from the first year of a public Ecuadorian high school -8th graders-, since the literature review suggests that it is in the early years of high school where descriptive writing should gain mastery. The participants were thirty EFL students, 18 boys and 12 girls. Ages ranged from 11 to 13 years old. Students were at an A1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The participants relied entirely on the teacher's indications to complete their tasks. Participants' native language is Spanish.

Ethical standards were explicitly followed, no names or personal identification from the participants were published. Before the project, the researcher had the principal vet and

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approval to implement self-assessment in the classroom. Anonymity was maintained throughout the study. The purpose of the study was to improve the researcher's practice.

Instruments

The researcher designed the instruments for self-assessment based on the definition that the primary goal of self-assessment is to make students more independent, aware of their learning, and able to determine how close their work meets set criteria. Therefore, all self-assessment instruments were developed to help students determine their own progress toward classroom goals.

Q. 1. To what extent does self-assessment affect descriptive writing?

To determine students' improvement, there was a writing sample at the beginning and a writing sample at the end scored with a rubric, a pre and a posttest. For both tests, students needed to describe a picture of a celebrity in one paragraph. The rubric used to score the tests was based on the elements identified in the breakdown of the transfer goal. The transfer goal was the following: I want my students to learn to use vivid adjectives, use vocabulary related to spatial organization when looking at pictures, and self-assess their work, so that, in the long run and on their own, they will be able to produce a well-written descriptive paragraph. The construction of the instruments were based on the elements identified in the transfer goal. A colleague was invited to help the researcher validate the scores of three of the students' pre and post-tests to prove that the instrument and the scoring were consistent. The colleague scored the paragraphs using the rubric created by the researcher without any instruction from the researcher. In this way, bias did not interfere with the results and reliability was proved.

Q2. What are the advantages and challenges of self-assessment for A-1 students?

Teacher's field notes and students' daily self-assessment were based on the day's learning objectives. Field notes collected data from students' daily work and from highlighting significant points in students' self-reflections. Self-reflections were allowed to

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be answered in Spanish since participants were beginners -A1 level- students. The self-reflection questions were related to what and how the students were learning and how they felt about it. *What did the teacher ask you to do? Did you use the rubric today? How is self-assessing helpful to you? Why is it important to know spatial order words? Did self-assessment help you with your writing, and why? What was a challenge for you?* were some of the questions.

Q3. What will students' perspectives be of using self-assessment to learn to write descriptive paragraphs?

The researcher employed an interview to answer this question. Nine participants were selected in the following manner taking into consideration their posttest scores: Three students with the lowest grades, three from the middle of the list and three students with the best scores (See Appendix 8). The interview was designed with four questions: What have you learned about writing? How do you know you have learned? How does self-assessment help you write? When does self-assessment become a challenge for you? The interview was conducted in Spanish and it was allowed to be answered in Spanish since participants were - A1 level- students.

Data Collecting and Data Analysis

Concerning to the first specific objective, quantitative data was analyzed comparing pre and post-test results. The computer package SPSS was used to get descriptive statistics as mean, standard deviation. Effect size was estimated to calculate the impact of the innovation (Swaminathan, Horner, Rogers, & Sugai, 2012).

Concerning the second specific objective describing the advantages and challenges on using self-assessment, the collection of data was based on document analysis through field notes and students' self-reflections after every session. The researcher identified threads, themes, and salient points to analyze data.

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With respect to the third specific objective describing the students' perspective on the advantages and challenges of using self-assessment to learn to write descriptive paragraphs, there was an analysis from a post interview.

Results

To describe to what extent self-assessment impacts descriptive writing, quantitative data were analyzed from the pre-test and the post-test using a rubric. As shown on Table 1 there is a considerable difference between both assessments. The minimal grade on the pre-test was 2.50 over 10 and the maximum 7 over 10. On the other hand, the minimal grade on the post-test was 6 over 10 and the maximum 10 over 10.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics on the Pre and Post-test total scores.

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Total Pre-test	30	2.50	7.00	4.7833	1.55743
Total Post-test	30	6.00	10.00	8.1167	1.17945

The research question about the effect that self-assessment had on descriptive writing is reflected on table 1 and 2. Table 2 shows the minimum and maximum scores from the pre and post-test of the different constructs. Scores were assigned from 1 to 4 according to the rubric. The mean and standard deviation is also presented. The five constructs were grammar, use of vivid adjectives, use of spatial order words, use of present progressive and paragraph sequence. The post Spatial Order construct was the one that showed the most significant results when compared to the pre Spatial Order results. Effect size was calculated and it shows that there is a large effect size difference between the scores of the pre-tests and the post-tests. Cohen's $d = (8.12 - 4.78) / 1.383112 = 2.414843$.

Table 2

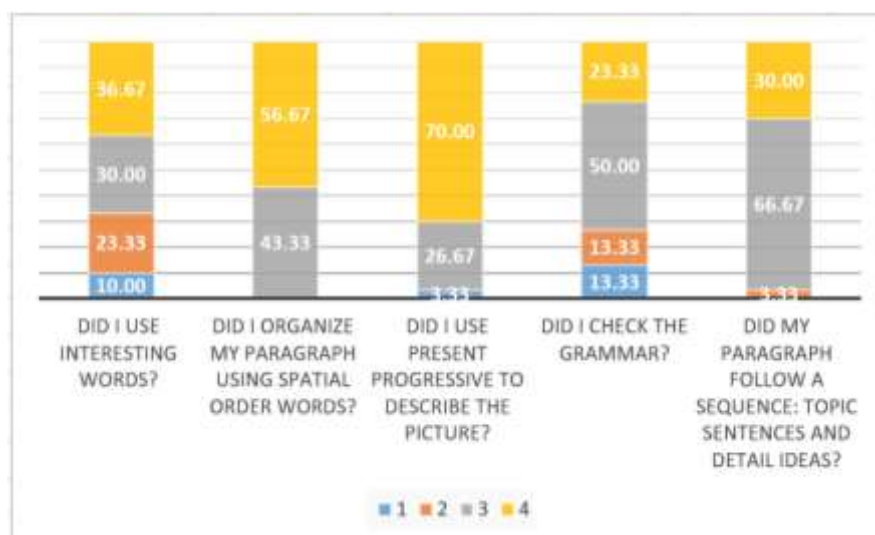
Descriptive statistics on the rubric's constructs.

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	PRE-TEST					POST-TEST			
	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Grammar	30	1.00	4.00	2.3333	1.12444	1.00	4.00	2.8333	.94989
Vivid Adjectives	30	1.00	3.00	1.1333	.50742	1.00	4.00	2.9333	1.0148
Spatial Order	30	1.00	1.00	1.0000	.00000	3.00	4.00	3.5667	.50401
Present Progressive	30	1.00	4.00	2.7667	1.07265	1.00	4.00	3.6333	.66868
Paragr. Sequence	30	1.00	4.00	2.3333	1.15470	2.00	4.00	3.2667	.52083

The spatial order construct in the posttest scores evidenced an important difference against the pretest results. The minimum in the pretest about this construct was 1 and the highest 1. This result showed a nonexistence knowledge about spatial order words. Meanwhile, the minimum in posttest results was 3 and the maximum 4. These results can be reinforced with the students' self-reflections. For instance, one student expressed *"I learned to write a paragraph describing a character step by step with vivid adjectives and spatial order words."* Another student stated, *"Today I learnt to describe things that are in the picture. It is important to know spatial order words because it can help us to describe what is around the picture."* Posttests' results using self-assessment to improve descriptive writing (Appendix 2) are shown on figure 1.

Figure 1. Posttests' results according to the constructs on the rubric for self-assessment.



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Qualitative data were collected for research questions 2 and 3 through an interview, field notes and students' self-reflections. The discussion of these qualitative data will be reviewed in the next section.

RQ #2. What are the advantages and challenges of self-assessment for A-1 students?

The researcher used field notes and students' daily self-assessments to answer this question. The students' answers were positive. Some of the students' reflections follow.

"I learned to improve my descriptive paragraphs and to make them interesting to read."

"I learned new words that helped my paragraph not to be boring."

"At the beginning writing was a challenge because I didn't know how to start."

"I learned to write a paragraph describing a character step by step with vivid adjectives and spatial order words."

"Using the rubric helped me to self-assess my work to realize if something was wrong."

"Self-assessment contributed to see if something was missing or what I needed to complete my paragraph."

"The rubric helped me a lot; it explains with details what my paragraph needs."

Students' responses indicated that they value self-assessment.

The researcher field notes focused on summarizing students' self-reflections and in observations made through the process. At the beginning, participants showed difficulties in working just by themselves without constantly asking questions or directions to the teacher. Also, some students answered their first reflection questions superficially, with short answers or a few details. It is worth noting that this was an innovation for the participants and they were not used to work in this way. Feedback was needed to improve students' performance and positive results started to reveal gradually.

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RQ #3. What will students' perspectives be of using self-assessment to learn to write descriptive paragraphs.

Results from the interview were positive. For question 1, what have you learn about writing? a student said *"I have learned new words related to adjectives and spatial order words."* Another students has said, *"I have learned to describe a paragraph. I have learned new words that I did not know in English. I learned how to write in English what I know in Spanish."*

For question 2, how do you know you have learned? a student expressed *"I know I have learned because at the beginning I did not know how to write and now I know how to do it."* Another student said, *"I know I have learned because it is not as difficult as it was at the beginning."* One more student have mentioned, *"I have become a little more independent on doing my descriptions."*

For question 3, how does self-assessment help you write? Answers were the following:

"It helped me a lot because it explained what my paragraph needed to be complete."

"It helped me to realize if I was wrong, it helped me to give solution to problems I had in my paragraph."

"With the rubric I can check if something is missing, if I am wrong or not without asking the teacher too much."

For question 4, when does self-assessment become a challenge for you? Students said:

"At the beginning, because I did not know how to start."

"The first time I use it."

"In the final description, because it was our last paragraph and we needed to do it through checking the rubric carefully and without the teacher help but by ourselves."

Discussion

Pre and posttests answered the first question of the innovation. Results in the post-tests evidenced that the use of a rubric as an instrument of self-assessment was very useful for the

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EFL learners' descriptive writings. Post-test scores when compared to the pre-test scores showed significant difference between them. Scores evidenced the improvement on descriptive writing and students' autonomy.

An example of autonomy was evidenced during the innovation through a piece of paper that a participant left inadvertently in the classroom. The paper contained a list of some of the rubric's aspects with checks, clearly used as self-assessment (See Appendix 9). Students showed autonomy during the innovation when in the last description they worked independently without constantly asking the teacher how they were doing on their writings. Hattie (2012) stated that applying self-evaluation strategies as self-assessment will require the student to make an extra step in the manner that the learners indeed evaluate what they have monitored.

Another instrument was the interview (see Appendix 7). These interviews answered the research question about perspectives the students had on the advantages and challenges of using self-assessment to learn to write descriptive paragraphs. According to the answers expressed in the interviews, students found it useful to have a rubric to self-assess their writings to improve describing a picture and even to gain more autonomy. They also were able to tell how they knew they had learned. Hattie (2012) indicates that using self-evaluation strategies would permit the students to self-reflect on their performance according to the learning goals set.

Participants also shared with the researcher some of the challenges they faced with self-assessment during the application. Several participants commented that self-assessment helped them to see if their paragraphs were well written, determine if something was missing, and if they were going to have the highest score according to the rubric. Hattie (2012) mentions that referring to the learning goals at the end of the lesson contributes to students' understanding on how closer they are to accomplish the stated criteria.

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Regarding the question “How do you know what you have learned?” a participant mentioned, “I know I have learned because I realized it is not as complicated as the first time.” Another student brought up that she has become more independent. At the end, she did not ask the teacher what to write about or how to write. A third participant referred to having the capability of describing a picture faster than before.

In connection with the research question about the advantages and challenges of self-assessment for A-1 students, the researcher used field notes and students’ daily self-reflections (see Appendix 1). These reflection questions’ were connected to the objective of each lesson. All the participants agreed that the rubric was a good tool for them to improve their paragraphs. Since the learners wrote three different photo descriptions, the moment the researcher became aware that self-assessment was being an effective assistant was in the last description. During this third task, students were completely autonomous. They were working by themselves finding the vocabulary that could fit in their descriptions from the list facilitated on the platform and using the rubric to self-evaluate their work at the same time. As Wiggins and McTighe (2011) stated, learners have understood a subject when they do not depend constantly on the teacher’s indications and prompts about what to do.

Results showed that the use of self-assessment helped A1-level EFL learners write a complete descriptive paragraph. As some authors considered in the literature review such as Brown and Harris (2014), Peñaflores (2002), and Yates and Hattie (2013), who affirmed that self-assessment is helpful for students to improve their learning; results show that self-assessment contributed to the improvement of students’ writing performance as well improving their autonomy.

In addition, research studies from the introduction section support self-assessment. Namely, Heidarian (2016) reported that self-assessment contributes students to detect strengths and weaknesses in EFL writing. In the same way, Punhagui and Souza (2013)

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described improvement in their study on using self-assessment activities in Brazil. At last, Ramírez and Guillén (2018) implemented self-assessment and obtained good results in Mexico. Improvement in students' writing when using self-assessment in the presented results compares to the mentioned research works and are evidently congruent, even though the participants were at an A1 level.

Conclusions

The present research focused on improving descriptive writing on EFL A1 level students through self-assessment. The results showed achievement in the application of the innovation. It was evidenced that self-assessment promoted students' autonomy through teacher's field notes and participants' comments in the interview. Therefore, self-assessment is important to provide students awareness on how to improve and it can even be seen as a way to release responsibility, since learners become more autonomous in the process. This study addressed the need for self-assessment with beginners just as Heidarian in 2016 had done with intermediate learners.

Learners reflecting on their own attainments and practices contributed to making learning visible. These reflections helped participants to realize what they were doing and why. These self-reflections after every lesson also contributed to aiding the researcher to visualize whether the students understood the goals and if feedback was needed. Since the participants were at an A1 English level, there was the concern if students would be able to write a complete paragraph with spatial order words, vivid adjectives, and describe what was in the picture using present progressive in a short amount of instructional time. Also, since learners at this level of language are able to produce very little in writing, self-assessment can be used as part of a release of responsibility in the teaching-learning process.

Nonetheless, certain strategies utilized assisted the process, notably "I do-you watch, I do-you help, you do-I help, you do-I watch", teacher modeling, student's self-assessing a

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descriptive paragraph with student-to-student collaboration, sentence strips, and facilitating vocabulary on the platform. The innovation had effective results in students. A key component to the realization of the project was the use of backward design. By focusing first on what teachers want students to be able to do with their own, lesson plan development and execution emerge in logical fashion.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was the time of investigation, with only four weeks to improve writing in A1 EFL learners. Writing needs time to develop and needs reviewing more than once. Students also presented some resistance at the beginning of the innovation when facing the new practice, as they were not used to writing a longer paragraph and using technology such as Moodle. There were moments when a student or two did not attend classes, delaying the teaching-learning process. A few students presented some trouble completing the activities on time due to technology problems. Homework activities were a limitation since there were some students that did not complete them.

Recommendations

This investigation was focused on a public school in Ecuador. Even though the present document is an action research and should not be generalized, if it is going to be replicated, the following are some suggestions that could be taken into consideration

This project applied in a public school in Ecuador did not have a control group. If a teacher wanted to determine whether self-assessment actually yields excellent results, then the teacher could use a control group to differentiate results.

Eighth graders at public schools in Ecuador are beginners with a low level of English language. The researcher applied the strategy “I do-You watch, I do-You help, You do-I help, You do-I watch” to guide learners in the acquisition and the practice. This activity can be included in future applications of the present innovation.

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Another strategy that can be used is “3 before me”. It is an aid that will provoke in students finding three other sources where to find help before asking the teacher. It will help students to focus on what they are doing and gain some of autonomy.

Due to the short amount of time, having feedback on the grammar needed for the practice could be minimized. The researcher used sentence strips as grammar starters. This strategy took a few minutes at the beginning of the class and promoted students awareness on checking the errors that a sentence could have. It also helped students to know how to avoid falling into these types of writing mistakes.

As far as the amount of time is concerned, the researcher suggests planning more than 4 weeks because of technology issues. The researcher recommends not relying completely on technology and having alternate plans where the use of technology is not needed.

Planning using backward design is essential, focusing first on what teachers want students to be able to do and demonstrate it through an authentic assessment. Constant feedback is needed.

The researcher recommends that the instruments should be piloted before implementing the strategy to be aware of the difficulties that students may have on using the rubric for self-assessment.

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Appendix 1

Students' self-assessment

Day # 1

Date:

Class:

Objectives of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

.....

Today I learned (Hoy día aprendí)

.....

How did knowing the structure of a paragraph help me write a paragraph? (¿Cómo saber la estructura de un párrafo me va a ayudar a escribir uno?)

.....

Day #2

Date:

Class:

Objective of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

.....

Today I learned (Hoy día aprendí)

.....

Why it is important to know vivid adjectives? (¿Por qué es importante conocer vivid adjectives?)

.....

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Day #3

Date:

Class:

Objective of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

Today I learned (Hoy día aprendí)

.....

Is it useful to use spatial order words? Why? (¿Es útil usar spatial order words? ¿Por qué?)

Did you use the rubric today? How was it helpful? (¿Usaste la rúbrica hoy? ¿De qué manera fue útil?)

Day #4

Date:

Class:

Objective of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

Today I learned (Hoy día aprendí)

.....

Day #5

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Date:

Class:

Objective of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

Today I learned (Hoy día aprendí)

.....

Did you use the rubric today? (¿Usaste la rúbrica hoy?)

How did using the rubric help you? (¿De qué manera la rúbrica fue útil?)

Day #6

Date:

Class:

Objective of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

Did you use the rubric today? (¿Usaste la rúbrica hoy?)

.....

How did looking at other websites help you work on your task? (¿Cómo te ayudó en tu tarea el observar otras páginas web?)

How does having other samples as a reference help you with your work? (¿Cómo te ayuda el tener otros ejemplos como referencia en tu trabajo?)

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Day #7

Date:

Class:

Objective of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

Did you follow the rubric today? How did using it help you? (¿Usaste la rúbrica hoy? ¿Cómo te ayudó usarla?)

.....

How is self-assessing helpful to you? (¿Cómo te ayuda utilizar self-assessment?)

Day #8

Date:

Class:

Objective of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

Did you use the rubric today? (¿Usaste la rúbrica hoy?)

Did you finish describing the second picture? (¿Terminaste de describir la segunda imagen?)

What was a challenge for you? (¿Fue un reto/difícil para ti?)

Day #9

Date:

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Class:

Objective of the day:

What did the teacher ask you to do? (¿Qué te pidió hacer la profesora hoy?)

Did you use the rubric today? (¿Usaste la rúbrica hoy?)

.....

Did you finish describing picture # 3? (¿Terminaste de describir la imagen 3?)

What was helpful and what was not? (¿Qué fue de ayuda y qué no lo fue?)

Day #10

Date:

Class:

Objective of the day:

What did you learn these 4 weeks? (¿Qué aprendiste estas últimas 4 semanas?)

What helped you learn? (¿Qué te ayudó a aprender?)

Did self-assessment (using the rubric) help you with your writing? (¿Te ayudó aplicar self-assessment (usar la rúbrica) en tu escritura?)

What was a challenge for you? (¿Qué fue un reto para ti?)

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Appendix 2

Rubric 1 for teacher's assessment

	1	2	3	4
Did the student use Interesting Words?	Student did not include vivid adjectives.	Student included only two relevant vivid adjectives.	Student included four relevant vivid adjectives.	Student included more than five relevant vivid adjectives.
Did the student organize his/her paragraph using spatial order words?	Student did not use spatial order words.	Student included only one spatial order word correctly.	Student included two spatial order words correctly.	Student included three or more spatial order words correctly.
Sentence Structure Did the student use present progressive to describe the picture?	Student did not use present progressive to describe the picture.	Student attempted writing in present progressive.	Student used present progressive for describing only what the person is doing or what the person is wearing, not both.	Student used present progressive describing what the person is doing and what the person is wearing.
Grammar	Filled with errors that interfere with the message.	Several errors that slow down the reading. (More than 5)	Some errors that do not interfere with reading or understanding the writing. (Between 4 and 5)	Very few errors or no errors presented. (Less than three)
Did the paragraph follow a sequence: topic sentences and detail ideas?	Student did not introduce the topic. Student did not include details.	Student attempted a topic sentence. Student included some details.	Student included a topic sentence. Student included descriptive details.	Student included a topic sentence. Student included details that create an image.

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Appendix 3

Rubric 2 for student's self-assessment

Ask Yourself:	1	2	3	4
Did I use Interesting Words? (¿Utilizaste palabras interesantes-vivid adjectives?)	I did not include vivid adjectives.	I included only two relevant vivid adjectives.	I included four relevant vivid adjectives.	Yes, I included more than five relevant vivid adjectives.
Did I organize my paragraph using spatial order words? (¿Organizaste tu párrafo usando palabras de orden?)	I did not use spatial order words.	I included only one spatial order word correctly.	I included two spatial order words correctly.	I included three or more spatial order words correctly.
Sentences Structure Did I use present progressive to describe the picture? (¿Utilizaste presente progresivo para describir la imagen?)	I did not use present progressive to describe the picture.	I attempted writing in present progressive.	I used present progressive only for describing what the person is doing or what the person is wearing, not both.	I used present progressive describing what the person is doing and what the person is wearing.
Did I check the grammar? (¿Revisaste la gramática?)	I did not check the grammar in my paragraph.			I did check the grammar.
Did my paragraph follow a sequence: topic sentences and detail ideas? (¿Siguió tu párrafo una secuencia: idea principal y detalles?)	I did not introduce my topic. I did not include details.	I attempted a topic sentence. I included some details.	I included a topic sentence. I included descriptive details.	Yes, I included a topic sentence. I included details that create an image.

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Appendix 4

Checklist

Requirements (your writing contains...)	Yes	No
a. Person's name		
b. Where the person is		
c. Describing what the people are doing		
d. What the person is wearing		
e. Give more details of the picture		

Appendix 5

Lesson Plan: Design from Your Goals¹

Instructional design of units for transfer of learning to real life contexts

Institution: Year of study: Student description: (include English Level)	2018-2019 EFL A1 level, beginners from a public school. Learners are 12-13 years old and they are in 8th grade of a high school in Ecuador.
Professor:	Laura Macías
Unit title:	Street Life
Weeks:	4
Hours:	14 hours

I. Transfer Goal (Stage 1)

Standards the unit will work with:

A1 students in creative writing can write simple phrases and sentences about themselves and imaginary people, where they live and what they do (CEFR).

Produce informational, transactional, and expository range and sentence structure that have more detail and show more variety in lexical texts consisting of a sequence of simple sentences (Ministerio de Educación, 2012)

Goal:

I want my students to learn to use vivid adjectives, use vocabulary related to spatial organization when looking at pictures, and self-assess their work, **so that, in the long run and on their own**, they will be able to produce a well-written descriptive paragraph.

1

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Breakdown of transfer goal

A. If we see and hear them do this, they CAN transfer this learning.	B. If we see and hear them do this, then they CANNOT (yet) transfer:	C. What I will commit to doing differently in my classroom to ensure my results look like Column A.
Use vivid adjectives in their writing	Not know or be able to use a vivid adjective	Teach them how to use self-assessment and a rubric
write a well-organized descriptive paragraph	Would not be able to use spatial order by looking at a picture	Show them models and pictures to help with description Prepare a word bank with pictures in the Moodle
Look at pictures and describe what people are doing in the pictures	Would be confused and frustrated	Using the communicative approach, model correct writing and teach them how to write a paragraph

II. Summative Performance Assessment Task (Stage 2)

Goal	To produce a short descriptive paragraph about a picture
Role	A junior assistant in TNZ, a paparazzi company
Audience	The editor of the paparazzi company and viewing public
Situation	As a junior assistant, you have to write about a famous person.
Performance	Look at pictures of this person and write notes about what this person is doing, and at the end, your writing will be posted on the company's blog as a descriptive paragraph using vivid adjectives, correct grammar, spatial vocabulary, with a good topic sentence and supporting sentences.
Standards	A 5-sentence paragraph, with vivid details, a good conclusion.

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	<p>A description of the place: weather and important places to visit.</p> <p>A brief and relevant biography of (the person) (name, age, country, nationality, physical appearance).</p> <p>A description of the clothes the person is wearing (according to the photos) and what is this person doing there.</p>
--	--

III. Knowledge and skills the students need to succeed in the assessment. (Stage 1)

What students will need to know	The skills students will need to be able to do
Vocabulary of vivid adjectives	<p>Describe a picture using vivid adjectives and spatial order words in a written paragraph.</p> <p>Reflect on what they have learned</p> <p>Self-assess through established criteria</p>
Spatial order words	
Present Progressive structure	
How to create a paragraph	

IV. Essential Questions (Stage 1)

Essential questions support the transfer goal, signal inquiry, guide instruction, and can be asked over and over throughout the unit without reaching a final answer.	
1. How I am going to use the vocabulary I learned when I write?	
2. How can I write to engage my reader?	

V. Learning Activities (Stage 3)

Transfer goal:

I want my students to learn to use vivid adjectives, use vocabulary related to spatial organization when looking at pictures, and self-assess their work, **so that, in the long run and on their own**, they will be able to produce a well-written descriptive paragraph.

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Abbreviated Performance Task:

You became a junior assistant for a week in a big paparazzi company, the TNZ Company.

They assigned you a famous person to write about. In addition, the company is going to give you some photographs previously taken of this celebrity for you to describe everything you can see in them. The story will be posted on our website. Do your best!

Consider in your writing:

- Write a paragraph with vivid details.
- Include a description of the place: weather and important places to visit.
- Make sure you have a brief and relevant biography of (the person) (name, age, country, nationality, physical appearance).
- The person's clothes according to the photos. Also, what this person is doing in there.

Length of the lesson: 12 days (16 school hours)

Learning Activities (from student's perspective)	Intention	A	M	T
<p>Week 1 – (4 hours)</p> <p><u>Day 1: 1 hour-</u></p> <p><i>Objectives: Ss will learn how to create a topic sentence and organize ideas in a paragraph.</i></p> <p>Teacher (TT) starts the class asking: Have you read celebrities' gossip in magazines or on the Internet? Have you visited blogs or</p>	Hook	A	M	

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<p>TT presents a format about self-reflecting that ss will be doing at the end of the sessions. TT asks students to complete it.</p>	<p>Closure</p>	<p>A</p>		
<p><u>Day 2: 1 hour-</u></p> <p><i>Objectives: Ss will be introduced to the idea of feedback. Ss will be introduced to the concept of spatial order.</i></p>		<p>A</p>	<p>M</p>	
<p>TT reviews what they learned in the last class and asks students to identify the sequence of a paragraph presented to the whole class.</p>	<p>Hook</p>			
<p>TT has provided feedback on ss' first sentence of the paragraph.</p>	<p>Formative Assessment</p>		<p>M</p>	
<p>TT teaches what are spatial order words and how to use them. These words are going to be used for giving details to the main idea in the paragraph.</p>			<p>M</p>	
<p>TT presents another picture with the paragraph and invites ss to add spatial order words to it. TT corrects when it is necessary.</p>	<p>Developing</p>		<p>M</p> <p>M</p>	

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<p>TT asks ss to go back to their paragraph writing and asks ss to finish it using spatial words to give details to their writing.</p> <p>TT presents a rubric and asks ss to follow it to see if the task is complete.</p> <p>Ss complete their daily self-reflection.</p>	<p>Initiating</p> <p>Closure</p>	<p>A</p>		
<p><u>Day 3: 2 hours-</u></p> <p><i>Objectives: Ss will learn how to use the Moodle. Ss will demonstrate an understanding of Spatial Order words through formative assessment. Ss will understand the difference between simple and vivid adjectives. Ss will learn to use the rubric for self-assessment.</i></p>	<p>Initiating</p>	<p>A</p>	<p>M</p>	
<p>TT presents the platform's content (Moodle) that ss will use with the vocabulary to have a reference for their tasks.</p> <p>TT reviews last class saying some sentences incorrectly according to spatial order looking at a picture and</p>		<p>A</p>		

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<p>TT reviews last class with the help of ss participation. Ss will generate ideas by looking at the first picture.</p> <p>TT shows an example of a complete descriptive paragraph and analyzes it with the group through the rubric.</p> <p>TT presents the unit task (caso) and shows the material they will be using on Moodle. TT explains that the writing will be done in the journals on the platform.</p> <p>TT assigns the celebrity with the three pictures for each student description and presents the rubric.</p> <p>Students do some brainstorming about what they are going to write.</p> <p>Students complete their daily self-reflection.</p>	<p>Developing</p> <p>Developing</p> <p>Closure</p>		<p>M</p> <p>M</p> <p>M</p> <p>M</p>	
<p><u>Day 2: 1 hour -</u></p> <p><i>Objectives: Ss will write a complete descriptive paragraph of the first picture.</i></p>	<p>Formative Assessment</p>		<p>M</p>	

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<p>TT invites students to create the first paragraph describing a picture using spatial order and following the paragraph structure. After writing the paragraph, TT asks ss to add vivid adjectives into the paragraph .</p> <p>TT does thumbs up/down activity to help ss realize if they are following the rubric.</p> <p>Ss complete their daily self-reflection.</p>	<p>Closure</p>		<p>M</p>	
<p><u>Day 3: 2 hours -</u></p> <p><i>Objectives: Ss will use the rubric to self-assess their first paragraph and will brainstorm ideas for the second paragraph using the second picture.</i></p>	<p>Hook</p>		<p>M</p>	<p>T</p>
<p>TT reviews the rubric with students to realize if the first paragraph is complete.</p> <p>TT shows a celebrity’s gossip web pages to relate ss work to the final task: posting their writing on a blog.</p>	<p>Developing</p> <p>Closure</p>			

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<p>Students do some brainstorming about what they are going to write using picture #2.</p> <p>Ss complete their daily self-reflection.</p> <p>Week 3 - (4 hours)</p> <p><u>Day 1: 1 hour -</u></p> <p><i>Objectives: Ss will complete the second paragraph using spatial order words and vivid adjectives.</i></p> <p>TT invites students to create the second paragraph describing a picture using the paragraph structure. After writing the paragraph, TT asks ss to add vivid adjectives into the paragraph.</p> <p>TT does thumbs up/down activity to help ss realize if they are following the rubric.</p> <p>Ss complete their daily self-reflection.</p> <p><u>Day 2: 1 hour-</u></p>	<p>Initiating</p> <p>Formative Assessment</p> <p>Closure</p>		<p>M</p> <p>M</p>	<p>T</p>
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IMPROVING DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

<p><i>Objectives: Ss will improve their second paragraph using the rubric to self-assess. Ss will review the rubric with the teacher to determine how closely their paragraph is related to their self-assessment.</i></p>	Developing		M	
<p>TT reviews last activity and invites ss to continue describing picture #2 adding more description using spatial order words.</p>	Closure			
<p>TT reviews the rubric with students to realize if the paragraph is complete.</p>				
<p>Ss complete their daily self-reflection.</p>			M	
<p><u>Day 3: 2 hours</u></p>	Hook			T
<p><i>Objectives: Ss will brainstorm ideas and begin writing their third paragraph. Ss will self-assess their writing using the rubric.</i></p>	Initiating			
<p>Students do some brainstorming about what they are going to write using picture #3.</p>	Developing			T

IMPROVING DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Appendix 6

Field Notes

Date

Objectives of the day

Class

Teacher's observations

Summary of student self-assessment

IMPROVING DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Appendix 7

Interview

What will be the students' perspectives on the advantages and challenges of using self-assessment to learn to write descriptive paragraphs?

1. What have you learned about writing?
2. How do you know you have learned?
3. How does self-assessment help you write?
4. When does self-assessment become a challenge for you?

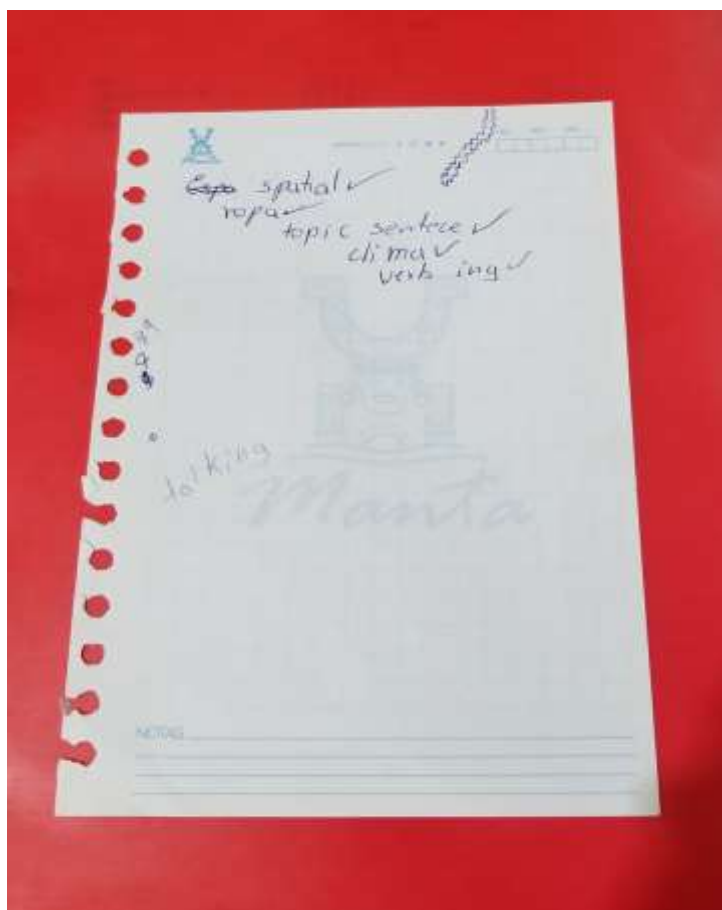
Appendix 8

Methodology Table

Specific Objectives	Data Collecting (Instrument and When)	Data Analysis
Describe the effect that self-assessment will have on descriptive writing (Quantitative). (according to RQ No. 1)	<p>Pre- post-writing sample scored with a rubric</p> <p>Pre-writing sample describing pictures scored with a rubric</p> <p>Post writing sample describing pictures scored with a rubric</p>	<p>Compare pre and post-test results with a rubric.</p> <p>SPSS to get descriptive statistics (mean, frequencies, standard deviation). Effect size.</p>
Describe the advantages and challenges of self-assessment. (Qualitative). (according to RQ No. 2)	<p>Results based on document analysis</p> <p>-Field notes throughout the innovation.</p> <p>Self-Reflection of students after every session</p>	<p>Report important outcomes.</p>
Describe the students' perspective on the advantages and challenges of using self-assessment to learn to write descriptive paragraphs. (according to RQ No. 3)	<p>Post interview</p> <p>Results based on interview at the end of the innovation.</p>	<p>Report most important outcomes. Match students' comments to other instruments and theory.</p>

IMPROVING DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Appendix 9



Appendix 10

Wix Link

<https://marialauramaciaslo.wixsite.com/lauramacias>