Self-Assessment to Assist Students in Writing Descriptive Texts

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Abstract

Most students find writing hard since it requires a complex process and strategies. They should cover not only all the dimensions of writing, such as content, organization of ideas, language use, mechanics, but also other important aspects such as, how they convey their ideas and do the editing process. They usually miss these aspects from the very beginning, the pre-writing process. Therefore, the teacher should give an effective strategy for the students to write. It is critical to provide them strategies so that they can assist themselves in their writing process. Self-assessment is one of the strategies that encourages students to be able to think about their purpose in writing and to reflect on what and how much they are learning. This article discusses the benefits and practical implementation of self-assessment to assist the students' writing process. Teachers should implement it frequently because it needs a process to train the students to develop their self-efficacy.

Keywords: self-assessment, writing, descriptive text

Introduction

Many researchers and practitioners have studied the effectiveness of alternative assessment in developing learners' writing skills. Alternative assessment in the form of the peers' oral and written comments helped students enrich the content of *th*eir writing, improve the organization of their writing, and improve the language (including grammar and vocabulary) of their writing. Similar techniques are thus still worth implementing in different contexts to contribute to students' understanding of the issue of the processes and pedagogy of composing (Widiati, 2003).

Self-assessment, as one of the alternative assessments, refers to the involvement of learners in making judgments about their learning, particularly about their achievements and the outcomes of their learning (Falchikov & Boud, 1989). Self-assessment has been viewed as having significant pedagogical values. Self-assessment has attracted so much

attention in recent years owing to the growing emphasis on learner independence and autonomy (Sambell et al., 2006). According to (Brown & Hudson, 2002), self-assessment requires less time to conduct in the classroom. Moreover, the learners are very much involved in the process of assessment, and this by itself can lead to learner autonomy and higher motivation. (Topping, 2003) also mentions that self-assessment is cognitively demanding tasks that require and encourage intelligent self-questioning, post hoc reflection, learners' ownership and management of learning processes, sense of personal responsibility and accountability, self-efficacy, and meta-cognition. It also reflects a growing interest in self-regulated learning and a conceptual shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction (Dann, 2012). In conclusion, self-assessments can be considered as effective ways to foster learners in learning a second language.

There are many ways on how teachers implement self-assessment in teaching writing to the learners of EFL. There are four ways in which teachers can encourage self-assessment, which are through dialogue journals, learning logs, self-assessment of interest and writing awareness, and a checklist of writing skills (self-assessment of writing dimensions) (O'Mally & Pierce, 1996). However, in this paper, I focus on the latest one, the checklist of writing skills (self-assessment of writing dimensions), in assisting learners to write a descriptive paragraph. As stated by Hayward (1993) in (O'Mally & Pierce, 1996), for learners to make progress in learning, they should understand (the activity and what proficiency it requires, (2) the steps needed to attain proficiency and (3) how they are progressing. This checklist has been proven to be significantly effective in improving the learners' writing ability (Naeini, 2011). The result of her study indicated the significant effects of treatment and outperformance of the experimental group in all components of writing and speaking. Therefore, it can be concluded that self-assessment acts as a booster for language skills improvement. This paper discusses the implementation of self-assessment to assist learners in writing a descriptive text for students of non-English departments.

Writing dimension
Self-assessment is a key element in Process Writing as learners review, edit, and revise their work. An important part of self-assessment is for learners to check their writing concerning the types of standards typically contained in the holistic and analytic scoring rubric. That is, learners should review the quality of each written piece for dimensions and their additional information on their attitudes toward their writing products. In conclusion, the self-assessment of writing dimensions consists of:

1. Writing Dimensions, which consists of
   - ❖ Content of composition,
   - ❖ Style/organization,
   - ❖ Grammar/sentence formation,
   - ❖ Language use
   - ❖ Mechanics

2. Learners' attitude toward their writing products

The specific terms in the writing dimensions and learners' attitudes toward their writing product probably will have little meaning or create different perspectives for most EFL learners. Therefore, I rephrased them as questions or statements that assist learners in reviewing the quality of their writing. In addition, to differentiate the rubrics of self-assessment of writing dimensions and writing guidelines, I focused on implementing the self-assessment of writing dimensions rubric after the learners finish the final product. In other words, I had the learners finish the writing process first, and then I asked them to self-assess their writing product.

Sample materials

In this section, the detailed self-assessment of the writing dimension is presented in detail in Table 1. Basically, the self-assessment of writing dimensions can be flexibly implemented to assist the learners in writing any kind of genre or topic, both in the form of a paragraph or a longer text. In this paper, a teaching procedure is also presented as additional modeling to train the learners in applying the self-assessment itself since the purpose is to assist the learners in writing a descriptive text. The self-assessment can be done after learners finish their final draft.

In addition, an analytic scoring rubric is attached to guide learners to score their writing products (**See Appendix 1**). In Table 1, each of the writing dimensions is elaborated and phrase clearly so that the learners can review the quality of their writing easily.

Table 1. Writing Dimension

1. Writing Dimensions		
CONTENT	Yes	No
1. I wrote enough	□	□
2. I included enough interesting details	□	□
3. All of my sentences and/or paragraphs focused on the topic	□	□
4. I organized my thought	□	□
5. I stated my purpose clearly	□	□
ORGANIZATION/STYLE		
1. My descriptive writing included general information and description	□	□
2. Each paragraph had a topic sentence and supporting sentences	□	□
3. I wrote complete sentences	□	□
4. I wrote systematically	□	□

LANGUAGE USE

1. I used some new vocabulary	□	□
2. I chose words that helped me make my point	□	□
3. I used adjectives and compound adjectives correctly in my writing	□	□

GRAMMAR

1. I used simple present tense correctly	□	□
2. I used correct subject – verb agreement	□	□
3. I used correct pronoun	□	□

WRITING CONVENTIONS

1.I spelled all my words correctly	□	□
2.I used capitals to start sentences	□	□
3.I used periods, commas, question marks and exclamation points correctly.	□	□
4.I indented paragraphs	□	□

2. Learners' attitude toward their writing products

1. What do you think of you writing, are you satisfied with the result of you writing? State your reasons

    _____

2. Do you think that your writing needs some improvement? If you do, what improvement you want to make? If you don't, what makes your writing excellent?

    _____

3. Score your own writing in the form provided (see the scoring guideline). Rewrite your total score in this number

    _____

4. Do you like assessing your own writing? Why or why not? Explain clearly

    _____

Each of the dimensions of writing has been stated and elaborated in detail, from the content of the composition, style/organization, grammar/sentence formation, language use, mechanics, and also the learners' attitude toward their writing products. This self-assessment can be used for learners to have self-assessment both in their paragraphs and text writing.

Teaching procedures
The detailed procedures of teaching self-assessment to EFL learners are presented in the following session. As mentioned previously, it is essential for teachers to state each of the procedure clearly so that the concept of self-assessment can be captured easily by the students.

- **Pre-teaching**
  (Building Knowledge of the Field)
  1. Ask the students about their background knowledge of a descriptive text. The writing activity is given after the students have done some reading comprehension related to descriptive text. It is important to activate students' background knowledge so that they know the purpose of writing a descriptive text and how to organize their ideas.
  2. Ask the students whether they have written any descriptive texts and discuss the students' answers.
  3. Review some important information related to a descriptive text, such as its communication purpose, generic structure, and language features

- **Whilst-teaching**
  (Modeling of the Text)
  4. Ask the students to make groups of four and sit together with their group. It is good to assign the students to work in groups so that they can share and exchange their ideas with others.
  5. Distribute one model of a descriptive text to the students (A Famous Comedian Named "Sule", See Appendix 2)
  6. Ask the students to read and comprehend the text. In this stage, they are also asked to give their opinion about the content of the text, the organization of the text, the language used by the writer, the grammar, and mechanics. In addition, they are also to state their opinion on the text.
  7. Ask the students to discuss the result of their group discussion

  (Joint Construction of the Text)
  8. Distribute Worksheet 1 (See Appendix 3) and explain what the students need to write individually.
  9. Assign the students to start writing a descriptive paragraph and remind the students about the time allotment.
  10. Before submitting the students' final work, ask them to revise their writing.
  11. Collect the students' final product on a descriptive text.

(Independent Construction of Text)

12. Distribute the self-assessment of writing dimensions to the students (See Table 1). In this stage, you should emphasize the student not to start the self-assessment before they instructed to do so. In addition, you also should give your students' final product so that they can assess it.

13. Ask the students to do the self-assessment. In doing the self-assessment, you are asked to do it step by step, based on your instruction. It is important to do so in order that the students have the same time in assessing their work and they can deeply assess their work without rushing or being in a hurry. In allocating time, you should allocate 2 minutes for each of the dimensions of students' writing and 8 minutes for answering all the questions on students' attitudes toward their writing.

#1 Content

At this first step of doing the self-assessment, you ask the students to self-assess their writing product based on the content of their writing. In this case, you should emphasize that they should be objective in assessing their work because later, you also will score their work based on the same criteria. Tell them that their way of assessing should not be very much different from their teacher's.

CONTENT	Yes	No
1. I wrote enough	□	□
2. I included enough interesting details	□	□
3. All of my sentences and/or paragraphs focused on the topic	□	□
4. I organized my thought	□	□
5. I stated my purpose clearly	□	□

#2 Organization/Style

The second step will ask the students to self-assess the product of their writing based on the organization of a descriptive text.

ORGANIZATION/STYLE	Yes	No
1. My descriptive writing included general information and description	□	□
2. Each paragraph had a topic sentence and supporting sentences	□	□
3. I wrote complete sentences	□	□

	Yes	No
4. I wrote systematically	☐	☐

#3 Language Use

Later, you need to ask your students to assess the language they use in their writing, whether they have employed the correct language use or not.

LANGUAGE USE	*Yes*	*No*
1. I used some new vocabulary	☐	☐
2. I chose words that helped me make my point	☐	☐
3. I used adjectives and compound adjectives correctly in my writing	☐	☐

#4 Grammar

The fourth step is to assign your students to assess the grammar of their writing.

GRAMMAR	*Yes*	*No*
1. I used simple present tense correctly	☐	☐
2. I used correct subject – verb agreement	☐	☐
3. I used correct pronoun	☐	☐

#5 Mechanics

The last part of the self-assessment of the writing dimension is mechanics. In this step, you should remind your students to see their work in detail so that they can have a thorough analysis of their work before assessing it.

WRITING CONVENTIONS	*Yes*	*No*
1. I spelled all my words correctly	☐	☐
2. I used capitals to start sentences	☐	☐
3. I used periods, commas, question marks and exclamation points correctly.	☐	☐
4. I indented paragraphs	☐	☐

#6 The students' attitudes toward their writing
For the last step, you should remind your students to answer all the questions in detail. You should ask them to write any reasons they have in assessing their work.

2.Learners' attitude toward their writing products
1. *What do you think of you writing, are you satisfied with the result of you writing? State your reasons*   _____
2. *Do you think that your writing needs some improvement? If you do, what improvement you want to make? If you don't, what makes your writing excellent?*   _____
3. *Score your own writing in the form provided (see the scoring guideline, Appendix 2). Rewrite your total score in this number*   _____
4. *Dou like assessing your own writing? Why or why not? Explain clearly*   _____

- **Post-teaching**
    14. Remind the students that after they have finished doing the self-assessment, ask them to check their answers and make sure that no missing answer and wrong judgment.
    15. Ask the students to submit their final product of writing, their self-assessments, and their scoring rubric.

Reflection
I have applied this technique in the teaching of English for Specific Purpose in Crop Production Technology Department of Politeknik Negeri Jember. Previously, I did not apply this self-assessment to assist the students in writing because I thought it would be hard for the students to assess themselves because of their English proficiency. Later, I found out that they need to independently assess their work to arise their sensitivity in evaluating their work and stimulate them to improve their proficiency.

At the first time, I assigned them to have the self-assessment on their writing product, I found a very low degree of reliability of their assessment result. It was because did not assess themselves objectively. Instead, they tended to score higher their exact proficiency because they wanted to get high scores, neglecting their low quality of writing. I evaluated the students' self-assessment in the classroom. After practicing it several times with different types of text and topics, I revealed that the students were much helped by the self-assessment in improving their quality of the next writing assignment. In addition, they also developed their sense of personal responsibility and accountability and autonomy. I

suggest that teachers not implement it only once because it needs a process to train the students to develop their self-efficacy. (Miqawati, 2009, 2019) also noted that the alternative assessments help students gain their motivation and know better on what to achieve during their process of learning and teachers play an important role in assisting students to be able to monitor their learning.

Conclusion

Teachers must be creative in teaching, especially in teaching writing to English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. English teachers should vary their teaching activities by employing various teaching techniques, materials, and media. So far, in teaching writing, teachers only focus on having the teacher's feedback on their students' writing. They also rarely implement alternative assessments, one of them is self-assessment to help students improve their writing ability. By asking the students to get involved in assessing their work, the teacher, as well as the students, will get many advantages.

This paper presents the explanation of the advantages of implementing the self-assessment and the procedure of applying it in the classroom, hoping that it will help teachers assist their students in improving their writing proficiency. Again, there is nothing that can be instantly pursued, everything needs process. Writing is a matter of practice and it takes a hard effort and process to be a good writer. Teachers should always encourage their students to keep practice writing and of course, they should provide their students with some strategies or techniques to be good writers.

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Appendix 1

Analytic Scoring Rubric for Writing

Domain Score *	Composing	Style	Sentence Formation	Usage	Mechanics
4	Focuses on central ideas with an organized and elaborated text	Purposefully chosen vocabulary, sentence variety, information and voice to affect reader	Standard word order, no enjambment (run-on sentences), completeness (no sentence fragments) standard modifiers and coordinators, and effective transitions	Standard inflections (e.g., plurals, possessives, -ed,-ing with verbs,and –ly with adverbs), subject-verb agreement (we were vs.we was) standard word meaning	Effective use of capitalizatio n, punctuation, spelling, and formatting (paragraphs noted by indenting)
3	Central idea, but not as evenly elaborated and some digressions	Vocabulary less precise and information chosen less purposeful	Mostly standard word order, some enjambment or sentence fragments	Mostly standard inflections, agreement, and word meaning	Mostly effective use of mechanics; errors do not detract from meaning
2	Not a focused idea or more than one idea, sketchy elaboration, and many digressions	Vocabulary basic and not purposefully selected, tone flat or inconsistent	Some non-standard word order, enjambment, and word omissions (e.g., verbs)	Some errors with inflections, agreement, and word meaning	Some errors with spelling and punctuation that detract from meaning
1	No clear idea, little or no elaboration, many digressions	Not controlled, tone flat, sentence halted or choppy	Frequent non-standard word order, enjambment, and word omissions	Shifts from one tense to another, errors in conventions (them/those, good/well, doublenegatives, etc)	Misspells even simple words; little formatting evident

* 4 = consistent control

  3 = reasonable control

  2 = inconsistent control

  1 = little or no control

(Adopted from O'Malley & Pierce, 1996)

Appendix 2
Read this text carefully with your group

A Famous Comedian Named "Sule"

His name full name is Entis Sutisna. People call him Sule. He is a famous comedian in Indonesia. Sule was born on 15 November 1976 in Bandung, West Java. He speaks Sundanese fluently. He also learns Javanese.

Sule is very unique. His hair is long with brown and yellow colour. He has oval face, flat nose and slanting eyes. People know Sule as a ridiculous man and full of jokes. He is very funny. His joke makes everyone smiling even belly laughing.

Sule plays in several TV shows such as Opera Van Java (OVJ), Awas Ada Sule, PAS Mantab, and Ini Talk Show. He also can sing very well. He has very famous song entitled Susis (Suami Sieun Istri).

Appendix 3

Worksheet 1:

- Assignment 1: Write a descriptive text describing the person on the picture.
  Time Allotment: 15 minute