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How Do You Measure Up?

Exploring students' perceptions of peer- and self- assessment

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Abstract

Self-and-peer assessments have been shown to be effective in improving the writing skills of ESL learners. In this study, 87 pre-diploma students at Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Pulau Pinang completed a self-and peer-assessment checklist for an essay writing assignment. A survey and a focused group discussion of 5 students found that they felt the checklist helped them to be critical, independent, confident, and better organized when writing essays. Although some students found the checklist challenging and time-consuming, most of them felt that the checklist is beneficial and enjoyable to use.

Keywords: self-assessment, peer-assessment, ESL, writing

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1.0 Introduction

Students who are learning English as a second language (ESL) frequently struggle with writing because of a variety of factors, such as a limited vocabulary and comprehension of English grammar, fear of making mistakes, and a lack of interest in the subject (Hanh and Tinh, 2022). Writing instructors are constantly searching for efficient methods to boost their students' writing abilities so they can help their students overcome these difficulties. Process writing, genre writing, vocabulary building, and integrating technology into teaching writing are some of the often-utilized methods to improve ESL writers' abilities. These methods have proven to be extremely beneficial in assisting students to improve their writing abilities.

The use of self- and peer-assessment is a different strategy that is becoming more common among writing instructors. The importance of learners' participation in their own learning process is strongly emphasized through self-and peer assessment (Siow, 2015). In writing classes, self-assessment requires students to evaluate their writing by comparing it to a set of standards provided by

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the instructor or based on a rubric. This aids students in becoming more self-aware of their writing talents and flaws, which can help them make progress in this area. Additionally, self-assessment motivates students to take charge of their learning and participate fully in the writing process. Peer-assessment, on the other hand, entails students scoring on others' written work according to the same set of standards. Students can benefit from and encourage each other's writing progress through peer-assessment. Additionally, it gives students a chance to give and receive feedback while honing their critical thinking abilities through the analysis and evaluation of other students' writing.

Although peer-assessment is a common method for assessing students' work in writing classes, writing instructors are continuously measuring the effectiveness of this tool in an effort to improve students' writing skills. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of SPACE (Self and Peer Assessment Checklist) in ESL writing classes as well as to identify its advantages and disadvantages as seen by the students. This study also seeks to identify prospective areas where this assessment tool's effectiveness could be further increased.

2.0 Literature Review

Writing is widely acknowledged as the most challenging skill to acquire among the four language learning skills (Grami, 2012 as cited in Hanh and Tinh, 2022). It emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and encourages thoughtful reflection within the realm of the English language (Yunus and Chein, 2016). Writing serves as a reinforcement for vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and organization of ideas, underscoring the crucial importance of effective writing acquisition for students. Overall, writing plays a pivotal role in students' language learning journey, fostering critical thinking, communication skills, self-reflection, and authentic language use. By providing a platform for active engagement with the language, writing helps learners develop fluency and enhance overall language proficiency.

In line with the latest developments in language teaching and assessment, which aim to promote learner autonomy, self-assessment, and peer-assessment are gaining prominence and playing vital roles in language education. These alternative strategies empower learners to gauge their own progress, understand their capabilities, and identify areas for improvement. As students become more self-aware of their performance, they rely less on teachers' evaluations. Additionally, self-report measures have become popular, enabling learners to offer valuable insights beyond what traditional tests can assess (Heineman, 1990; Chen, 2008, cited in Javaherbakhsh, 2010). Teachers play a crucial role in supporting students' knowledge construction through active engagement in assessing their proficiency levels and fostering self-control in learning (Chen, 2008, cited in Javaherbakhsh, 2010). By providing opportunities for self-evaluation, teachers nurture learners' autonomy (Oskarson, 1989), crucial for lifelong learning and success. Similarly, peer-assessment gained popularity as an educational tool, equipping students with the ability to make judgments about high-quality work (Topping, 1998). It also helps teachers gain a more accurate picture of individual performance in group settings (Cheng & Warren, 2000, cited in Van Zundert et al., 2010). Integrating self- and peer-assessment prepares students for effectiveness and improvement throughout their lives, aligning with the goal of lifelong learning (Chen, 2008).

Though self- and peer-assessment offer advantages in improving writing skills, their utilization presents certain limitations. Both can be time-consuming (Siow, 2015). Furthermore, low-achieving students may overestimate their work, while high-achieving students may underestimate it (Sung et al., 2010). Nevertheless, previous studies demonstrate that these assessments enhance students' understanding, as they provide increased opportunities for observation and learning from one another (Yang, 2010). They also offer opportunities for students to provide and receive specific feedback, fostering improved interaction and self-confidence (Almahasneh & Abdul-Hamid, 2019). Particularly in writing skills, these assessments enable students to cultivate advanced critical thinking abilities, enhance organizational skills, and develop a more analytical approach (Siow, 2015). Hanh and Tinh's (2022) research showed improved performance in students who consistently utilized a peer-review checklist. Therefore, utilizing peer- and self-assessment can enhance the writing process and ultimately help students master this skill.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods design to investigate student self and peer assessment practices in writing within three pre-diploma to diploma-level classes. Utilizing the Self and Peer Assessment Checklist (SPACE), participants assessed their own and their peers' writing. Informed by the importance of confidentiality and participant privacy, anonymity was ensured throughout the research process, with pseudonyms employed for reference purposes in documentation and reporting.

3.1 Procedure

Students were asked to do the self-assessment followed by peer-assessment, in which they were asked to respond to the comments given in the peer-assessment and were given the chance to revise their assignment before the final submission. The students were later requested to complete a 26-item questionnaire with 5-point likert scale to examine their perceptions on the effectiveness of SPACE in improving their writing skills. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) (n=5) was conducted to further investigate and triangulate the data from the survey.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The questionnaire was completed by a total of 87 students and consisted of three sections: demographic data, perceptions on self-assessment, and perceptions on peer assessment. The results obtained from the questionnaire will be discussed in accordance with these sections. To evaluate the survey's reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated and yielded an exceptionally high value of .945. This indicates excellent internal consistency, as higher Cronbach's Alpha values suggest increased reliability (Amirrudin et al., 2021). The results of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) that included five students were presented alongside the quantitative findings.

4.1 Demographic data

Among the total sample of 87 participants, a significant majority of 82.8% were enrolled in pre-diploma programs, specifically the Pre-Business Administration (PBA) and Pre-Accountancy Services (PAS) programs, as well as pre-diploma courses, namely English for Pre-Diploma I (ELC010) and English for Pre-Diploma II (ELC030). The remaining 17.2% of respondents were students from the Faculty of Hotel Management and Tourism, specifically enrolled in the diploma course Integrated Language Skills: III (ELC231). It is noteworthy that the gender distribution was skewed towards female students ($n=59$), with a higher representation compared to male students among the respondents. A total of 5 students participated in a semi-structured focused group discussion. The interview protocol consists of questions on the students' perceptions on self- and peer-assessment as the receiver of feedback and the one giving the feedback.

4.2 Perception on Self-Assessment

Table 1. Perception on Self-Assessment

Item Statement	Mean score
<i>The self-assessment makes me independent.</i>	3.44
<i>The self-assessment makes me think more.</i>	3.60
<i>The self-assessment makes me learn more.</i>	3.62
<i>The self-assessment makes me more confident.</i>	3.31
<i>The self-assessment makes me more critical.</i>	2.75
<i>The self-assessment makes me write with a proper plan.</i>	3.32
<i>The self-assessment is time consuming.</i>	3.02
<i>The self-assessment is enjoyable.</i>	3.32
<i>The self-assessment is hard.</i>	2.60
<i>The self-assessment is challenging.</i>	3.10
<i>The self-assessment is helpful.</i>	3.40
<i>The self-assessment is beneficial.</i>	3.41

The analysis of the mean scores provides valuable insights into students' perceptions of self-assessment as a valuable and beneficial practice. The findings indicate that students generally recognize the advantages of self-assessment, particularly in promoting independence and contributing to their thinking and learning abilities. The mean scores for these aspects (3.44, 3.60, and 3.62) suggest that students perceive self-assessment as an empowering tool that enables them to take ownership of their learning process and enhances their cognitive development. However, the analysis also reveals areas where improvements can be made in the implementation and impact of self-assessment. The mean score of 3.31 for confidence suggests that some students may not yet fully perceive self-assessment as a confidence-building activity. This indicates a need for further support and guidance in helping students recognize and appreciate their strengths and areas for growth through self-assessment. Similarly, the mean score of 2.75 for critical thinking skills indicates that students perceive self-assessment as having a moderate impact on their ability to think critically. This finding suggests that additional strategies or instructional support may be beneficial to help students develop their critical thinking skills through self-assessment activities. On the other hand, students find self-assessment moderately helpful for writing with a proper plan, as reflected in the mean score of 3.32. This finding suggests that students recognize the value of self-assessment in organizing and structuring their writing, indicating that it supports their ability to plan and articulate their ideas effectively. The mean score of 3.02 for time investment indicates that students perceive self-assessment as requiring a significant amount of time and effort. This finding suggests that educators should consider providing clear guidelines and time management strategies to help students effectively incorporate self-assessment into their learning routine without feeling overwhelmed.

Regarding enjoyment, the mean score of 3.32 suggests that students find self-assessment moderately enjoyable. While this indicates a positive perception, it also implies that there is room for enhancing students' engagement and enthusiasm for self-assessment activities. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that students perceive self-assessment as somewhat challenging (mean score: 3.10) and demanding (mean score: 2.60). These findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive learning environment where students receive appropriate scaffolding and guidance to navigate the challenges associated with self-assessment. This can help students develop the necessary skills and confidence to engage in self-assessment effectively. Overall, the mean scores of 3.40 and 3.41 for self-assessment as a valuable tool for personal growth and improvement indicate that students recognize its significance in their development as learners. These findings underscore the potential of self-assessment to foster student agency, metacognition, and continuous improvement in their learning journey.

The findings from the semi-structured focused group discussion revealed that self-assessment has significant positive effects on students' writing skills. 3 of the informants stated that "the checklist is helpful in identifying careless mistakes and (they) realized the need to improve (their) vocabulary and considered (their) friend's essay as a reference for writing better essays in the future". The participants were able to identify their own mistakes and recognize areas of improvement in their writing. Also, they found the process valuable in pinpointing careless errors and areas where their vocabulary needed enhancement. This newfound awareness acted as a

strong motivator for the students, inspiring them to work towards producing better-written pieces in the future. By taking an active role in evaluating their own work, students felt empowered to take ownership of their learning and strive for continuous improvement in their writing abilities. Self-assessment emerged as a valuable tool in honing their writing skills and cultivating a deeper understanding of their writing strengths and weaknesses.

Based on the findings, educators can leverage the strengths of self-assessment while addressing the areas for improvement to optimize its effectiveness as a pedagogical practice. Providing targeted support, clear guidelines, and strategies to enhance critical thinking and confidence-building through self-assessment can further enhance its impact on student learning outcomes. Additionally, incorporating elements of enjoyment and addressing the challenges associated with self-assessment can help create a positive and engaging learning experience for students.

4.3 Perception on Peer-Assessment

Table 2. Perception on Peer-Assessment

Item Statement	Mean score
<i>The peer-assessment makes me dependent.</i>	3.22
<i>The peer-assessment makes me think more.</i>	3.47
<i>The peer-assessment makes me learn more.</i>	3.56
<i>The peer-assessment makes me more confident.</i>	3.35
<i>The peer-assessment makes me more critical.</i>	2.88
<i>The peer-assessment makes me work with a proper plan.</i>	3.42
<i>The peer-assessment is time-consuming.</i>	2.94
<i>The peer-assessment is enjoyable.</i>	3.45
<i>The peer-assessment is hard.</i>	2.79
<i>The peer-assessment is challenging.</i>	3.06
<i>The peer-assessment is helpful.</i>	3.43
<i>The peer-assessment is beneficial.</i>	3.50

The analysis of the mean scores reveals a generally positive view of peer-assessment among the respondents, highlighting its perceived value and benefits as a learning tool. The findings suggest that peer-assessment promotes deeper thinking, learning, and confidence among students. The mean scores for these aspects (3.22, 3.47, and 3.56) indicate that students recognize the value of engaging in peer assessment activities, as it encourages critical thinking, facilitates learning, and enhances their overall confidence in their abilities. The moderate influence on dependency (mean score: 3.22) suggests that students may rely on their peers to some extent during the assessment process. While collaboration and interaction are important elements of peer-assessment, it is essential to strike a balance between peer support and individual responsibility. Educators can provide guidance and encourage students to develop independent thinking and decision-making skills while engaging in peer-assessment. The mean score of 3.35 for validating and enhancing confidence suggests that peer-assessment plays a role in boosting students' self-assurance in their work. Receiving feedback and evaluation from peers can validate their efforts and provide a sense of achievement. This finding emphasizes the social and motivational aspects of peer-assessment, as it creates an environment where students can support and encourage each other's growth and development. However, the mean score of 2.88 for the impact of peer assessment on developing critical thinking skills suggests that students may not perceive it as particularly strong in this aspect. It is important for educators to provide clear guidelines and criteria for peer assessment to ensure that students focus on providing meaningful feedback that fosters critical thinking and helps improve their peers' work. The moderate helpfulness of peer-assessment for planning (mean score: 3.42) indicates that students recognize its role in supporting their ability to plan and structure their work effectively. Peer assessment can provide valuable insights and perspectives that help students refine their ideas and approach to assignments.

The mean score of 2.94 for time-consuming suggests that students perceive peer-assessment as requiring a significant investment of time and effort. Educators can address this concern by providing clear instructions, structured peer-assessment frameworks, and opportunities for efficient and focused feedback exchange. The mean score of 3.45 for enjoyment indicates that students find peer-assessment moderately enjoyable. This suggests that, overall, students appreciate the collaborative and interactive nature of peer-assessment, which adds an engaging element to the learning process. While peer-assessment poses certain challenges (mean score: 2.79), the mean score of 3.06 for manageable suggests that students perceive these challenges as surmountable. Educators can support students in overcoming these challenges by providing clear guidelines, fostering a positive and supportive classroom culture, and offering opportunities for peer learning and reflection. Overall, the mean scores of 3.43 and 3.50 for peer assessment as helpful and beneficial for personal growth and development highlight its positive impact on students' learning experiences. These findings underscore the potential of peer assessment to foster collaborative learning, critical thinking, and self-reflection, contributing to students' overall growth and development as learners.

During the semi-structured FGD, the participants highlighted the significant impact of peer-assessment on students' writing experiences. One notable advantage of peer assessment was the exposure to diverse perspectives and feedback it offered. Students appreciated the varied insights received from their peers, providing them with fresh viewpoints on their writing, thereby enriching their understanding of different approaches to composition. Moreover, the feedback received from peers proved to be both exciting and encouraging for participants. The positive comments they received motivated them to persevere in their writing journey and fostered a sense of confidence in their abilities. 4 informants agreed that "the feedback received was exciting and provided encouragement".

However, the effectiveness of peer assessment may vary depending on the quality of feedback received from peers as two informants highlighted that they “did not receive the desired feedback from some friends, suggesting that the quality of feedback varied among peers”. The students expressed concerns about not receiving the desired feedback from specific friends, indicating that the consistency and depth of feedback varied among their peers. Despite this, the majority of participants acknowledged the beneficial impact of peer assessment on their writing growth and the valuable role it played in refining their written expression. Based on this analysis, educators can further leverage the benefits of peer assessment while addressing any challenges or areas for improvement. Providing clear guidelines, promoting a supportive learning environment, and encouraging effective peer feedback strategies can enhance the impact of peer assessment on students' critical thinking skills, confidence, and overall learning outcomes.

Given such a backdrop, it is crucial for educators to promote and facilitate meaningful self-assessment and peer-assessment practices. Clear guidelines should be established to ensure constructive evaluations during peer assessments, emphasizing the importance of providing specific and helpful feedback. Educators can also encourage students to use the feedback received from peers as a source of inspiration and motivation for improvement. It is noteworthy that the positive impact of self-assessment and peer-assessment on students' writing skills is evident in this study. By incorporating these assessment approaches into the ESL classroom, educators can empower students to take ownership of their learning, enhance their critical thinking abilities, and foster a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

The main objective of this study was to look at the ways students responded to simultaneous self-assessment and peer-assessment learning, which was successfully attained. According to the results of this study, it has been very advantageous for the pupils to include SPACE in the curriculum. The feedback from the students with regards to the use of SPACE to synchronously improve their writing skills is positive. Students said that they love learning to write since the checklist is simple to use and encourages teamwork and self-improvement. The unique aspect of this product is the synchronous feature, which enables students to evaluate their peers and themselves online using the checklist. The successful implementation of simultaneous self-assessment and peer-assessment learning using SPACE underscores the importance of incorporating formative assessment practices in ESL classrooms. This approach not only enhances students' writing skills but also cultivates important skills such as critical thinking, self-reflection, and effective communication. By leveraging the power of technology and promoting a learner-centered approach, educators can create an environment that empowers students to take ownership of their learning and actively engage in the assessment process. Moving forward, further research could explore the long-term effects of simultaneous self-assessment and peer-assessment learning, considering its potential to impact not only writing skills but also other language domains. Additionally, investigating the implementation of SPACE in diverse ESL contexts and exploring its adaptability to different proficiency levels would contribute to the ongoing development and refinement of formative assessment practices. Ultimately, the integration of effective formative assessment strategies, such as SPACE, holds great promise for fostering language development and creating dynamic and engaging ESL classrooms.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to the area of Language Assessment, particularly formative assessment in English as a Second Language classroom context. Moreover, this research contributes to the field of language assessment by emphasizing the importance of ongoing assessment and feedback in fostering language development and creating a learner-centered classroom environment.

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