

An Investigation on Self-Reported Writing Problems and Actual Writing Deficiencies of EFL Learners in the Beginners' Level

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Abstract

This study was informed by Flavell and Willman's (1977, in Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 1998) definitions of metacognition which include "knowledge of the task and one's own cognitive resources, and monitoring, or the ability to control and regulate one's thinking" (p. 94). Points investigated were the following: EFL learners' writing difficulties as reported by them and as identified by the teacher raters; if there is an agreement between self-assessment and raters' assessment of the students' output; aspects of process knowledge considered by the participants when they write; and activities which these students believe can help overcome their difficulties. Participants were twenty-six EFL students from the Center for Language Learning of De La Salle University in the beginners' level, and who belong to different nationalities. An instrument consisting of three parts was used: Part I asked for personal information. Part II required the students to write two or three paragraphs about their writing difficulties; and Part III asked how they thought their difficulties could be overcome. Final task was for the participants to rate their written output using a 0-5 rating scale. Two English professors were invited to interrater. Writing difficulties were categorized as they appeared, making the analysis data-driven. Students' report shows their deep involvement in thinking processes before writing, but it diminishes during the writing stage. Means are lowest in the post-writing stage, their concern being on grammar, vocabulary, and the final output. Students admit that consistently speaking and writing in English, and being given encouragements, as well as more opportunities to interact with foreign nationals, can help them overcome their writing problems.

Keywords: Writing instruction, writing problems and writing deficiencies, teaching English as a foreign language, self-reports in language learning

Introduction

That more learning takes place when students are trained to be autonomous and when they are given freedom to negotiate meaning (Altan & Trombly, 2001), and that “self-assessment accuracy is a condition of learner autonomy” (Blanche & Merino 1989, p.313) is upheld by modern educators and researchers. Research findings stress the usefulness of assessment tools which may come in different forms: dialogue journals, learning logs, diaries, standardized appraisal forms, including students’ oral or written output. Not only do these tools enable the students to evaluate their own performance; learners’ use of these self-evaluation devices provides educators insights both on these students’ strengths and weaknesses, in addition to making known their linguistic abilities. As Shaaban (2001) notes, a student’s writing ability, as well as their improvement over time can be gleaned from dialogue journals, as well as from learning logs which bear a “record of the students’ experiences with the use of the English language outside the classroom” (p.20). In Venkatesh’s (2003) study on the development of graduate learners’ monitoring proficiencies and task understandings in the context of a complex writing task, the 17 students involved were found to have exhibited signs of a general monitoring ability across the six weekly learning logs, which they were asked to keep. These logs were based on the content being covered in one of their graduate courses. Learners’ improvement on monitoring proficiencies was also noted as instruction progressed. No relationships, however, were found between the measure of task understanding and the learners’ monitoring abilities. Even L₂ teachers have benefited from diary studies conducted lately. Zeyrec (2001) reports on the success she experienced when she did a diary study of 24 fourth year ELT students at Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey. Findings reveal her students’ personal views on professional growth, their openness to methodologies in class and innovative ideas on professional development (p.13), concretizing her ideas for these student teachers’ professional development.

Any of the aforementioned tools can be possibly used for self-assessment with students being asked to write down how they have performed in their English language class or how they have used the English language during the day. These devices then become a good source of information about each learner’s strengths and weaknesses and they can eventually prove useful not only for their teachers, but also for the learners themselves who are given the opportunity to show how they think and learn. This observation was pointed out too by Mok, Lung, Cheng, Cheung, and Ng (2006) in their study on the use of metacognitive approach for self-assessment of teacher education students.

The implications of self-rating for foreign language and teachers and researchers is one reason why Blanche and Merino (1989) summarized the literature from different parts of the world on self-evaluation of foreign language skills. Overall, they noted consistency in agreement between self-assessments and ratings using different criteria. Part of their summary reports the absence of significant relationships “between the accuracy of students’ evaluations of their foreign language skills and their actual (classroom/test) performance” (p.324). Lower correlations were observed between “examination results not based on situational models, and global self-assessments of ‘macroskills’ like writing...”

(p.324). One positive observation is that learners appeared motivated as revealed by self-evaluation measures.

Chen's (2002) study, which attempted to investigate the problems of university EFL writing in Taiwan, was meant to obtain insights on how EFL writing instruction in Taiwan could be improved. As in the present study, Chen asked the student participants (28 sophomores) to write a self-reflective report on a given topic presenting their problems when writing in English. Results show similarities on the two analyses - one done by the researcher and the other by the research assistant. Following are the points showing commonalities between the students' self-appraised performance and their actual writing difficulties: (1) Word usage and English expressions, (2) confusion about the subtle differences among similar words due to insufficient cultural knowledge, (3) limited vocabulary, (4) grammatical errors, (5) organization, (6) errors on prepositions (idioms) or slang, (7) L1 influence, and (8) independent thinking - ranging from lexical, syntactic levels to rhetorical and cultural levels.

Framework of the Study

This investigation is informed by Flavell and Wellman's definitions of metacognition (1977 in Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 1998) which include "knowledge of the task and one's own cognitive resources, and monitoring, or the ability to control and regulate one's thinking" (p. 94). The roles of two content areas of knowledge are cited by Hacker et al., namely process knowledge, which includes setting goals, evaluating goal progress, and making necessary adjustments, and product knowledge, which refers to awareness of text types, structures, and organization. Beliefs about one's competence, motivation, affect, and strategies form part of the process knowledge. Product knowledge, on the other hand, is said to embrace the function and purpose of a text in a "defined social context, written for a specific purpose and particular audience" (p. 94). Presented theories on metacognition correspond to those involved in the composing processes as revealed in Flower and Hayes' (1981, in Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 1998) study, who noted three major aspects involved: planning, translating, and reviewing (p. 95). Three sub processes in turn comprise the planning stage: establishing a purpose or goal setting, generation of ideas, and organization of ideas, at which time ideas or content are logically arranged to make them comprehensible. Translating can be regarded as the transformation or concretization of ideas into their written form. Another process reflecting metacognition is reviewing which enables the writers to re-see what they have composed and "compare" them to the internal representation of intended text" (p. 96).

Such processes came to be regarded as synonymous to "making meaning", "intervention", and "multiple drafts" (Emig, 1974; Zamel, 1976, in Raimes, 2000, p. 154). Such processes, too, provide learners the opportunity to self-regulate their learning. Butler and Winnie (1995, in Hacker, et al., 1998) report that "Theoreticians seem unanimous - the most effective learners are self-regulating" (p. 13) and that "accurate self-assessment of what is known or not known" leads to effective self-regulation (Schoenfeld, 1987, in Hacker, et al., p. 13).

Kamimura's (2000) attempt to investigate what processing tasks are considered by EFL writers before writing, during writing, and after writing, supports the roles played by the two content areas of knowledge discussed above. Such study tried to test if there is a close link between process and product approaches to EFL writing instruction, an integration that cannot be denied by those who have had exposures to these two approaches. Learners, too, can be led to develop awareness of their use of grammar, vocabulary, verb tenses, articles, determiners, prepositions, verb-subject agreement, correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation -- language points that are usually missed or misused by students - and which other scholars have noted, too: Chen (2002), when he looked at Taiwanese students' writing difficulties; and Ashwell (2000), when he studied his students' written work and the pattern of the teacher's response to it.

Conducting studies then, to investigate how closely students of EFL students assess their own learning as compared to the teachers' assessment, appears to be timely. As Nunan (1999) claims, "By having learners rate themselves against their learning goals, the teacher not only develops the learning self-critical faculties, but also serves to remind them of the goals of the instructional process" (pp. 192-193). Given options, individuals learn to make decisions and select what they think would be the best materials or strategies for their decisions.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to investigate EFL learners' writing difficulties as reported by them and as identified by the teacher-raters. Following are the specific points studied:

- 1) What are sampled EFL learners' self-reported writing difficulties?
- 2) What are sampled EFL learners' actual writing difficulties as identified by the teacher raters?
- 3) Is there an agreement between students' self-assessment and the raters' evaluation of the students' written output?
- 4) What aspects of process knowledge are considered by the participants before, during, and after writing?
- 5) What activities/strategies would sampled EFL learners hope to employ to overcome reported difficulties?

Methodology

Participants

A total of 26 EFL learners in the beginners' level -- 13 females and 13 males - participated in the study. These students are enrolled in the Center for Language Learning (CeLL) of De La Salle University, Manila, the Philippines and are taking up either one or more of the following courses for the month of February 2007: Writing Skills 2; Grammar 2 or 4; Reading 3 or 6; and Conversation 3, 4, or 6. Languages spoken as declared by the participants are found in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants' Profile in Terms of Spoken Languages

L ₁	f	%	L ₂	f	%	FL	f	%
Korean	15	58	English	8	30.8	English	16	61.5
Turkish	2	7.60	Japanese	3	11.5	Spanish	1	3.8
Tagalog	2	7.60	Persian	1	3.8	No answer	9	34.6
Thai	1	3.8	No answer	14	53.8			
Chinese	1	3.8						
Mandarin	1	3.8						
Kordish	1	3.8						
No answer	3	11.5						

As can be seen, more than half of the participants sampled have Korean as their first language, and English is regarded as a foreign language by a little more than 60% of the participants. The no-answer results could probably be due to some participants' failure to understand fully what first or second language, or even foreign language (FL) means despite given explanations during the answering of the questionnaire. Others, however, seem smart enough to declare a second language as distinct from a language that is foreign to them. Although 8% of them claim English as their L₂, they are considered part of the sampled EFL learners as their written and spoken English suggest so.

Instrument

The instrument used was a researcher-made questionnaire consisting of three parts: the first part sought to obtain personal information including the students' spoken languages. Part II consisted of a writing task which required them to write two or three paragraphs about their writing difficulties - with examples - and possible reasons for such difficulties; and the third part contained questions asking them how they think their difficulties could be overcome. As this type of instrument has been used, too, by other researchers (Chen, 2002) and is recognized as a "global" type of assessment (Blanche & Merino, 1989, p.324), no pilot testing was done to validate it. In Part II instrument, the students were also asked what exercises, activities, strategies taught in the Center where they were enrolled in they did find useful, and why they wanted to study English. Lastly, Kamimura's (2000) questionnaire concerning what the students thought and did before, during, and after writing, was used.

Data Collection

The instrument was administered after the 1:15-3:15 sessions on Friday afternoon during the month of February in one of the CELL classrooms. Invited were students from the afternoon classes who were willing to stay until 5:00 p.m. Students were asked to complete all parts before they left and to rate their written output in Part II using the following scale:

0 = Can't write anything intelligible; nothing can be understood

- 1 = Writing is *poor* - very little can be understood or considered clear
 2 = Writing is *fair* - less than one-half of the paragraph can be understood or considered clear
 3 = Writing is on the *average* - half of the whole paragraph can be understood or considered clear
 4 = Writing is *good* - more than half of the paragraph can be understood or considered clear
 5 = Writing is *very good* - all or almost all sentences can be understood or considered clear

Such descriptors were based on the quality of the students' written work in their grammar and writing classes. The rating scale was explained in simpler terms to the students whose level was very low.

Interrating

Two colleagues from the Department of English and Applied Linguistics - one a Ph.D. student who had taught English for more than 30 years, and the other, also a Ph.D. student who had taught for 13 years in the tertiary level - were invited to interrater the students' essays. The three of us rated the students' papers independently at first; then we convened to decide what rating should be given to each paper.

Students' self-ratings were then compared with the raters' assessment per paper.

Data Analysis

Writing difficulties were coded and categorized as they appeared, the regularly recurring ones being similar to what Chen (2002) and Ashwell (2000) noted in their studies: word choice or vocabulary, articles/determiners, use of the plural/singular forms of nouns, spelling, prepositions, punctuation marks, agreement between the subject and the verb, and verb tense.

As the analysis was data-driven, additional errors were noted and coded by the raters. Such difficulties were partly reported, too, by the students in this study: use of the past participle, agreement between pronouns and antecedents, establishing cohesion, use of supporting details/organization of ideas, and addressing the prompt.

Findings and Discussion

EFL Learners' Writing Difficulties

Table 2 displays the summary of the participants' self-reported difficulties when they write. It can be noted that the sampled EFL learners consider vocabulary and grammar as their topmost writing difficulties, these two problems having been the concern of more than 60% of females and males combined. This finding is similar to that of Chen (2002) who investigated the writing problems of EFL students in a university in Taiwan. Among the difficulties reported by 28

Taiwanese freshmen and sophomore students, 60.7% were on vocabulary and 50% were on grammar. Topping their list was lexical choice which was not directly reported by the EFL learners from CELL and which was probably part of their report on vocabulary.

Table 2
EFL Learners' Writing Difficulties

	F		M		Total %
	f	%	f	%	
Vocabulary	8	30.7	8	30.7	61.4
Grammar	8	30.7	10	38.5	69.2
Spelling	3	11.5	1	3.8	15.3
Prepositions	1	3.8	2	7.7	11.5
Articles/ Determiners/ Number	1	3.8	-	-	3.8
Verb Tense	1	3.8	1	3.8	7.6
Word Order	1	3.8	1	3.8	7.6
Interference of L ₁	1	3.8	1	3.8	7.6
L-R system of writing in L ₁	-	-	2	7.7	7.7
Not good command of English	1	3.8	-	-	3.8
Punctuation	-	-	-	-	-

Others might have integrated in Grammar their reports on Articles/Determiners/Number, Verb tense, Prepositions, showing low results on these difficulties. While the participants' focus seem to have centered on vocabulary and grammar, the raters, on the other hand, observed several other problems, including organization, lack of sufficient supporting details, and failure to address the prompt. Students' lack of confidence was noticeable during the completion of the given writing task, a number of them attempting to submit their papers with nothing written in part II or with something written which was irrelevant to the prompt. Among the reasons they gave for non- or almost non-compliance to the task were the following: they "do not write," they "don't know what to write," their "English is not good," they are "worried." They had to be given some prodding, motivation, and guidance before they were able to write something acceptable for the purpose. A little less than 4% seem to be bothered by the difference in word order and in the system of writing between their L₁ and their FL, which is English, and one female confessed her not having a good command of the English language as a whole.

Sample difficulties noted by the raters in students' papers:

- A. Vocabulary/ Word choice
 M8: ... very difficulties for me. [...very difficult for me].
 F2: ... I'm not customized to use those. [She probably means accustomed to using those].
 F4: ... I feel difficult that make me perfect sentence. [maybe she means "I find it difficult to write a perfect sentence].
 F11: ... I have another problem but I can't surface... [She probably means "I can't make that other problem surface or I can't identify that particular problem].
- B. Prepositions/Number (Plural or Singular)
 M4: ... We use different kind of grammar....
 M3: I enrolled \wedge this university to enhance my knowledge...
 M8: I want some teacher \wedge speak slowly...
 M11: I have a problem of vocabularies ...
 F2: When I speak to other they don't care...
- C. Spelling
 M13: My problem is grammer...
 M6: I think English diffucult.
 M4: ... for example the stracher of sentences...
- D. Articles
 M3: ... to develop a English language
 M4: ... If we have a time to visit a place...
 F1: I'm not a American...
- E. Punctuation/Past participle
 M6: I need is Grammar, _Because I don't have grammar_Not use to grammar.
- F. Agreement (v-subj; Pronoun-antecedent)
 M9: I don't studies Eng. in Korea.
 M3: ... I think the difficulties for me is my verb and preposition.
 F1: So every English academy teach them...
- G. Verb tense
 M10: I study English from I was a Junior high school. [have studied English since].
 M2: Nevertheless, I'm think about that.
- H. Use of Cohesive Devices
 F2: Because the articles don't exist in Korean, so I', not...
 When I speak to other they don't care whatever I'm right or wrong in articles, but writing in English is important.
- I. Organization of ideas/Addressing the Prompt
 An example of a paper with some sense of organization and with a good attempt to address the prompt (given a rating of 4.0 - meaning GOOD --- by the raters):
 F9: I of course have some difficulties of writing in English as a foreign language learner.
 First, I don't have enough vocabularies to write something fluently. Even though I sometimes have enough vocabularies, I am confused

what usages I have to use. So I need to learn more vocabularies in specific sentence or text.

Second, my mother tongue or my thought in my first language interfere with my thought in English. That's why I make some mistakes while I'm writing in English. But I believe of a lot of input by reading English can be given, I can overcome that problem. Good materials will help me write well in English.

Actually, I'm taking only one course in CELL now. The class is related with conversation, so I wasn't able to write about the class' influences on writing.

Sample paper that almost disregards the prompt and contains insufficient details to support the opening sentences:

F10: I think writing is difficult because I didn't have a good practice. I didn't have a good grammar.

F12: My Problem is Grammar, fix up written, and mixing my head.

I want to common things, talk, and speak.

And diary is homework good for us.

Generally, the students' writing problems seem to have stemmed from their poor command of the English language and lack of facility in using English, it being a foreign language to most or all of them and they being in the beginners' level. One good sign, though, is their admission of possible reasons behind those difficulties – that they lack practice in speaking and writing English, that their L₁ interferes with their use of a FL, that they are poor in grammar and spelling, and that did not know the right words or lexicon to use, among others.

Organization of their ideas seems to have been badly affected by the aforementioned shortcomings, such that although they have had attempts to give enough supporting details, they seem unsuccessful due to lack of vocabulary in their repertoire, and probably because of their fear to make mistakes, as revealed in the following samples:

M5: ... *Some time I also worried my spelling was wrong...*

M2: ... *I think it's shortage of my confidence speaking English ...*

F3: *I am really worried about "How to Speak English" like that.*

F8: *I think English is not hard. Compare then other things.*

The most important thing is the encourage.

Not just well known about English. But also grammer.

My opinion. Many people just afraid of how to talk to. or how to write to English.

Because they are just worried about am I wrong or am I right? Like this. do not expectation of perfect.

Just encourage. Please.

It is not surprising for the EFL learner participants to seem unmindful of the content, organization of ideas, and manner of addressing the prompt. Their inadequate facility on the use of English tends to make them conscious of the basic tools that they need in order to write: grammar and vocabulary. Their main concern appears to be how to concretize in written form -- using correct English grammar and lexicon – their thoughts, their ideas.

Awareness of their writing deficiencies and the latter's underlying reasons can lead to the students' own monitoring and regulating "of the course of their own thinking", one of the two general attributes associated with activities regarded as 'metacognitive' (Kluwe, 1982, in Hacker, Dunlosky, & Graesser, 1998, p.8). This awareness, coupled with the students' expressed motivation to learn English, namely: to satisfy job requirements, prepare for university life, prepare for planned migration, be more successful in business, enjoy life, be useful in the world, communicate with friends, and use the most important language in the world, to name some, can inspire them to overcome their language problems and achieve their goal.

Self-Assessment vs. Raters' Assessment

Results on the possible relation between students' self-assessment and that of the raters are categorized into three types: a) perfect agreement, meaning students and raters give each student's paper exactly the same rating; b) partial agreement, which means a difference of 1 exists between the two ratings; and c) no agreement, when a difference of two (2) exists between the student's and the raters' ratings. Table 3 presents the findings on assessment of student papers.

Table 3

Agreement Between Self-Assessment and Raters' Assessment

Perfect Agreement		Partial Agreement		No Agreement	
f	%	f	%	f	%
9	34.6	9	34.6	8	30.8

Findings imply that students have the tendency to overrate their written output, creating both small and big disparities when compared to the raters' evaluation. The No agreement and Partial Agreement results total more than 60%. Two students - one female, one male - however, underestimated their writing abilities, but generally, more females were observed to have overestimated the quality of their writing. The inconsistency noted between the two assessments somehow supports Blanche and Merino's (1989) report on self-evaluation of writing skills using a foreign language. Writing as a more encompassing type of assessment was found to have low correlations with the results of the examinations as found in their reviewed literature. This observation is perhaps not surprising. Assessing one's written work holistically such as through the use of a 0-5 rating scale, might not have been easy for individual students. With their low level in terms of language proficiency, combined with the absence of someone knowledgeable enough to deliberate with on their self-assigned score, plus the fact that it had to be done by the students alone, a high level of agreement may indeed be difficult to achieve. Blanche and Merino claim that "The self-test items that seem to have yielded the most accurate answers contain descriptions of concrete linguistic situations that the learner can size up in behavioral terms" (p.324). There seems to be a need to construct a more objective and specific self-assessment tool

that would yield closer, if not perfect, agreement between the two types of assessment.

Aspects of Process Knowledge Considered by EFL Learners

Table 4 shows the self-reported tasks done by the learners before, during, and after writing.

As can be seen, the students considered major processing strategies before writing, a little more than 80% paying attention to the content and almost 70% mindful of how to organize their ideas. Almost 60% admit having read the instructions repeatedly, a little more than 60% made an outline, and more than 50% jotted down words. Nearly 50% each claimed they listed down ideas and thought about their readers in preparation for their writing. Overall, the students seem highly involved in thinking processes during the pre-writing stage.

During the writing stage their processing appears to have diminished, probably because they did not want to waste time while writing. They seem conscious of their grammar – close to 70% claiming they paid attention to it – and almost 60% having tried to write as much as possible using English while being mindful of the content. Close to 40% avoided writing whatever idea came to mind, implying that they took care not to commit errors. Close to 20 or 30% considered other strategies like organization – which anyway they considered during the pre-writing stage – vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation. They admit not stopping often in the middle of their writing, and half of them claimed they were conscious of their reader or audience as they wrote. The lowest mean among all the thinking processes in the three stages can be noted in the post-writing stage when a little over 65% said they paid attention to grammar, and very close to 60% showed concern for vocabulary. One possible reason why the means of the students' thinking processes gradually diminished as they advanced to the next writing stage is their desire to finish the given task early enough. Another reason could be their being too engrossed in their writing. They might have wanted to preserve the ideas that were flowing in.

Means are lowest during the post-writing stage, but the students were highly concerned about grammar and vocabulary. They seemed to be too concerned about the output, hoping it would be presentable enough to be read by their audience. This concern tends to form part of their product knowledge, which, as defined earlier, is said to embrace the function and purpose of a text in a “defined social context, written for a specific purpose and particular audience” (Flavell & Wellman, 1977, in Hacker, et al., 1998, p. 94).

Table 4
Processing Tasks Considered by EFL Writers

Pre-Writing		Yes	%	No	%
A.	1. Thought about the content	21	80.7	5	19.2
	2. Thought about the organization of ideas	18	69.2	8	30.7
	3. Thought about my reader or audience	12	46.1	14	53.8
B.	4. Read the instructions many times	15	57.7	11	42.3
	5. Made an outline	16	61.5	15	57.6
	6. Listed ideas	12	46.1	14	53.8
	7. Jotted down words	14	53.8	12	46.1
		Mean = 59.3		Mean = 43.4	
While Writing					
	8. Thought and wrote in English from the beginning	15	57.5	11	42.3
	9. Avoided writing whatever idea came to mind	11	42.3	15	57.6
	10. Tried to write as much as possible	15	57.7	11	42.3
	11. Seldom stopped in the middle	7	26.9	19	73
		Mean = 46.15		Mean = 53.79	
	12. Paid attention to:				
	Content	15	57.7	6	23.1
	Reader or Audience	13	50	4	15.4
	Organization	5	19.2	9	34.6
	Vocabulary	8	30.7	9	34.6
	Grammar	17	65.4	.	.
	Spelling/Punctuation	6	23.1	2	7.69
		Mean = 41.01		Mean = 23.1	
Post Writing					
	After writing, reread and tried revising it, paying attention to:				
	Content	8	30.7	6	23.1
	Audience	4	15.4	9	34.6
	Organization	6	23.1	9	34.6
	Vocabulary	15	57.7	2	7.7
	Grammar	17	65.4	2	7.7
	Spelling/Punctuation	12	46.1	4	15.4
		Mean = 39.7		Mean = 20.5	

Note. Adapted from “Integration of Process and Product Orientation in EFL Writing Instruction” by T. Kamimura, 2000, *RELC Journal*, 31 (2) p.1-27.

Suggested Ways to Overcome Self-Reported Difficulties

Participants sampled admit that they can overcome their writing problems by consistently speaking and writing in English. One of them even cautioned against meeting students from the same country. Her idea is to speak English with other nationals using English, instead of using their L₁. Most of them believe that practice will help them master their FL. Other tasks believed to be useful in enhancing their mastery of the English language are the following: jotting down new words, memorizing words (and probably their meanings too), keeping a diary, reading good materials, getting more input from teachers, being given encouragements, studying grammar, practicing, talking to other foreign students, and consistently speaking and writing English, the last four having been regarded as helpful activities being done in their CeLL classes. Using an electronic dictionary and traveling have been suggested as well. Students' having minimal errors in spelling was probably due to their use of an electronic dictionary. This had probably helped maintain part of their self-confidence.

Conclusion

The absence of a higher category of agreement between EFL learners' self-assessment and the raters' rating implies the need to help students "internalize criteria for quality writing" (Thome, 2001, Abstract), as this can train students to assess their own writing in and out of school. Involving students in classroom-based assessment using rubrics on students writing, as suggested by Thome, can help students assess their own writing skills more accurately. Literature says learners' monitoring proficiencies improve as instruction progresses (Venkatesh, 2003). Instruction then, plays a significant role in training students to do a more accurate self-evaluation. Providing instruction in evaluation criteria, emphasizing "content/organization, mechanics and usage" (Marteski, 1998, Abstract), is favorable to the development of students' ability to self-assess. It seems imperative that the students be trained to become independent learners and skillful in evaluating their own performances (Ferris, 1982; Oskarson, 1980; in Blanche & Merino, 1989), preferably following teacher-training sessions to develop students' self-assessment capabilities.

The students' consideration of high-order processing skills during the three stages in writing, particularly during the pre-writing part, is a positive sign. Such skills need to be honed further, as their development can make them better composers, better writers. It must be remembered that helping students to become more aware of their processing strategies means helping them develop their metacognitive skills - which should be every serious and dedicated educator's concern for the students under their charge.

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