Self-assessment techniques and their effect on young EFL learners’ writing competence: An experimental approach

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Interest in alternative assessment has grown rapidly over the last few years since it can help teachers monitor and modify their instruction throughout the school year (Tsagari, 2004). One method of alternative assessment that can help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses and assess their own learning progress is self-assessment (McMillan, 2008). Motivated by the above literature, this presentation reports on a two-year longitudinal study that aimed at investigating the impact of self-assessment checklists on young EFL learners’ development of writing competence. Following an experimental approach, a total of 50 EFL students aged 11 to 12 years old took part in the study from whom 500 written essays were collected, half of which belonged to the experimental group (revision of essays using self-assessment checklists to promote self-reflection). The purpose of the study was to examine, using a range of advanced Computational Linguistics and Automated Machine Learning systems, whether the essays produced by the experimental group were of increased complexity when compared to the ones produced by the control group. The results showed statistically significant differences between the two groups regarding a range of linguistic features (propositional density, lexical sophistication, syntactic complexity and cohesion). These findings seem to support the notion that self-assessment checklists might help students improve their language competence while fostering intrinsic learning motivation. The findings of the study could provide practical guidance to EFL teachers and curriculum designers as to the kind of self-assessment techniques young learners should be exposed to in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: EFL learners, self-assessment, writing competence.