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Self-Assessment to Promoting EFL Learners' Writing Autonomy: A Study at Hail University

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of self-assessment practices on promoting learner autonomy and improving writing proficiency among EFL students at Hail University, Saudi Arabia. A mixed-methods approach was utilized, integrating quantitative pre- and post-test assessments with qualitative data from learner surveys. Fifty-two intermediate-level learners were split into two groups: an experimental group that used CEFR-based Can-Do Self-Assessment Checklists and reflective journals, and a control group that used traditional teaching methods. Quantitative results indicated a statistically significant enhancement in the experimental group's writing performance, evidenced by a substantial effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.50$) between pre- and post-test scores. The experimental group had an average of +18 points, while the control group only had an average of +1 point. The survey data showed that students were very interested in self-assessment practices. Furthermore, learners indicated enhanced autonomy, especially in assuming responsibility for learning beyond the classroom. The results are in line with Flavell's metacognitive theory, which holds that self-assessment improves metacognitive knowledge, self-regulation, and learner agency. The study finds that structured self-assessment tools help EFL writers become independent and skilled by encouraging them to think about their learning and set strategic goals. These findings endorse the incorporation of self-assessment methodologies into EFL curricula to cultivate lifelong learning competencies.

Keywords: Metacognition; Writing; Self-Assessment; Learner Autonomy; CEFR; Self-Assessment Checklists

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1. Introduction

The pursuit of learner autonomy is a key principle in modern English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, but it remains a challenging goal, especially in academic writing. At Hail University, like in many similar settings, students often rely heavily on instructors for feedback and corrections. They see writing as a task to finish for the teacher rather than a skill to develop for themselves. This study suggests that structured self-assessment can help learners move from dependence to independence. Based on Flavell's theory of metacognition, which emphasizes that "thinking about thinking" is vital for self-regulation, this research looks at how self-assessment tools can trigger the metacognitive processes needed to encourage autonomy and improve writing skills^[1]. The following sections will review the existing literature, explain the methodology, present the findings, and discuss their implications for EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia.

Metacognitive regulation consists of the conscious processes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating^[2]. In the writing context, this translates into planning through the production of ideas and the organization of arguments, monitoring through the assessment of coherence and accuracy in drafting and evaluating through reflection on the success of the revisions. This cycle of activity not only improves performance but also increases sensitivity to the learning process itself. By practicing self-assessment, students are actually making these metacognitive processes work, thus overseeing their own learning in a conscious and reflective manner.

According to Zhangli et al., assessment is an essential component of the learning process. It is not only something that is imposed from the outside, but it is also inherent to the learning process itself^[3]. Communicative approaches to the teaching and learning of languages place a strong emphasis on the idea that evaluation is an intrinsic aspect of communication and interaction. This idea can be utilized in the process of monitoring the learning process and in guiding the learning process itself. The development of the ability to analyze both oneself and others in order to assist in one's own learning appears to be a key component of becoming a successful learner. As a result, evaluation is not a process that works in only one direction, where the instructor or someone from outside the classroom analyzes the performance of the student based on criteria that have been established

from outside of the classroom. On the contrary, it is a dynamic process in which students are actively involved in interacting with their classmates, first in deciding what to evaluate, which are the criteria, and second, in actually conducting the evaluation^[4,5]. In a multiway system of this kind, the feedback that both the teacher and the students receive would be significant and genuinely helpful to the kids in their learning process^[6]. As a result, a significant point that comes to the forefront is that assessment is not conducted in a manner that is static and with predetermined external criteria but rather through the process of negotiation with the many learners^[7-9]. This would imply that students will need to receive some orientation or training in order to be able to complete the assessment in a manner that is both methodical and principled.

In fact, involving the learners in the assessment process itself is a way of enabling them to do it well^[10]. By actively participating in the process that is learning, learners will gradually internalise the nuances of the assessment system and will be able to interpret the results and feedback in a way that is meaningful to them, which would also enable them to become better learners^[7,11]. As a result of this, they will be better able to participate in the evaluation process instead of having it imposed on them by outsiders. What we are talking about is self-assessment or self-evaluation here. This also includes peer assessment, which is what is implied in interactive learning, a notion that communicative approaches strongly advocate. Cooperative or collaborative learning allows for the deployment and exploitation of learners' strengths for mutual benefit. Assessment concretised this notion and enables it to take place in a non-threatening climate. In EFL situations one often witnesses that evaluation achieves the opposite effect: unsuccessful learners getting frustrated and successful ones becoming complacent. It is largely because the assessment system treats learners as objects rather than as interactive, responsible participants in the learning process.

By virtue of their very natures, teaching and assessment are both inextricably linked with each other and feed into each other. One significant feature of classroom assessment which is essentially inherent to a formative mode is that of feedback^[12]. However, as a tool in the learning process it is totally in the hands of the teacher who feels that students are not ready, they are not experts or they do not know enough to

be able to assess their own or their peers' work^[13,14]. While some of these apprehensions may be true, the fact remains that they are never or seldom given a chance to have a say in matters that actually relate to them. Assessment so far in the Saudi classrooms is product-oriented, that is, scores are given on a paper-and-pencil or computer test for tasks which are predetermined. Qualitative descriptions focusing on the skills or on the different steps the learner takes to complete the task are seldom a part of such assessments. Discussions of how a learner has performed, where they have gone wrong, and what will fetch a better score, and how exactly they can improve their skills get a low priority compared to the main job of teachers, in their view, for which they are held accountable the main and most important of these being syllabus completion.

Many university students still depend on their teachers for help, feedback, and correction. Because of this dependency, students often see writing as something they have to do for the teacher instead of something they need to learn for themselves. This is what happens in many educational institutions, like Hail University, where students have trouble writing on their own and don't seem to be able to identify their mistakes, set learning goals, or revise on their own. The primary focus of this study is to tackle the lack of effective tools to promote writing autonomy among EFL learners, which ultimately hinders their long-term proficiency and the development of self-regulated learning.

This study benefits EFL learners by fostering self-sufficiency, confidence, and metacognitive skills through self-assessment. For EFL teachers and curriculum designers, it offers a practical framework for integrating self-assessment into writing curricula, enhancing teaching and promoting student-centered classrooms. In terms of educational policy, the findings can inform national strategies by supporting metacognitive training and self-assessment in learning standards. Academically, it contributes to the corpus of empirical data from Saudi Arabia on learner autonomy and alternative assessment, reinforcing the link between self-assessment, metacognition, and autonomy. This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To measure the effect of self-assessment on learner autonomy.
2. To evaluate the impact of self-assessment on writing performance.

3. To highlight the perceptions of Saudi students at Hail University about self-assessment as well as to analyze the perceived relationship between self-assessment and learner autonomy

Based on that the research questions are as follows:

1. What is the effect of self-assessment on learner autonomy, and by extension, learners' writing performance in an EFL situation?
2. What is the perception of students towards self-assessment, learner autonomy, and the relationship between them?

2. Literature Review

Perhaps no sector was as affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as education, considering the large number of stakeholders who adopted and adapted to drastic changes in functioning. The study by Phan explored how self-assessment improves learner autonomy among undergraduate English learners^[15]. The study used theoretical reviews and qualitative methods, concentrating on autonomous learning styles and suggesting a self-assessment strategy. The research involved 88 non-English majors split into two groups: one group practiced self-assessment and the other practiced peer assessment. Key findings showed that both self and peer assessment significantly improved aspects of learner autonomy, such as starting, tracking, and evaluating learning. However, self-assessment had a bigger effect on initiating autonomy compared to peer assessment. The study concluded that self-assessment effectively promotes learner autonomy, which supports its null hypothesis. While Phan's study looked at autonomy more broadly and included speaking skills^[15], the present study focuses specifically on writing autonomy at Hail University. Both studies emphasized self-assessment as a driver for autonomy, but the present study is narrower in scope, allowing for a deeper exploration of autonomy within writing skills.

A critical review of the literature on self-assessment and autonomy shows that this field is changing, with a variety of methods and an increasing focus on using technology. Early studies, like Gholami^[16], laid important groundwork by showing a positive link between self-assessment and learner autonomy among Iranian EFL learners. However, these studies have limited relevance for today's dig-

ital classrooms. The study involved 25 self-assessments over three months in a traditional classroom. The results showed only small improvements in certain aspects of autonomy and no significant gains in overall language skills. This is different from the stronger effects seen in later research. It suggests that the method's effectiveness may be limited without the support and reflection tools that technology can offer. The design of comparative studies greatly affects their results. For example, Alibakhshi and Sarani found that self-assessment improved speaking fluency more than accuracy^[17]. Ghadi and Khodabakhshzadeh showed how electronic peer assessment helped writing and autonomy^[18]. However, these studies reveal an important gap: the differing effects of assessment types (self vs. peer) and methods (traditional vs. electronic) on specific language skills are still not well understood. This highlights the need for the current study to investigate writing using a structured, CEFR-based self-assessment framework.

Attitudes and perceptions greatly influence learning outcomes to learning. Numerous studies have underscored the impact of positive attitudes, whether toward language learning, blended learning, collaborative methods, or innovative technologies, relate to learning outcomes such as motivation, autonomy, and achievement. The CEFR checklist (used in the current study) for self-assessment descriptors (to measure learners' reflective evaluation), along with an adapted version of LAQ (to measure autonomy) used in this study, does not directly measure learner attitudes, however, it does reflect upon learners' perceptions of their proficiency and outcomes, which can be factors of attitudes to learning.

In a direct assessment of attitudes in relation to learning, the educational landscape after the pandemic has sped up the use of technology-based assessments, changing the focus of research. Salameh Al Hawamdeh et al. conducted a study in Ethiopia to compare the effects of e-portfolio assessment and summative assessment on EFL learners' writing complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF), along with their autonomy, learning anxiety, and self-efficacy. Sixty intermediate EFL students, chosen based on their OQPT scores, participated in 21 instructional sessions^[19]. They were split equally into an experimental group (EG) that used e-portfolios and a control group (CG) that used summative assessment. Both groups took pre- and post-tests on their writing performance, CAF, autonomy, anxiety, and self-efficacy. Statistical analyses

with independent and paired samples *t*-tests showed significant improvements in the EG across all measures compared to the CG. This finding suggests that e-portfolio assessment leads to better writing performance and learner development. The study supports incorporating self-assessment practices in tech-enhanced EFL classrooms, which aligns with trends in modern educational settings like Saudi Arabia.

In a similar vein, Ismail et al. looked at the impact of authentic assessment on self-regulated learning, autonomy, and self-efficacy among 55 Iranian EFL learners^[20]. The students were divided into an EG using authentic assessment and a CG using non-authentic assessment. Pre-treatment questionnaires were used to assess baseline levels of the target variables. After instruction involving 15 English passages, post-tests and attitude questionnaires were given. ANCOVA results indicated that the EG performed significantly better than the CG in autonomy, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning. The EG also showed positive attitudes toward authentic assessment.

On the other hand, Baleghizadeh and Masoun examined the role of formative self-assessment on the self-efficacy of EFL learners^[21]. The study group, which consisted of 57 Iranian EFL students at an English-language school participated was split into an experimental and a control group. A questionnaire that was identical for both groups was used to gauge the participants' self-efficacy. Throughout the semester, the experimental group members also filled out a self-assessment questionnaire every two weeks. The acquired data were subjected to an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) analysis. The results demonstrated a considerable improvement in the experimental group's self-efficacy. This implies that implementing formative self-assessment in an EFL context boosts self-efficacy. Thus, this study emphasizes how self-assessment in EFL classes has instructional significance.

The background for self-assessment was prepared by peer feedback and assessment mechanisms that took form with the growing importance of the communicative approach to language teaching and learning. With the use of web-based tools and electronic applications, peer assessment at the turn of the century became a proven method for enhancing the autonomy and academic performance of EFL learners.

Despite the global body of work, there is a noticeable lack of empirical research from the Gulf region, especially Saudi Arabia. The local educational context, influenced by

cultural and teaching norms, is important for understanding how to implement practices that promote autonomy. This study aims to provide essential empirical data from Hail University. It addresses a significant gap in the literature for the region and offers specific insights into how self-assessment works in Saudi EFL classrooms.

3. Method

In the background of the studies discussed in the earlier sections, the present study employed a mixed approach – qualitative and quantitative. Quantitatively, it utilized a questionnaire that measures the perception of students towards self-assessment practices.

This study used a mixed-methods design with an explanatory sequential approach. The main quantitative part included a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test and post-test control group. This measured the intervention's impact on writing performance and autonomy. The qualitative part involved a post-intervention questionnaire with open-ended questions. This helped explain and expand on the quantitative results related to learner perceptions.

Fifty-two intermediate-level EFL sophomores at Hail

University were randomly split into an experimental group ($n = 26$) and a control group ($n = 26$). Over six weeks, the control group continued with traditional, teacher-centered writing instruction and assessment. The experimental group received the same core instruction but also received explicit training on two structured self-assessment tools: (1) a CEFR-based Can-Do Self-Assessment Checklist for Writing (see **Appendix A**), which outlined writing skills such as task response, coherence, vocabulary, and grammar in simple, can-do statements across different proficiency levels; and (2) a reflective journal. For each writing assignment, learners used the checklist to assess their own work and completed a journal entry. This prompted them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, plan specific revisions, and set goals for the next assignment. This combination of the checklist and journal aimed to support the metacognitive process of planning, monitoring, and evaluating.

Data on Self-assessment practices have been collected in this study by using Oscarson's Self-Assessment of Speaking/Writing Skills Questionnaire^[22], which aligns with the CEFR-based Can-Do Self-Assessment Checklists. A1-C2 proficiency. The reliability of the questionnaire constructs can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1. The reliability of the questionnaire constructs.

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
self-assessment practices	0.679	8
Learner Autonomy	0.901	7
Relationship between self-assessment practices and Learner Autonomy	0.711	5
Total	0.835	20

The tool has three different constructs as shown in the table above with their internal consistency reliability as determined by Cronbach's Alpha. The values of the scale exhibit an acceptable internal consistency. This indicates that the scale has strong reliability. The total value of the scale, 0.835, exhibits excellent internal consistency. This high value suggests that the scale's items have a strong correlation with one another and consistently measure the same underlying construct. This scale is excellent for in-depth analysis and is very robust. The information demonstrates that the study's measurement tools have varied but generally acceptable reliability levels.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

The study is based on two factors, viz., self-assessment and learner autonomy. The study participants are 52 EFL intermediate-level learners enrolled in the sophomore year at Hail University, Saudi Arabia. Two groups of 26 learners each were randomly created, with one (experimental group) being explicitly guided in the use of the CEFR-based Can-Do Self-Assessment Checklists paired with a reflective journal, and the other (control group) following the current classroom practice, conventional way. The study duration was six weeks; during this span, the experimental group used the reflective log and checklist for each written assignment to assess their organization, vocabulary, grammar, and task

response.

Table 2 summarizes the pre- and post-test statistics of the two groups in the study. As can be seen. The paired sample *t*-test was administered to each group to determine

whether any change occurred in writing performance across the two tests. Besides, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the performance of the groups in the post-test.

Table 2. Independent samples *t*-test pre-test and post-test between the two groups.

Test	Difference in Mean Value	<i>t</i> -Value	Sig.	Cohen's d
pre test	1.0	0.46	0.64	0.10
post test	14.0	5.41	<0.001	1.50

The impact of the intervention is clearly described by the independent samples *t*-test results. The pre-test result showed that the two groups were statistically equal before the implementation. The Cohen's d value of 0.10 demonstrates that there was no significant difference, and the small difference of 1.0 points in their mean scores was not statistically significant, as the *p*-value was 0.64. The outcomes show a significant and dramatic change after the implementation. The groups' means differ by a significant 14.0 points,

according to the post-test analysis. With a *p*-value of less than 0.001, this difference is statistically significant.

Above all, the Cohen's d effect size of 1.50 elevates the finding from statistical significance to practical significance (see **Table 3**). This kind of effect size is categorised as “very large,” indicating that the intervention significantly and profoundly affected the outcome measure. To sum up, the data illustrate a very successful intervention.

Table 3. Paired samples *t*-test (pre-post test within the group).

	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Gain	<i>t</i>	Sig	Cohen's d
Control group	51	52	+1	0.85	0.40	0.17
Experimental group	52	70	+18	7.65	0.001	1.50

The paired samples *t*-test results reveal the performance of each group in the pre-test and post-test. For the control group, the data indicate lack of effective progress. The inadequate gain of +1 point (from 51 to 52) was not statistically significant, as the *p* value was 0.40, the finding strongly supported by an insignificant Cohen's d effect size of 0.17. In contrast, the experimental group demonstrated a dramatic improvement, as the scores rose by +18 points, jumping from a mean of 52 to 70. The highly significant *p*-value of 0.001 provides powerful statistical evidence that this substantial gain is extremely unlikely to be a product of random chance. The scale of this improvement is most interestingly captured by the Cohen's d value of 1.50, which is classified as a “very large” effect size. This quantifies the intervention's profound practical impact, indicating that the average participant in the experimental group improved by far more than the average control participant.

All in all, the results from both groups create an undeniable case for the intervention's efficacy. The control

group's stability rules out alternative explanations for the improvement, while the experimental group's transformation demonstrates a powerful cause-and-effect relationship. Means, std. deviation, percentage, and frequency of self-assessment practices are stated in **Table 4**.

The data provide a fascinating picture of the self-assessment practices of English language learners, demonstrating that the students were highly engaged and favorably inclined toward metacognitive techniques. Its consistently high mean scores (which cluster closely between neutral and strongly agree) and exceptionally low standard deviations (ranging from 0.755 to 0.802) are the dataset's most noteworthy features. This combination demonstrates that there is a strong positive consensus among the respondents, with very little difference in their opinions. The absence of any recorded disagreement suggests a learning environment where self-evaluation is regarded as both a normal practice and a significant and recognized component of language acquisition. The items related to the basic mechanics of

self-assessment, like regularly monitoring progress, using rubrics, and feeling comfortable assessing productive skills, share the same mean of 4.000. This suggests a steady level of competence and familiarity with the real practice. But the marginally higher scores for items 3 and 4 (selecting improvement and evaluating performance against external standards like the CEFR) imply that learners' confidence is more firmly rooted in their ability to evaluate outcomes and apply impartial standards than in their ability to describe the process.

The most advanced applications of self-assessment receive the highest mean scores (4.087), including changing future learning objectives based on results and, most importantly, being motivated to do so by teachers. This implies that self-assessment is an active, strategic tool for learning planning for this group rather than a passive exercise, and that teacher support is a crucial element in this process. Means, std. deviation, percentage, and frequency of learner autonomy are summarized in **Table 5**.

Table 4. Means, Std. Deviation, percentage, and frequency of self-assessment practices.

Statement	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Std. Deviation	Mean
1. I constantly monitor my English learning progress.	14 30.4%	18 39.1%	14 30.4%	0.789	4.000
2. I apply rubrics or checklists to assess my English abilities.	14 30.4%	18 39.1%	14 30.4%	0.789	4.000
3. I am able to decide whether my English improves or worsens.	13 28.3%	18 39.1%	15 32.6%	0.788	4.043
4. I contrast my English performance against explicit standards (e.g., CEFR, test requirements).	13 28.3%	17 37.0%	16 34.8%	0.800	4.065
5. I believe self-assessment makes me aware of my strengths and weaknesses.	14 30.4%	17 37.0%	15 32.6%	0.802	4.022
6. I am comfortable with assessing my own speaking and writing.	14 30.4%	18 39.1%	14 30.4%	0.789	4.000
7. I adjust new learning objectives on the basis of my self-assessment outcomes.	12 26.1%	18 39.1%	16 34.8%	0.784	4.087
8. My teachers motivate me to evaluate my own performance.	11 23.9%	20 43.5%	15 32.6%	0.755	4.087

Table 5. Means, Std. Deviation, percentage, and frequency of Learner Autonomy.

Statement	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Std. Deviation	Mean
1. I feel responsible for enhancing my English outside the classroom.	12 26.1%	20 43.5%	14 30.4%	0.759	4.043
2. I set myself goals for learning English.	14 30.4%	20 43.5%	12 26.1%	0.759	3.957
3. I draw choices on learning methods that suit me the best.	14 30.4%	20 43.5%	12 26.1%	0.759	3.957
4. I use supplementary resources (websites, YouTube, apps) to enhance my English.	14 30.4%	20 43.5%	12 26.1%	0.759	3.957
5. I explore means of practicing English without a teacher.	16 34.8%	20 43.5%	10 21.7%	0.749	3.870
6. I think that my English learning success lies primarily with me.	16 34.8%	20 43.5%	10 21.7%	0.749	3.870
7. I am confident of learning English on my own, even without a teacher.	13 28.3%	21 45.7%	12 26.1%	0.745	3.978

The data in **Table 5** is very important for understanding how the students are becoming more independent learners. This is closely related to the self-assessment practices shown in **Table 4**. The results show the students are very positive

about autonomous learning behaviours. However, their attitudes are a little more varied and practical than the group's overall agreement on self-assessment. The average scores for autonomy statements range from a high of 4.043 to a low

of 3.870, which is still in the “Agree” category of the scale. The standard deviations are still low (0.745 to 0.759), which shows that respondents still agree.

The data shows a clear order of autonomous behaviors. The statement “I feel responsible for improving my English outside of class”, gets the most agreement (Mean = 4.043). This shows that they accept personal responsibility, which is an important part of being independent. There are three behaviours that come next: setting personal goals, picking the right ways to learn, and using extra resources. All three have the same mean of 3.957. This indicates that for a considerable number of learners, the feeling of responsibility effectively transforms into tangible, strategic action.

The data, on the other hand, shows a small but noticeable drop in agreement for the most advanced forms of autonomy. The lowest means (3.870) are for statements on looking into teacher-independent practice methods and, most importantly, the idea that “learning success lies primarily with me.” This means that even though students are taking charge of their own learning, many still see the teacher or the formal classroom as an important part of their success, even if it isn't the only one.

Table 6 revealed the most significant component of the analysis, exceeding the mere measurement of self-assessment and autonomy in isolation, to directly reflect the learners' perceived causal relationship between the two constructs.

Table 6. Means, Std. Deviation, percentage, and frequency of the Relationship between self-assessment and learner autonomy.

Statement	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Std. Deviation	Mean
1. Self-assessment encourages me to learn more independently.	14 30.4%	19 41.3%	13 28.3%	0.774	3.978
2. When I self-assess, I am more responsible for my own progress.	15 32.6%	17 37.0%	14 30.4%	0.802	3.978
3. Self-assessment makes me less reliant on my teacher.	14 30.4%	17 37.0%	15 32.6%	0.802	4.022
4. Self-assessment prompts me to set up my own learning plans.	13 28.3%	18 39.1%	15 32.6%	0.788	4.043
5. I think self-assessment is crucial to being an independent learner.	15 32.6%	18 39.1%	13 28.3%	0.788	3.957

The data provided strong evidence that the students perceive self-assessment not only as a supplementary practice but also as a fundamental catalyst for their autonomous behaviors. The means for all five statements were very high, between 3.957 and 4.043, and the standard deviations were always low. This shows that there is a strong agreement on these construct items.

The most important thing is that they all agree strongly that self-assessment makes them less dependent on the teacher, with a mean of 4.022. This directly addresses the minor hesitation. In this context, self-assessment is clearly recognized as the driving force that reduces dependence on the teacher and strengthens the feeling of primary ownership. This metacognitive exercise subsequently converts into practical strategic measures (Items 4–5). The statement that self-assessment makes them set up their own learning plans has the highest mean in the table (4.043). This shows that self-assessment is a link between evaluation and planning. The consensus that self-assessment is “crucial to being

an independent learner” (Mean = 3.957) scored the lowest, yet it remains significantly affirmative, reinforcing the belief in its essential function.

5. Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate a powerful and positive impact of the self-assessment intervention on learners' writing proficiency, metacognitive practices, and sense of autonomy. The most outstanding finding was the substantial gain in writing performance within the experimental group. This provides strong evidence that the intervention was the catalyst for this change, a conclusion strengthened by the fact that both groups began the study at an equivalent level of proficiency.

The findings of this study clearly show that the self-assessment intervention, which includes CEFR checklists and reflective journals, significantly improved writing skills, metacognitive practices, and learner independence. The very

large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.50$) in writing improvements for the experimental group confirms not just statistical significance but also highlights the real-world impact of the intervention. This result is consistent with the study by Ebrahimi et al.^[23] but goes further by demonstrating how a structured tool like the CEFR checklist makes abstract writing skills easier and more manageable for learners. This approach helps foster better self-regulation.

The CEFR checklist served as an essential criterion, making abstract writing competencies concrete and actionable for learners, a practice supported by the work of Zhangli et al. who reported the efficiency of co-creating assessment criteria for improving students' quality and cultivating students' writing and assessment-related cognitive and metacognitive skills^[3].

Regardless of the usefulness of self-assessment, the data reveal the metacognitive mechanisms that drove this improvement. Learners reported high levels of engagement in self-regulatory behaviors, such as monitoring their progress, evaluating their work against external standards, and—most importantly—using those evaluations to adjust their learning goals. This indicates that the intervention successfully fostered the metacognitive processes described by Hudesman et al., who found that self-regulation of cognitive and affective states improves performance outcomes, enriches reasoning, strengthens metacognitive abilities, and increases the motivational disposition to learn^[24]. All of which contribute to the desire for lifelong learning, transforming learners from passive recipients of instruction into active managers of their own learning^[25]. The teachers motivated self-assessment, underscores that autonomy is not developed in a vacuum.

The qualitative data show the mental processes behind this improvement. Learners actively monitored their progress and checked their work against outside standards. Most importantly, they used these evaluations to change their future learning goals^[24]. This process reflects Flavell's model of metacognitive regulation. It also supports the findings by Hudesman et al. on the benefits of self-regulation^[1]. Notably, the strong agreement that teachers encouraged self-assessment (**Table 4**) challenges the idea of autonomy as solely self-directed. Instead, it backs the model suggested by Benson^[26] and Borg and Al-Busaidi^[27], which sees the teacher as an essential helper who supports metacognitive growth.

The data show a complex view of autonomy development. Learners felt strongly responsible for their learning outside of class (**Table 5**). However, the lower agreement with the statement "learning success lies primarily with me" suggests that they still recognize the teacher's role. This contradiction indicates that the change in learning agency, while important, may not be complete within the short time of this study. It underscores that developing a fully internalized sense of control is a complicated and lengthy process. Additionally, while self-report questionnaires were needed to measure perceptions, they have a potential downside. Social desirability bias might have led respondents to express more positive views on autonomy and self-assessment than what they actually experienced.

The study provides empirical evidence for a proposed model linking structured self-assessment to enhanced metacognition, which in turn increases autonomous learning behavior, ultimately leading to greater proficiency gains. Learners themselves perceived this causal link, strongly agreeing that self-assessment made them less reliant on their teachers and more responsible for their own progress^[28,29]. This research confirms that equipping learners with metacognitive tools is not merely a supplementary activity but a core pedagogical strategy that empowers them to become more proficient, self-reliant, and effective language learners. It was found that there was a significant link between metacognition and learner autonomy, extending Flavell's foundational work^[1]. The experimental group showed enhanced independence via self-assessment, resulting in decreased teacher dependence and a heightened sense of personal learning responsibility outside the classroom. This transition signifies a shift in learning agency from teacher to student, with teachers focusing on motivating and facilitating metacognition, thus enabling learners to direct their own success actively.

The data provide robust empirical evidence that the implemented intervention, grounded in self-assessment practices, successfully fostered the development of metacognition and self-regulated learning among participants, directly aligning with the core components of Flavell's metacognitive theory^[1]. The findings can be summarized through the views of Flavell's model of metacognitive knowledge as follows^[1]:

1. The learners developed Metacognitive Knowledge through Self-Assessment. The learners demonstrated awareness of their own cognitive abilities, strongly

agreeing that “self-assessment makes them aware of their strengths and weaknesses”. This shows they were building knowledge about themselves as learners.

2. The learners developed a clear understanding of the demands and criteria of language learning tasks, which is a key aspect of task knowledge.
3. The learners could employ effective strategies. This signifies that self-assessment provided the data necessary for them to know which strategies to apply for improvement, moving from blind practice to strategic action.
4. The experimental group students gained higher learning outcomes, which is due to successfully encasing the metacognitive process. As students set goals based on identified weaknesses (based on CEFR-based Can-Do Self-Assessment Checklists for Writing). They also continuously check their performance against the CEFR can-do statements, and they make judgments about their learning outcomes. This cycle, as described by Flavell^[1], leads to greater cognitive gain.

6. Conclusions

This study provides persuasive evidence that the integration of CEFR-based Can-Do Self-Assessment Checklists for Writing significantly enhances L2 writing proficiency by systematically improving learners' metacognitive skills and fostering greater autonomy. The intervention successfully transformed theoretical metacognitive principles into practical pedagogical applications, demonstrating that when learners are given explicit criteria and instructed in reflective self-assessment, they transform from passive recipients of knowledge to active, self-regulating agents of their own learning. The findings endorse the proposed model, indicating that structured self-assessment enhances metacognition, fosters autonomy, and ultimately results in significant proficiency gains. This chain of influence was confirmed by both significant quantitative improvements in writing performance and learners' qualitative evaluations of their own advancement. The reduction in teacher reliance and the increased sense of personal accountability highlight a substantial evolution in agency—a core objective of modern educational systems aimed at fostering lifelong learning.

This study also highlights the critical role of the

teacher as a facilitator and motivator in the development of metacognitive skills. The intervention did not diminish the teacher's significance; rather, it redefined their role as crucial facilitators in the learning process, aligning with social-constructivist educational models. The theoretical implications of this study augment Flavell's metacognitive model by situating it within the context of L2 writing pedagogy and demonstrating empirical links to autonomy and proficiency outcomes^[1]. This study offers educators a replicable framework for the execution of metacognitively-rich assessment practices that promote enhanced learning.

Future research should examine the long-term retention of these advancements, the applicability of self-assessment skills across diverse language domains, and the impact of professional development on educators' ability to effectively implement such reflective pedagogies. This study plainly confirms that the incorporation of metacognitive strategies through self-assessment is not merely a supplementary task, but a fundamental component of effective language instruction.

7. Limitations

Learner bias cannot be fully ruled out in self-report tools (questionnaire in this study), gender was not a factor under consideration here, and the study was limited to a single institution that has an established reputation for above-average learners seeking admission here. To make the results generalizable, replications with varying factors are advisable.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board with Referential No. H-2025-901 at University of Hail dated 29/9/2025.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions related to participant confidentiality. The dataset includes sensitive information from classroom assessments and surveys involving identifiable student responses. However, anonymized excerpts from the qualitative data and summary statistics of the quantitative data may be made available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to approval by the institutional ethics committee and in accor-

dance with participant consent agreements.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table 1. CEFR-based Can-Do Self-Assessment Checklists for Writing.

A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, wellstructured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

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