Assessment for Learning as a Means
to Promote Students' Writing Proficiency
Paula Katchi Cravo | NOVA FCSH

Abstract | The present study, conducted as part of the practicum during my master's degree in teaching English in the third cycle of basic education and secondary schooling, aimed to enhance students' writing through formative assessment tools and practices. This entailed the use of rubrics, success criteria checklists, students' self-assessment using rubrics, and teacher feedback through error correction codes, comments, and the writing of a second draft by students. The study was conducted during a 6 month period, and involved 21 eleventh-graders. As my research methodology, a small scale classroom-based action research study was implemented, which entailed a qualitative and quantitative approach to data collection. The data collection tools consisted of a teaching journal, questionnaires, and teacher and student assessment of the written tasks through the use of rubrics. The written tasks were an opinion essay and a letter of application. Results showed that students felt motivated to use the formative assessment tools implemented in class. They revealed an ability in self-assessing their work through the use of rubrics, and a capacity to correct their mistakes. The practices implemented in class promoted students' writing proficiency of specific written tasks.

Keywords | *assessment for learning (AfL), writing proficiency, formative assessment tools, secondary level*

1 Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, written communication, carried out at a growing speed plays a major role in networking, and in voicing one's opinion in various contexts. My interest in assessment for learning, which aims at improving learning through the use of assessment interconnected to the learning and teaching process related to writing (MacDowell et al., 2009), stems from two main concerns that I have held over my years of teaching. These were my capacity to conduct a lengthy process of correcting students' written work, which involved mainly writing the correct words over students' mistakes, and my perceptions of how much the students really benefitted from that correction. Firstly, the time-consuming task of correcting students' work has led me to provide fewer writing opportunities than my students need. Secondly, I have realized that most of the time, students pay scant attention to the corrections and are mostly concerned with their final qualitative or quantitative grade awarded taking into account their performance in linguistic aspects, organisation and ideas. My concern led me to ponder how to best enhance my students' involvement in their learning process, and how to lead students to benefit from teacher feedback. Furthermore, my belief that writing can and should be taught, and that students should not write without being explicitly taught and given the necessary tools led me to consider ways to guide my students in their writing process. In addition, I gained the belief that the use of appropriate tools would first of all help my learners learn to write different types of texts, and secondly, contribute to a shared responsibility of assessment by teacher and students. Ultimately, I believed the use of selected tools would lead to students' increased writing proficiency.

2 Literature Review

There is extensive literature that indicates that formative assessment is crucial in promoting learning and learners' empowerment and independent learning and thus preparing them to face new challenges in the rapidly changing world. Oscarson

(2009, p.62) advocates that "formative assessment is often referred to as AfL, and is primarily used to improve learning by giving the student information on his or her learning progress while still learning". In other words, formative assessment offers students the chance to understand their own learning stage. Ramaprasad (cited in Black & William, 2009) refers to the three central processes in which formative assessment is grounded:

1- establishing where the learners are in their learning;

2- establishing where they are going;

3- establishing what needs to be done to get them there.

These processes lead to students' learning while assessment takes place. As pointed out by Black et al. (2003), the term assessment for learning (AfL) has become a usual substitute for formative assessment, and it is defined as "a process, one in which information about learning is evoked and then used to modify the teaching and learning activities in which teachers and students are engaged" (p.122).

Formative assessment is often felt by teachers to be opposite of summative assessment which is "given to determine how much students have learned at a particular point in time, for the purpose of communicating achievement status to others" (Chappuis, 2014, p.4). However, the author demonstrates that formative and summative assessment may work hand in hand. The author points out that prior to summative assessment the same task can be used formatively. For example, when a student performs a writing task that is submitted to the teacher, who provides feedback, and this is followed by the students' revision and final submission (p.5).

The above rationale seems to have been incorporated into Portuguese educational policies, which in recent years have gradually emphasized the relevance of the learning process over the final product. The National Programme for English in the 10th-12th years (Moreira et al., 2001/2003) recommends the use of "different assessment modes, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, diagnostic assessment, summative assessment, and above all, formative assessment" (p.44, my translation). These suggested practices are varied, giving the teacher the opportunity to use different assessment tools. In line with the

official document referred to above, the MAIA project (*Monitoring and research project in pedagogical assessment)* discusses pedagogical assessment in Portuguese schools, and mentions the importance of the use of formative assessment and the active participation of the students in the learning process (Fernandes et al., 2020). Black and Wiliam (2009) further point out that the teacher, the peer and the learner share responsibilities in the learning process as "the teacher is responsible for designing and implementing an effective learning environment and the learner is responsible for the learning within that environment" (p.4).

The process approach to writing entails the students' focus on the process, while they carry out their written tasks, rather than on the products themselves (Onozawa, 2010), offering thus the chance of continuous improvement, by going back and forth, on the same piece of writing, before its final stage. AfI and the process approach to writing are combined in the present study, since writing was assessed at different stages and its purpose was to support learning.

Cope and Kalatziz (personal communication, December, 2021) seem to foresee assessment as a natural element, always present in the classroom. Moreover, assessment should, according to the authors, be intertwined in instruction, pointing thus to assessment with its various tools- functioning as a means to learning.

Formative assessment "can be a powerful weapon to create a "culture of success" in the classroom, negating low self-esteem, low self-efficacy and inadequate learning approaches so that all students are able to achieve" (Oscarson, 2009, p. 62), since students understand what they need to do to progress in a positive learning environment, in which teacher and students share responsibility in the students' learning process.

3 Methodology

3.1 Writing Proficiency

"How can assessment for learning promote students' writing proficiency?" is the main research question of the study. The aim of the research was to conduct an action research study over a period of five months in the academic year 2021-2022, to improve the writing proficiency of a group of 11th grade students, through the implementation of AfL. The study aimed to use tools that were associated with AfL, which could ultimately develop students' written skills.

Eleventh-grade English teaching should correspond to B2 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020) according to the *Aprendizagens Essenciais / Articulação com o perfil dos alunos* (*Essential Learning/ Articulation with the students' profile*) (Direção Geral da Educação, 2018). According to the Council of Europe (2020), written production at B2 level entails creative writing, report writing and essays. Written interaction, on the other hand, involves similar language to oral language and encompasses two scales, "correspondence", which is centred on interpersonal exchange and "notes, messages and forms" that entail information transfer (p.83). In addition, the CEFR (2020) presents descriptor scales for the following aspects of communicative language competences: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Firstly, linguistic competence includes such aspects which are important for writing, these being "general linguistic range", "vocabulary range", "grammatical accuracy", "vocabulary control" and "orthographic control". Secondly, sociolinguistic competence refers to "sociolinguistic appropriateness". Lastly, pragmatic competence includes, among other aspects, "coherence and cohesion", which are other aspects undoubtedly relevant in writing. Students' English writing proficiency indicated in the present study corresponded to students' ability to use the written English language effectively taking into account the official documents referred to above. The categories included in the rubrics took into consideration these aspects.

3.2 Research Tools

The relevant tools for the present study were:

a) use of success criteria guidelines, and success criteria checklist. This is, the teacher's clarification of learning intentions, and a way for learners to check they have included the necessary criteria.

b. 1) use of rubrics for students' self-assessment of their first draft and use of the same rubrics by the teacher to assess students' written work. The use of rubrics aimed at helping students to understand what they should do to improve their work. Students were encouraged to check if their work contained what was described in each category of the rubrics and then to improve in the areas needed. For the students' self-assessment I added the students' numerical grades attributed by themselves of all categories and divided by the number of categories to achieve the average result of students' self-assessment. Then, I added the self-assessors' numerical grades and I divided it by the number of self-assessors to find out about the students' self-assessment in each category.

b.2) the teacher's use of the rubrics to assess students aimed at understanding what areas students were the most successful and those students needed more support. Lastly, the use of rubrics was crucial to collect data. For teacher teacher's assessment, I added the students' numerical grades attributed by the teacher of all categories and divided by the number of categories to achieve the average that each student received over the marks they receive for each category. Secondly, I added the students' numerical grades by category and divided it by the number of participants to obtain the teacher's assessment in each category. The results were expressed in percentage.

c) the teacher's feedback, through the use of comments and error correction codes, which is essential for facilitating students' understanding of where they are in their learning stage and how they can improve their work.

The teacher's feedback provided qualitative data analysed in the study. Data collection was based on the correction of both students' drafts, questionnaires and a teaching journal. The analysis of quantitative data was expressed as percentages, and the analysis of qualitative data entailed categorization.

3.3 Context

The study involved a group of twenty-one 11th grade students from a private school located on the outskirts of Lisbon. The students had two ninety-minute English classes per week. This group of students were considered motivated to learn, and academically competitive and successful by their teachers. The students were described by their English teacher as being highly interested in technology and mathematics, and less interested in the humanities.

3.4 The Procedures Used

The action research involved the writing of two written assignments, in accordance with the school curricula, with success criteria guidelines and success criteria checklist for each class. It also involved the use of teacher assessment of the written texts using rubrics (Appendices A and B), class feedback and feedforward through PowerPoint slides and individual feedback through the use of an error correction code (Appendix C).

Lastly, students wrote the second draft of each written assignment using the error correction code and their peers' help, and resubmitted the text to the teacher. The procedures described fit into the AfL framework, in which learners and the teacher share responsibility in the learning process.

4 Results

4.1 Written Task 1: An Opinion Essay

In February the eleventh-grade students were asked to write their first written task, which preceded the writing of an opinion essay in their written test. They were provided with the success criteria guidelines and the success criteria checklist appropriate to the task.

4.1.1 Class Feedback on Draft 1 of the Opinion Essay.

Class feedback through PowerPoint slides was provided to the students before the teacher handed back students' work. The rubrics (Appendix A) were displayed in the slides and explained to students. Examples of the most successful categories in the rubrics were identified and shared with the students. In addition, the categories that most needed improvement were shown. Register was not included as a category in the rubrics. However, my correction of the students' written tasks led me to later include it as a category. In fact, "Students' use of very informal expressions in formal texts such as *a lot*, and *way higher* surprised me". (My teaching journal, 17/02/2021).

Students were reminded through a PowerPoint slide not to use phrasal verbs, to think about complex words to substitute less complex ones, use more formal connectors, and finally use the passive voice.

4.1.2 Results and Discussion of Task 1.

The students were provided with the success criteria guidelines to help them plan their task, and also with the success criteria checklist to their work.

Table 1. *Difference between teacher's assessment and self-assessment in the different categories of the rubric for essay of opinion*

Categories of the rubrics					
Results expressed in percentage	Position statement	Evidence and examples	Sentence structure	Grammar and spelling	Closing paragraph
Teacher	86	84	67	72	66
Students	92	84	73	72	70
Difference	6	0	6	0	4

Results shown indicate that teacher and students agreed on the assessment of *evidence and examples* and *grammar and spelling*. Concerning the other categories, the difference between the teacher's assessment and the students' self-assessment was not significant, which seems to demonstrate students' ability to

self-assess their work through the use of the tools provided (calculation explained in section 3.2). The self-assessment skill plays a central role in the development of learner autonomy, in which students play an active role in their learning.

4.1.3 Personalised Feedback through the Use of the Error Correction Codes. individual Feedback, and Writing of the Second Draft of the Opinion Essay.

The students were given the error correction code and were asked to correct the first draft of their written assignment. The first sample of this assignment demonstrated use of informal language, for example: "From my point of view, nations that have more money are usually the one involved in worldwide problems, so in general I agree with this statement." The second draft demonstrated how the student's managed to overcome the problems of the first draft, "From my point of view, wealthier nations are the ones involved in worldwide problems, so in general I agree that richer nations are the ones responsible for problems around the world".

As well as language, content was also considered by the teacher. In the sample transcribed below, the student's perspective seemed somewhat biased.

A study made in 2016 by EDGAR (Emission Database for Global Atmospheric Research informed us that the top 3 countries that pollute the most are China, the USA and India, two of them being poor countries. In 2016, China had approximately 1,4 billion people and it emitted approximately 10 billion tons of CO_2. India, another big country, emitted 2 billion tons of CO_2.

The teacher encouraged the student to include the perspective of the poor countries through the question written on the student's text: "don't India and China produce goods to be sent to wealthy countries?" The student was therefore able to state his opinion with greater maturity and respect for the poor countries. The second draft is transcribed below:

A study made in 2016 by EDGAR (Emission Database for Global Atmosphere Research) showed us that the top 3 countries that pollute the most are China, the USA and India, two of these being poor countries. Although these two countries export products to richer countries, they are still producing tons of trash that pollute our planet every day.

In the second draft, the student did not include the data he had included in the first draft. In fact, although his research helped him shape his opinion, the figures were not essential to write an opinion essay, as the student came to realise.

4.1.4 Teacher's Assessment of Second Draft and Comparison with the First Draft.

Writing the second draft is not a widespread practice, especially among older students, and even less so during lessons. However, a positive learning environment could be observed when students were writing their second draft in class:

"See how focused they are in correcting their work. They are aware of what they need to correct. It's a pity that we don't have time to do this every time", said my cooperating teacher. (My teaching journal, 22/02/ 2022).

Table 2 *Difference between teacher's assessment of the first and the second draft in the different categories of the rubric for the opinion essay*

Results in percentage	Draft 1	Draft 2
Position statement	85	99
Evidence and examples	84	97
Sentence structure	63	91
Grammar and spelling	72	93
Closing paragraph	65	82

In fact, and as expected, the outcome of the calculations explained in section 3.2 of the present study showed that in all the categories of the rubrics the students scored higher results in their second drafts. *Sentence structure*, which had been identified as the least successful of the areas improved greatly, and also the *closing paragraph* was significantly better in the students' second drafts.

4.1.5 Distribution of the First Questionnaire to the Eleventh-grade Students.
In March, after writing the first draft of their opinion essay, followed by self-assessment and writing of their second draft, questionnaire 1 was distributed.

Firstly, I aimed at understanding how students used the tools provided. The results below (Table 3) confirmed that a high number felt that the success criteria guidelines helped them stay focused on their writing task (question 1) and also helped them plan their written task (question 3). However, for 33 percent the success criteria guidelines could limit their ideas (question 2). Concerning the use of the checklist, it seems that most students who used it, did so when they finished writing (question 4) and not while they were writing (question 5). Indeed, learning strategies varied among students who achieved similar results, and therefore the use of the checklist at the end or while they were writing did not seem to cause an impact on results.

Table 3 *Students' use of the tools provided during their writing process* (21 respondents)

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. The success criteria guidelines helped me stay focused in my writing task.	0	11	11	**39**	**39**
2. The success criteria guidelines limited my ideas in my writing task.	11	**33**	39	11	6
3. The success criteria guidelines helped me plan my writing task.	0	6	17	**28**	**50**
4. I read the success criteria guidelines when I finished writing.	22	17	6	**22**	**33**
5. I ticked the items in the checklist while I was writing.	**33**	17	28	11	11

In the present study it was relevant to understand students' perception of the feedback provided on their written tasks (Table 4).

Table 4 *Students' perception of feedback*

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. Individual feedback helped me understand how to improve writing opinion essays.	6	0	8	**1**	**6**
2. Correction codes helped me to understand my mistakes.	0	6	7	**4**	**3**
3. Correction codes made me confused.	0	2	7	0	**1**

The students viewed individual feedback as a helpful tool to improve their writing of opinion essays (Question 1). However, results showed that the error correction codes had a greater role in helping students understand their mistakes (Question 2). For almost 75 percent of students the error correct codes were not confusing and only 11 percent agreed with the statement (Question 3).

The analysis of the open question, aimed at understanding which type of feedback students preferred among class feedback, individual feedback and error correction codes, showed that over 50 percent of the students preferred individual feedback because it helped them understand their mistakes and improve their writing. The use of corrections was the main means used in individual feedback and it seems that a more regular use of these could lead to students' greater efficiency in using them, more satisfaction and enhanced development.

Table 5 *Students' use of rubrics*

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. Rubrics helped me to self-assess my opinion essay.	0	7	7	**9**	**8**
2. Rubrics helped me to understand what I need to do to improve when I write opinion essays.	0	6	7	**0**	**8**
3. Rubrics are useful to understand what grade I will get in an opinion essay.	6	7	**3**	3	1
4. Rubrics make me anxious about my performance.	0	7	2	6	6

Results displayed in table 5 show that 67 percent of students considered the use of rubrics helpful to self-assess their opinion essay (Question 1) and 78 percent believed that the use of rubrics helped them understand what they needed to do to improve their written task (Question 2). Over 30 percent were not certain whether the use of rubrics would help them to understand the grade they would have in their opinion essay (Question 3). Probably, the time gap between the writing of the essay and the filling of the questionnaire played its part by contributing to students' forgetfulness. Interestingly, the use of rubrics brought some students a degree of anxiety about their performance (Question 4).

4.2 Written Task 2. A Letter of Application

In March students were asked to write their second written task, a letter of application. Once more the students were provided with the success criteria guidelines to help them plan their task, and also with the success criteria checklist.

4.2.1 Class Feedback on Draft 1 of Students' Letter of Application.

Class feedback through PowerPoint slides was provided to the students before handing back their work. The rubrics were shown in the slides and explained. *Salutation and closing* in formal emails/letters was a successful area. However, it

was relevant to clarify the students who had not followed the conventions fully. In addition, it seemed pertinent to present samples of good arguments used by the students because their lack of work experience was a fact that needed to be considered.

4.2.2 Results of Written Task 2. A Letter of Application.

The analysis that follows was based on the teacher's assessment and the students' self-assessment of the first draft of the written task, and before students' corrected their work using the correction code. The assessment was carried out through the use of rubrics (Appendix 2) that included the following categories: *Salutation and closing*, *grammar and spelling*, *sentences and paragraphs*, *format*, and *register*.

Table 6 *Difference between teacher's assessment and self-assessment in the different categories of the rubric for the letter of application*

Categories of the rubrics					
Results expressed in percentage	Salutation and closing	Grammar and spelling	Sentences and paragraphs	Format	Register
Teacher	84	85	90	87	93
Students	81	82	78	81	84
Difference	3	3	12	6	9

The assessment of the category of *sentences and paragraphs* seemed the most dissimilar. Interestingly, in all the categories the teacher's assessment was more favourable than the students' self-assessment, which could stem from the fact that this group of students was considered highly competitive and rigorous in the different subject areas by their different teachers (calculation explained in section 3.2). The students used self-assessment as a tool to support their learning process and the results seemed to indicate that assessment for learning promoted students' writing proficiency.

4.2.3 Personalized Feedback through the Use of the Error Correction Codes and Writing of the Second Draft of the Letter of Application.

The students were asked to correct the first draft of their written assignment, using the error correction code. As shown earlier, the results of the assignment were significantly above average in all categories of the rubrics.

The selection of the samples of the letter of application aimed to illustrate a student's success in writing his second draft, in terms of organisation. In fact, in the first sample the sports mentioned by the student were dispersed in the text, which affected the organisation of paragraphs, as illustrated in the sample transcribed below:

> I think I am suitable for the role because I can speak different languages and I can play sports and even swim if necessary. I enjoy working with young people and if possible I could introduce ideas for new activities in the camp. As said before I am capable to play many different sports. For example, football, basketball, water polo, handball and volleyball.

As shown below, in draft 2 the student was able to improve the organisation of his ideas. That is, the student listed the sports he did in a systematized manner and deleted the irrelevant words and expressions, which led him to improve the coherence of his text, notwithstanding the linguistic problems. The text is transcribed below:

> I am writing to apply for the role of summer camp leader.
>
> I think I am suitable for the role because I have worked as a camp leader before in my home country.
>
> Not only that I can speak three different languages and I can play sports as for example, football, swimming, basketball, water polo, handball and volleyball. In addition, I can play the guitar.
>
> I look forward to hearing from you soon.

As shown, the inversion using "not only" needed to be corrected. Thus, writing was considered a process aimed at improvement, and assessment aimed at helping students to develop their writing skills.

4.2.4 Teacher's Assessment of Second Draft and Comparison with the First Draft.

Grammar and spelling were the categories in which a greater difference between the two drafts was perceived. Students were able to correct their language mistakes, using the error correction codes, their mobile phones to search for the information they needed, and their peers' help. Students were competent in making the necessary changes in order to develop the format of their texts as can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7 *Difference between teacher's assessment of the first and the second draft in the different categories of the rubric for the letter of application*

Results in percentage	Draft 1	Draft 2
Salutation and closing	84	97
Grammar and spelling	85	99
Sentences and paragraphs	90	96
Format	87	96
Register	93	97

The *salutation and closing* greatly improved. Students had received straightforward instructions regarding this category, which they had not fully followed. Once they received the feedback, they self-corrected this writing area. In all, and not surprisingly, students' upgraded writing in their second drafts was revealed in each category of the rubrics, as shown above.

4.2.5 Distribution of the Second Questionnaire.

In April the 11th grade students responded to the second questionnaire which aimed at understanding students' views on the effectiveness of the tools adopted during the development of their written tasks.

Results shown (Table 8) indicate that over 50 percent of the students considered that the success criteria guidelines helped them stay focused on their writing task (Question 1) and helped them plan their writing task (Question 3).

However, nearly 40 percent of the students thought that the success criteria guidelines limited their ideas (Question 2). Nevertheless, a similar number of students read the success criteria guidelines when they finished writing their text (question 6), which shows that they read the success criteria guidelines throughout their writing and read them at the end too (Questions 4 and 5).

Table 8 *Students' use of the tools provided during their writing process*

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. The success criteria guidelines helped me stay focused on my writing task.	0	13	13	**38**	**21**
2. The success criteria guidelines limited my ideas in my writing task.	4	17	25	**25**	**13**
3. The success criteria guidelines helped me plan my writing task.	0	4	13	**54**	**13**
4. I read the success criteria guidelines several times throughout my writing.	13	8	21	**17**	**25**
5. I read the success criteria guidelines when I finished writing.	21	13	17	**25**	**13**
6. I ticked the items in the checklist while I was writing.	**25**	**21**	4	21	13
7. I ticked the items in the checklist after finishing writing.	13	13	17	**8**	**33**

Nearly 50 percent of the students did not tick the items in the checklist while they were writing (Question 6), and 33 percent ticked the items after finishing writing (Question 7). In total 83 percent claimed they ticked the checklist at some point, which seems to indicate their interest in the tool provided.

Students' perception of feedback is illustrated below (Table 9). Over 50 percent of the respondents thought that class feedback and individual feedback helped them to improve their letters of application (Questions 1 and 2) and 46 percent considered that correction codes helped them understand their mistakes (Question 3). However, nearly 40 percent thought that the correction codes made them confused (Question 4). Possibly, students would have needed some training, which I was not aware of. I had shown the error correction code to the students and had briefly explained the meanings of the symbols which I assumed was sufficient.

Table 9 *Students' perception of feedback*

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. Class feedback helped me understand how to improve writing letters of application.	3	4	3	**9**	**5**
2. Individual feedback helped me understand how to improve letters of application.	4	0	5	**1**	**3**
3. Correction codes helped me to understand my mistakes.	0	7	1	**5**	**1**
4. Correction codes made me confused.	7	1	8	**3**	**5**

Outcomes shown below (Table 10) illustrate students' perception of the use of rubrics. 46 percent considered that the rubrics helped them to self-assess their letter of application (Question 1).

Table 10 *Students' use of rubrics*

Students' answers converted in percentage	Not true	Somewhat true	neutral	true	Very true
1. Rubrics helped me to self-assess my letter of application.	4	7	7	**9**	**7**
2. Rubrics helped me to understand what I need to do to improve when I write a letter of application.	4	0	**6**	7	7
3. Rubrics are useful to understand what grade I will get in a letter of application.	3	8	1	**9**	**3**

34 percent of the students thought that the use of rubrics helped them understand what they needed to do in order to improve their writing task, whereas nearly 50 percent were not so sure about its usefulness (Question 2). Interestingly, a similar number of respondents considered it useful to understand what grade they would get in a letter of application, in a summative evaluation.

4.3 *Summary of Results of Written Task 1 and Written Task 2*

In the written tasks, spelling and grammar mistakes were those students were best able to overcome when they wrote a second draft, possibly because the information needed could be accessed easily and their correction tended to be straightforward. The more specific aspects of the task, such as *position statement* in opinion essays and *salutations and closing* for letter of application were also areas in which students overcame their misunderstandings, presumably due to unambiguous models provided, which they looked at more carefully when they wrote their second drafts. The number of students who considered that the success criteria guidelines helped them to stay focused on their task decreased by almost 30 percent, and the number who thought that the success criteria guidelines had helped them plan their writing task also decreased, but not so significantly. This may be attributed to a greater self-confidence achieved by

students who adopted a more risk-taking attitude when they wrote the second task. The practices carried out included the integration of various assessment tools, whose primarily role was helping students to improve their writing.

5 Final Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to promote students' writing proficiency through AfL. The study involved a group of eleventh-grade students. Two written tasks were completed, various assessment tools were used, and students' responses to the tasks as well as to questionnaires were analysed within the scope of the present study.

Direct support was provided to students for improving their writing, but also the students' role was crucial in their assessment process, which is in agreement with the characterisation of *AfL* suggested by Siarova et al. (2017). Moreover, students were provided with information on their accomplishment while they were learning, which is in line with Oscarson's (2009) definition of formative assessment.

A significant number of students considered that class feedback, as well as individual feedback through an error correction code, helped them understand how to improve their writing tasks. In fact, Siarova et al. (2017) stresses the teachers' key role in providing feedback and in setting goals in AfL. Moreover, effective feedback is a tool in AfL, which supports students' learning (Vogt and Froelich, cited in Tsagari et al, 2018). Individual feedback, provided mostly through the use of correction codes was considered effective by the students in helping them develop their writing. In line with this outcome, Black et al. (2003) refer to a study that aimed at understanding the efficacy of different types of feedback, which concluded that learning gains were greatest for those students who were given only comments with no grades.

Interestingly, it seems that, although some students found error correction codes confusing, they tried to overcome their doubts, by seeking clarification. As suggested by Bosher (1990), students "were engaged in a problem-solving approach to error" (p.88). Indeed, this group of students, being science and maths oriented, and thus challenged by quantitative calculations and logical reasoning, could be

highly motivated to use the error correction codes. In addition, the students regarded the rubrics helpful to self-asses their written task, as suggested by Goodrich (1996), and to understand what they needed to do to improve their texts.

In all, results confirmed the students' reflection during their learning process and the development of their writing proficiency. The students' learning process entailed students knowing where they were in their learning stage, where they were going and what they needed to do to reach their goals. In the final stage of the action research students' written texts revealed significantly fewer language problems and the acquisition of the correct requirements for each task. That is, students were able to produce an essay, in which they gave reasons to justify their point of view, and they were able to respond to an advert through writing, which are aims described by   the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2020). Assessment for learning implemented during my practicum, which involved the use of various assessment tools, described in this study, promoted students' writing proficiency of specific written tasks.

Future study could involve students and the English teacher in collaborative co-construction of the writing rubrics and giving learners guided practice in using the rubrics.

REFERENCES

Andrade, H. G. (1996). Understanding rubrics. *Educational Leadership*, 14-17.

Black, P., Harrison C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & Wiliam, D. (2003). *Assessment for learning*. Open University Press.

Black, P., & William, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, *1*(1), 5-31.

Bosher, S. (1990). The role of error correction in the process-oriented ESL composition classroom. *MinneTESOL Journal, 8, 89-101.*

Chappuis, J. (2014). *Seven strategies of assessment for learning* (2nd ed.). Pearson.

Cope, W., & Kalantziz, M. (2021) Assessment for learning. Coursera. University of Illinois at Urabana-Champaign.

Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European framework of reference for languages: learning, teaching, assessment*. *Companion volume*. Council of Europe.

Direção Geral da Educação (2018b) *Aprendizagens essenciais / articulação com o perfil dos alunos, 11º ano inglês* (Agosto, 2018). http://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/Aprendizagens_Essenciais/11_ingles_f_geral_cont.pdf

Fernandes, D., Machado, E.A., & Candeias, F. (2020). *Para uma avaliação pedagógica: Processos e dinâmicas de formação no projecto MAIA (2019-2020)*. Ministério da Educação/Direcão-Geral de Educação.

McDowell, L., Sambell, K., & Davison, G. (2009). Assessment for learning: A brief history and review of terminology. In C. Rust (Ed.), *Improving student learning through the curriculum*, 56-64. Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development.

Moreira, A., Moreira, G., Roberto, M., Howcroft, S., & Almeida, T. (2001/2003). *Programa de inglês-10º,11º e 12º anos- Nível de continuação*. Ministério da Educação. Departamento do Ensino Secundário. https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Secundario/Documentos/Programas/ingles_10_11_12_cont.pdf

Onozawa, C. (2010). *A study of the process writing approach- A suggestion for an Eclectic writing approach.* Gunma University Academic Information Repository, 153-162. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/141876629.pdf

Oscarson, A. (2009). *Self-assessment of writing in learning English as a foreign language : A study at the upper secondary school level.* Goteborgs Universitet. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED505960

Tsagari, D., Vogt, K., Froehlich, V., Csépes, I., Fekete, A., Green, A., Hamp-Lyons, L., Sifakis, N., & Kordia, S. (2018). *Handbook of assessment for language teachers.* Tale Project.

Rubistar. (2000). ALTEC, University of Kansas. http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php

Siarova, H., Sternadel, D., & Masidlauskaite, R. (2017). Assessment practices for 21st century learning: Review of evidence, *Neset II report*, Publications Office of the European Union.

Appendix A Rubric for written task 1 for the eleventh-grade: opinion essay

Generated by *Rubistar* and adapted

CATEGORY	Sophisticated	Competent	Partly competent	Not yet competent
Position Statement	The position statement provides a clear, strong statement of the author\'s position on the topic.	The position statement provides a clear statement of the author\'s position on the topic.	A position statement is present, but does not make the author\'s position clear.	There is no position statement.
Evidence and Examples	All of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the author\'s position.	Most of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the author\'s position.	At least one of the pieces of evidence and examples is relevant and has an explanation that shows how that piece of evidence supports the author\'s position.	Evidence and examples are NOT relevant AND/OR are not explained.
Sentence Structure	All sentences are well-constructed with varied structure.	Most sentences are well-constructed and there is some varied sentence structure in the essay.	Most sentences are well constructed, but there is no variation is structure.	Most sentences are not well-constructed or varied.
Grammar & Spelling	Author makes just some errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes a few errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes many errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Author makes many erros in grammar or spelling that hinder the reader\'s comprehension
Closing paragraph	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader solidly understanding the writer\'s position. Effective restatement of the position statement begins the closing paragraph.	The conclusion is recognizable. The author\'s position is restated within the first two sentences of the closing paragraph.	The author\'s position is restated within the closing paragraph, but not near the beginning.	There is no conclusion - the paper just ends.

Appendix B Rubric for written task 2 for the eleventh-grade: Letter of application

Generated by *Rubistar* and adapted

CATEGORY	Sophisticated	Competent	Partly competent	Not yet competent
Salutation and Closing	Salutation and closing have no errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and closing have 1-2 errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and closing have 3 or more errors in capitalization and punctuation.	Salutation and/or closing are missing.
Grammar & spelling (conventions)	Writer makes minor errors in grammar or spelling that don\'t distract the reader from the content	Writer makes some errors in grammar and/or spelling that don\'t distract the reader from the content	Writer makes many errors in grammar and/or spelling that don\'t distract the reader from the content	Writer makes many errors in grammar and/or spelling that hinder the reader\'s understanding.
Sentences & Paragraphs	Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well-constructed and of varied structure.	All sentences are complete and well-constructed (no fragments, no run-ons). Paragraphing is generally done well.	Most sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing needs some work.	Many sentence fragments or run-on sentences OR paragraphing needs lots of work.
Format	Complies with all the requirements for an application letter.	Complies with almost all the requirements for an application letter.	Complies with several of the requirements for an application letter.	Complies with less than 50% of the requirements for an application letter.
Register	The author uses long forms and formal words/expressions consistently.	The author uses mostly long forms and formal words/expressions.	The author uses mostly long forms.	The author uses short forms-

Appendix C Error correction code

Error correction codes	
sp	spelling
V	verb tense / verb form
prep	incorrect preposition
pl	singular/plural
ww	wrong word
G	grammar mistake
wo	wrong word order
pro	incorrect pronoun
frag	fragment (incomplete sentence)
ns/	start a new sentence here
?	unclear
∧	add word/s
del	delete
0	problem with punctuation
▭	use a better word
H	messy handwriting
rep	repetition
〜〜〜	the sentence is confusing