

The Impact of Self-Assessment for Speaking on Washback Effect

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Abstract

Alternative assessment is a new assessment culture that values processes of learning and the unique performance of individual. Self-assessment, as an alternative assessment process, encourages learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning.. Here, discovering any washback effect of self-assessment toward students' speaking proficiency could be very helpful in any purposes for teaching and learning process. This paper aims to uncover washback effect both positive and negative of the implication of self-assessment for students' speaking proficiency. The result shows that self-assessment has significant impact i.e. both positive and negative washback effect on language skills especially speaking. However, self-assessment's effect stands mostly on positive washback effect because it can improve students' speaking proficiency in learning process.

Keywords: self-assessment, speaking skill, washback effect

Introduction

In line with theories of self-directed learning and learner autonomy, self-assessment is assuming a larger role in language teaching nowadays. The procedure involves students in making judgments about their own learning, particularly about their achievements and learning outcomes. Many researchers and practitioners deem self-assessment as a vital part of learner autonomy and argue that teachers should provide the opportunity for students to assess their language level so as to help them focus on their own learning (Blanche, 1988; Blue, 1994; Oscarson, 1997). Hunt, Gow & Barnes (1989) even claim that without learner self-evaluation and self-assessment “there can be no real autonomy” (p. 207).

In addition, self-assessment is considered necessary for effective lifelong learning (Boud, 2000). There is a common understanding that university education should equip students with the skills and attitudes required throughout their lives. As Boud (2000) argues, “Assessment involves identifying appropriate standards and criteria and making judgments about quality. This is as necessary to lifelong learning as it is to any formal educational experience”. Given as such, when asked to assess their own language performance and progress in the classroom, students will identify appropriate standards for the task in hand and seek forms of feedback from the environment (including peers, teachers, written or oral sources), and gradually develop a critical attitude toward their learning, which will in the long run prepare them for their future roles in the workplace.

Research into the reliability and validity of self-assessment among ESL/EFL students has yielded mixed results. Some studies have reported agreement between students’ self-awarded ratings and ratings awarded by their teacher (AlFallay, 2004; Chen, 2008) or scores that students expected to get in a test and those they actually obtained (Bachman and Palmer, 1989) and

suggested that students are able to assess their language proficiency accurately.

However, discrepancy has also been found between students' self-ratings and ratings from other sources (Blue, 1994; Yang, 2002).

Literature suggests that student participation in grading is a viable method to encourage learner autonomy because the ability to assess one's proficiency with a reasonable degree of accuracy and supplement any deficiency therein is essential preparation for lifelong learning. The more often students are exposed to self-assessment the more accurate their assessment becomes.

This paper aims to uncover washback effect both positive and negative of the implication of self-assessment for students' speaking proficiency.

Method

Literature Review

Types of Self-Assessment

Bachman in Saito (2014) have attempted to define the term by identifying two types of self-assessment according to their purpose. Those are performance-oriented assessment that measures the outcomes related to selection, certification, placement, achievement, diagnosis, etc. For instance, if self-assessment is used as a placement exam in a university ESL program, it will be administered to the students only once prior to program entrance. In this case, students are asked to evaluate their language ability on whatever is being assessed. The advantages of Performance-oriented assessment are eliminates concerns with cheating and security issues also cost and time efficient; and development-oriented self-assessment that measures the process of learning (usually in a classroom environment) in which self-managed activities are incorporated. This approach not only promotes autonomy in student learning, it also helps the teachers

measure the students' progress in the course. Development-oriented self-assessment may best serve as a complementary instrument to traditional assessment presently.

Process of Self-Assessment

McMillan (2008) provides three processes of self-assessment. They are self monitoring, self-judgment, and learning target . In self-monitoring, the students pay deliberate attention to what they are doing, often in relation to external standards. Thus, self-monitoring concerns awareness of thinking and progress as it occurs; involves identifying progress toward targeted performance. Made in relation to established standards and criteria, these judgments give students a meaningful idea of what they know and what they still need to learn and as such, it identifies part of what students do when they self-assess; learning target, the students choose subsequent learning goals and activities to improve partially correct answers, to correct misunderstandings and to extend learning. They need skills in determining learning targets and further instruction that will enhance their learning. Overall, in self-assessment process the students identify their learning and performance strategies, provide feedback to themselves based on well-understood standards and criteria, and determine the next steps or plans to enhance their performance.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Self-Assessment

Many researchers have shown that self-assessment can motivate and improve student's learning. Alvarez and munoz (2009) said that Self-assessment can be related to beneficial washback because it helps learners develop internal criteria for progress and success, and thus develop learner autonomy. Esmat Babaii, Shahin Taghaddomi and Roya Pashmforoosh (2015) It is pointed out that getting learners involved in assessing their own ability would help them

improve learning. NFER (2012) argued that assessing their own work or that of others can help pupils develop their understanding of learning objectives and success criteria. Making judgments about the progress of one's own learning is integral to the learning process.

An advantage of self-assessment is that it may lead to more confidence while performing a task (Oscarson, 1997). Oscarson (1997) also mentions six advantages of using self-assessment in the language classroom: promotion of learning, raised level of awareness, improved goal-orientation, expansion of range of assessment, shared assessment burden, and beneficial post-course effects. Blue (1994) identifies benefits such as encouraging more efforts, boosting self-confidence, and facilitating awareness of the distinction between competence and performance as well as self-consciousness of learning strengths and weaknesses.

Schawartz provides some advantages and disadvantages of self-assessment. The advantages of self-assessment are encouraging student involvement and responsibility; encouraging students to reflect on their role and contribution to the process of the group work; allowing students to see and reflect on their peers' assessment of their contribution; and focusing on the development of student's judgment skills. While the disadvantages of self-assessment are potentially increasing lecturer workload by needing to brief students on the process as well as on-going guidance on performing self-evaluation; Self-evaluation has a risk of being perceived as a process of presenting inflated grades and being unreliable; and students feel ill equipped to undertake the assessment.

Washback Effect

Washback is not restricted to learners and teachers. Bachman and Palmer (1996) consider washback to be a subset of a test's impact on society, educational systems and individuals. They

believe that test impact operates at two levels: The micro level (i.e. the effect of the test on individual students and teachers); and the macro level or the impact the test may have on society and the educational system.

Discussion

Investigations concerning self-assessment in language learning have examined the value of self-assessment in proficiency testing with participants of all ages in different language skills and the results with these learners show that self-assessment positively correlates with language abilities, includes oral language or speaking ability. For example, Finch and Taeduck (2002) examined applying self-assessment as a valuable additional means of improving oral abilities. They developed a test focusing on the improvement in spoken English of 1700 Freshman University students over an academic year (64 hours). This was administered and evaluated using established oral-test criteria. They looked at improvement rather than level of achievement, and the Conversation-English course taken by the students was the basis of the test. Results showed that: 1) preparation for the test necessitated active spoken participation in lessons, 2) lessons tended to utilize task-based communicative teaching methods, 3) the means became the end - the test was not only a reason for developing oral skills, but also a means of achieving that goal.

Another research about the impact of self-assessment on students speaking proficiency is also held by Naeini (2011) entitled "Self-assessment and the impact on language skills". She was not only focus on the impact of self-assessment on students speaking proficiency but also writing ability. The results of the study indicated the outperformance of the experimental group over the control group in both writing and speaking. The data analyses also revealed that the experimental

group scores significantly differed from the scores of the subjects in control group in all the components both in writing and speaking. This is an evidence for the treatment effect. Hence, self-assessment is suggested to be applied as a booster for the other skills. In other words, the study began with the intention of developing a means whereby language learners would be able to monitor their learning by evaluating their performance on writing tasks. Then, it became evident that this was ultimately resulted in the improvement of the other language skill, say, speaking.

Moreover, there is also a research held by Sammy (2009) entitled “Self-assessment in the School-based Assessment speaking component in a Hong Kong Secondary Four classroom: A case study”. This study examines the process of implementing student self-assessment in a local secondary school to prepare students for the SBA speaking assessments. It was found that most of the students in the study had not participated in self-assessment before the study began. The data collected from the various sources support the assertion that self-assessment has positive impacts on students’ perceived performance but the students were reserved about doing it. They also responded differently to the various class activities. The students valued feedback from others most but it was found that the way the teacher gave students feedback might have a significant influence on how students do peer and self-assessment. The most significant finding was that the negative psychological impact self-assessment has on students cannot be neglected.

Reviewing on some researches about the effect on the use of self-assessment for speaking, it can be seen that self-assessment for speaking performance has several washback effects, both positive and negative. But, the most result shows about positive effects on learning outcomes. By using self-assessment, language learners would be able to monitor their learning by evaluating their performance. After assessing their selves, learners’ speaking proficiency would be

increasing because self-assessment can encourage more students' efforts, boost their self-confidence, and facilitating awareness of the distinction between competence and performance as well as self-consciousness of learning strengths and weaknesses. This is as Oscarson (1997) argument about the advantages of doing self-assessment. He states that the advantages of using self-assessment in the language classroom are: promotion of learning, raised level of awareness, improved goal-orientation, expansion of range of assessment, shared assessment burden, and beneficial post-course effects.

Conclusion

Self-assessment is a process of alternative assessment where the students judge or evaluate their quality of their work, the outcome of their learning, also identify their strengths and weaknesses. Self-assessment might have a significant impact i.e. both positive and negative washback effect on language skills especially speaking and may be possibly related to some other variables such as gender, age, personality-type and teachers' attitudes towards self-assessment. However, viewing on the result of some researches, self-assessment's effect stands mostly on positive washback effect because it can improve students' speaking proficiency in learning process.

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