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The Effect of Students' Self-Assessment on Their English Performance in ELT Classroom

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INFO ARTIKEL

ABSTRAK

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This study aimed to describe whether the students' self assessment provides prominent effect on their English performance. This study used library research which was divided into three parts. First part was the concept of Assessment in general and self-assessment in language teaching. The second part discusses both the possible benefit and limitation of the use of students' self-assessment. The third part discusses validity and the procedure of conducting self-assessment to improve students' performance in English language teaching. The study shows that self-assessment contributed to student learning and that the effects grow larger with direct instruction on self-assessment procedures.

Introduction

It is unquestionable that assessment is important in teaching and learning. Every teacher should assess his/her students' learning regularly. Some of the methods which teachers use to measure their students' learning are written tests, book reports, research papers, homework exercises, oral presentations, and question-and-answer activities. Therefore, teachers spend a great deal of their class time engaged in one type of assessment or another. Assessment of students entails using a well-organized system, namely tests, to make judgments about the students' achievement. These tests bring anxiety, fear, or disappointment to students which might negatively affect their language learning. Students may suffer because of spending several hours in learning and preparing for the test under pressure of their fear. Assessment has "the most powerful influence on student learning" (George and Cowan, 1999:8). Therefore, teachers should always keep enough, and accurate, information on which they can build their judgment to improve their students' performance (Shaaban, 2005:38).

One of assessment method that needs to be considered is self-Assessment. Self-assessment does not mean that students are allowed to assess themselves in the form of grades; instead they get continuous feedback on their progress to help both the students and the teacher. The information collected through self-assessment is used to detect the strengths and weaknesses of the learners for the purpose of improving proficiency. It provides useful information for both the teacher and the student upon which appropriate action can be taken (Shaaban, 2005:35). Students' self-assessment is considered to be one of the most important formative classroom assessment techniques. One of the purposes of this technique is to improve the quality of students' learning. It can also lead to modifications when teaching strategies do not meet the required learning outcomes. However, there is a big question: Does self-assessment provide valid evidence to measure students' performance? Does self-assessment improve students' performance? How to make self-assessment more useful?

This paper intends to investigate the benefit of using students' self-assessment in English language teaching by using library research method. The first part of this paper introduces the concept of Assessment in general and self-assessment in language teaching. The second part discusses both the possible benefit and limitation of the use of students' self-assessment. The third part discusses validity and the procedure of conducting self-assessment to improve students' performance in English language teaching.

Testing and Assessment in Language Teaching

Before going further, it's important to distinguish the term test and assessment because there are several teachers who still confuses about the two terms and see them as the same concept. Brown (2004:3) defines a test as a method of measuring a person's ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain. From this definition, we know that a test is a method or instrument to measure individual general ability. It must be explicit and structured either in the form of multiple choices or writing prompt to obtain a score. Test is a procedure that is prepared administratively at certain times in a curriculum when learners master all their faculties to offer peak performance, knowing that their responses are being measured and evaluated (Brown, 2004:3). On the other hand, assessment is continuing process that includes much wider domain. Assessment, in the broad sense, means "any methods used to better understand the current knowledge that a student possesses" (Collins and O'Brien, 2011:29). According to Crooks (2001:1), assessment is "any process that provides information about the thinking, achievement or progress of students". The position of testing and assessment in language teaching is described in the following diagram:

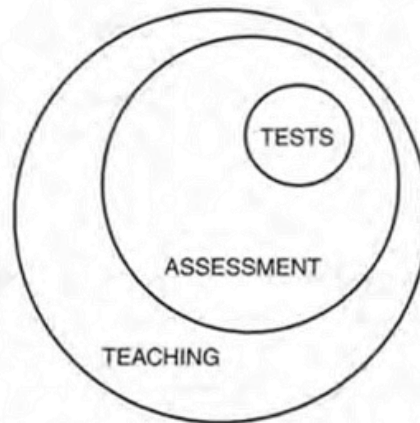


Figure 1: The position of testing and assessment in teaching process (Brown, 2004)

There are two types of assessment: summative assessment, which is taken at the end of a program of a study to measure and communicate learner's performance, and formative assessment that is taken during a course or a program of a study with the purpose of improving student's learning (Torrance and Pryor, 1998:8). In fact, authentic assessment requires both. Summative assessment takes place at the end of a term or a course and is used to provide information about how much students have learned or how well a course has worked. That is to say, a test is usually given at the end of a term, semester or year, the purpose of which is to measure proficiency. On the other hand, formative assessment takes place during a course of teaching and is used essentially as feedback to the teaching-learning process (O'Malley and Pierce, 1996). In other words, formative assessment is an ongoing process of collecting information about the students' performance through various techniques of classroom assessment. The purpose of formative assessment is not only to measure proficiency, but also to improve it as well. Formative assessments do not bombard students with questions to be answered within a time limit. On the contrary, they "reflect the concepts and skills that the teacher emphasized in class, along with the teacher's clear criteria for judging students' performance" (Guskey, 2003:8).

An assessment is summative when the intention is mainly to give a final judgment on students' achievement. The information collected through summative assessment is used to detect the strengths and weaknesses of the learners for the purpose of improving proficiency. It provides useful information for both the teacher and the student upon which appropriate action can be taken (Brown, 2004:6). Summative assessment, or assessment of learning, tends to be an end point, usually expressed in grades and concerned with making judgments. On the other hand, formative assessment, or assessment for learning as it is sometimes called, is a continuous process in which the main purpose is beyond measurement; rather it is to help students improve. Both forms of classroom assessment, formative and summative, are needed to determine how much learning has occurred.

Black and William (1998) define the assessment as a process to include all activities undertaken in class, either by teachers to assess their students or by the students to assess themselves, which can be used as feedback to adjust the teaching-learning strategies. According to this definition, assessment includes teacher observation, classroom discussion, marking tests

and collecting information from the students themselves about their own learning; namely *students' self-assessment*.

Definition of Students' Self-Assessment

For the purpose of this article, I will follow Klenowski's definition of self-assessment as "the evaluation or judgment of 'the worth' of one's performance and the identification of one's strengths and weaknesses with a view to improving one's learning outcomes" (Klenowski, 1995:146). This definition emphasizes the ameliorative potential of self-assessment and focuses attention on its consequential validity. Although some of the research conducted on self-assessment has consisted of students appraising their work with little interpretative guidance, I will argue with Klenowski that the benefits of self-assessment are more likely to accrue when three conditions are met: teacher and students negotiate self-assessment criteria; teacher-student dialogue focuses on evidence for judgments, and self-assessments contribute to a grade (by students alone or in collaboration with teachers).

Although self-assessment has long been part of the authority of classroom teachers, assessment reform has increased its use. Key proponents of assessment reform (e.g., Wiggins, 1993:54) recommend that students submit a self-assessment with every major assignment. Self-assessment is a valid instance of assessment reform, as defined by Wiggins (1993:192) in that (i) students create something that requires higher level thinking (i.e., they interpret their performance using overt criteria); (ii) the task requires disciplined inquiry, (i.e., the criteria for appraisal are derived from a specific discipline); (iii) the assessment is transparent (i.e., procedures, criteria and standards are public); and (iv) the student has opportunities for feedback and revision during the task (e.g., by responding to discrepancies between the student's and teacher's judgment). Other important features of assessment reform, e.g., the extent to which the task represents real world applications of school knowledge, characterize some but not all self-assessments.

Some teachers find it helpful to distinguish between self-evaluation (judgments that are used for grading) and self-assessments (informal judgments about attainment) as suggested by Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2003:3). Not everyone finds the distinction helpful; for example, the text on classroom assessment by McMillan (2004) uses the terms interchangeably. Throughout this article, I will use the term self-assessment to refer to data collections.

Students' self-assessment is considered to be one of the most important formative classroom assessment techniques. One of the purposes of this technique is to improve the quality of students' learning. It can also lead to modifications when teaching strategies have not met the required learning outcomes. Some educators have argued that students often find external assessment by teachers or supervisors unjust. Therefore, if students are given the chance to assess themselves, they will be more confident to give more accurate information about their progress (Angelo and Cross, 1998:5).

The benefit of Self-Assessment

By assessing their own learning, students can increase their awareness of what is happening in class (Angelo and Cross, 1998:36). Perhaps the most important factor of a successful teaching-learning process is active student involvement (Fulcher and Davidson, 2007:254). This requires teachers to provide their students with feedback and teach them to use it effectively for learning. Consequently, students can learn how to assess themselves so that they can learn what they need to do in order to achieve success (Black and Wiliam, 1998:144). Hence, successful formative assessment depends on active student involvement.

The potential benefits of self-assessment have been widely recognized. They include the fact that Self-Assessment can be directly integrated into the teaching/learning process, encourages learner autonomy and may increase student motivation, it can reduce the teachers' assessment burden, and can result in increased student involvement in monitoring and assessing their language performance (Brown, 2004:270).

In addition, there are some benefits of using self-assessment for the students:

1. development of metacognitive skills – students become more skilled at adjusting what they are doing to improve the quality of their work (Boud and Falchikov, 1989)
2. increased responsibility for students' own learning as a result of more opportunities for self-reflection (Black et al., 2003)
3. positive effects for low achievers – reducing achievement gaps (Black and William, 1998)
4. development and refinement of students' capacity for critical thinking (Crooks, 2001)
5. reduction in disruptive behavior (Crooks, 2001)

On the other hand, there are also some benefits of using self-assessment for the teachers:

1. increase in student engagement (Boud and Falchikov, 1989)
2. access to information, otherwise unavailable, about student effort and persistence (Guskey, 2003)
3. students begin to internalize instructional goals and apply them to future efforts (Sebba et al., 2008)

Bransford (in Olin and Sullivan, 2004:6) views self-assessment as part of a metacognitive approach to instruction that develops "people's abilities to predict their performances on various tasks and to monitor their current levels of mastery and understanding". Teaching practices that use a metacognitive approach to learning focus on self-assessment and reflection on what worked and what needs improving. Within this framework, self-assessment can help learners appraise their current understanding in order to determine improvement needs. Most research on metacognition has focused on developing student ability to monitor their learning behaviors through goal-setting, record-keeping, using job aids or cuing devices to check for understanding, and other strategies

Self-Assessment and Its Validity

One issue that is regarded as the most important principle related to assessment is validity. Brown (2004:22) defines validity as "the extent to which inferences made from assessment results are appropriate, meaningful, and useful in terms of the purpose of the assessment". Validity means to discover whether a test measures accurately what it is intended to measure or uncover the appropriateness of a given test or any of its component parts as a measure of what it is purposed to measure (Hughes, 2003:26). So, if we write a test to measure one language skill for instance, we have to make sure that the language skill being measured is real and does measure what is intended.

Validity in self-assessment typically means agreement with teacher judgments (considered to be the gold standard) or peer rankings (usually the mean of multiple judges which tend to be more accurate than the results from a single judge). Content validity, requiring students to perform the behavior being measured, is the major source of validity in a classroom assessment and it may be evaluated by considering two key factors: 1) whether classroom objectives are identified and appropriately framed, and 2) whether lesson objectives are represented in the form of assessment specifications (Brown, 2004). Face validity is the extent to which - students view the assessment as fair, relevant, and useful in improving learning (George and Cowan, 1999).

Research on the self-assessments of university students produced mixed results. Boud and Falchikov(1989)reviewed 48 studies reporting self-teacher assessment agreement. In most, self-assessments agreed with teachers' ratings but the reviewers expressed concern about the quality of many of the studies. There was extensive variation about what constituted agreement; the criteria used by teachers and students were frequently not defined; there were few replications involving comparable groups of students; some studies combined effort with achievement in a single rating; self-grading was not defined (e.g., it could be what a student deserves or what he or she expects to get).

Student self-assessments are generally higher than teacher ratings, although exceptions have been reported e.g., (Moheidat and Baniabdelrahman, 2011)for middle school students. Hung (2009:100) examined the electronic portfolio of 70 female students of Tokyo Woman's Christian University and he found that the content and face validity of that project was high. Over-estimates are more likely to be found if the self-assessments contribute to the student's grade in a course (Boud and Falchikov, 1989). Young children may over-estimate because they lack the cognitive skills to integrate information about their abilities and are more vulnerable to wishful thinking.

Self-Assessment and Students' Performance

There is ample evidence that self-assessment contributes to student achievement (Hughes, 2003), particularly if teachers provide direct instruction in how to self-assess - e.g., Hung (2009); Moheidat and Baniabdelrahman(2011). There is also evidence that self-assessment contributes to improved student behavior (Olina and Sullivan, 2004). Some data suggest that students prefer self-assessment to assessment by the teacher alone. The reasons given by grade 5-11 students why they preferred self-assessment suggest additional benefits of self-assessment: 1) students said that with self-assessment they had a better understanding of what they were supposed to do because they were involved in setting the criteria for the assessment; 2) students argued the self-assessment was fairer because it enabled them to include important performance dimensions, such as effort, that would not usually be included in their grade; 3) self-assessment enabled them to communicate information about their performance (e.g., their goals and reasoning) that was not otherwise available to their teacher; 4) self-assessment gave them information they could use to improve their work (Ross, Rolheiser, and Hogaboam-Gray, 1998). These changes in perception in the value of assessment through greater involvement in the process might reduce the trend reported by Paris, Lawton, Turner and Roth (1991) in which students become increasingly cynical about the validity and value of assessment as they move through the school system.

Self-assessment encourages students to focus on their attainment of explicit criteria, rather than normative comparisons to other students. For example, when a grade four student in a classroom that used self-assessment extensively was asked what she compared her work to, she reported, "I usually compare it to my own work because no other people's marks are going on my report card...so I need to see if I improved" (Ross et al., 1998). The same study found that student conversations about self-assessment were much less focused on marks than their conversations about assessments by the teacher, even though both types of assessment contributed to the final grade.

The supporters of self-assessment see student self-assessment as a means for making instruction more interactive, involving students more actively in their own learning, and developing lifelong learning skills (Black and Wiliam, 1998:144). Classroom assessment

researchers view self-assessment as an instructional strategy that, when applied to the mastery of specific learning tasks, can help students better understand the learning goals and take greater responsibility for their own learning. Black and Wiliam suggest that part of teachers' responsibility is to download students' evaluative knowledge so that students eventually become independent of the teacher and intelligently engage and monitor their own development" (1998:146).

Relatively little research has been conducted on the benefits of self-assessment for other groups. Teachers may benefit from self-assessment to the extent that making assessment criteria explicit to students may help teachers clarify their intentions and distinguish essential from less important features of student performance. More focused teaching might result. Teacher-student conferences to resolve discrepancies between self- and teacher-assessments might give teachers insights into student thinking; especially student misconceptions that impede further learning. Subsequent instruction may explicitly address deficiencies revealed in the conference. Little has been written about parent reactions to self-assessment. However, the construction of rubrics using language meaningful to students might also make the goals of the curriculum more accessible to parents and the meaning of expected standards more transparent.

Although most research on self-assessment focuses on its contribution to academic achievement, some teachers use self-assessment only to measure social skills and to encourage compliance with classroom rules. One explanation might be the previously noted policy impediments to using self-assessment for academic grading. In addition, teachers may find it more challenging to engage students in constructing rubrics for academic performance than for behavioral goals.

Self-Assessment Procedures and Models

Teachers who are concerned about the inaccuracy of self-assessment may be partially reassured by the research evidence about the psychometric properties of self-assessment. The concern is likely to remain. Improvement in the utility of self-assessment is most likely to come from attention to four dimensions in training students how to assess their work.

First, the process for defining the criteria that students use to assess their work will improve the validity of assessment if the rubric uses language intelligible to students, addresses competencies that are familiar to students, and includes performance features they perceive to be important (Black et al., 2003:49). Rolheiser (1996) suggested several strategies for engaging students in the construction of simple rubrics. A key message in Rolheiser's manual is that teachers should not surrender control of assessment criteria but enact a process in which students develop a deeper understanding of key expectations mandated by governing curriculum guidelines. Offering to expand the rubric to include additional "kid-criteria" contributes to student commitment. In addition to focusing student attention on specific aspects of a domain, the construction of a rubric also provides students with a language for talking about their learning. In some instances, a process of progressive revelation of the rubric may be appropriate, if students lack sufficient experience in the domain to be able to identify dimensions of mastery.

Second, teaching students how to apply the criteria also contributes to the credibility of the assessment and student understanding of the rubric (Black et al., 2003:52). Among the more powerful strategies are teacher explanations of each criterion, teacher modeling of criteria application, and student practice in applying the rubric to examples of student work (including

their own). Within-lesson comments that link instructional episodes and student tasks to assessment criteria reinforce student understanding of the criteria.

Third, giving students feedback on their self-assessments is a process of triangulating student self-assessments with teacher appraisals and peer assessments of the same work using the same criteria (Black et al., 2003:52). Conferencing with individuals and groups to resolve discrepancies can heighten attention to evidence, the antidote to lying and self-delusion. A key issue is to help students move from holistic to analytic scoring of their work. For example, student self-assessments are frequently driven by their perception of the effort expended on the assignment, an important criterion but it should not swamp attention to other dimensions of performance.

Fourth, students need help in using self-assessment data to improve performance. Student sophistication in processing data improves with age (Black et al., 2003:53). Older students were more likely than younger to compare current to past achievement on similar tasks. Teachers can provide simple recording forms for tracking performance over time to compensate for memory loss. Teachers can provide games, conferences, and menus of examples to support goal setting. Goals are more likely to improve student achievement if they are set by students themselves, are specific, attainable with reasonable amounts of effort, focus on near as opposed to distant ends, and link immediate plans to longer term aspirations. Recording goals in a contract increases accountability. Teachers can also address student beliefs that contribute to higher goal setting, such as attributions for success and failure and seeing ability as something that can improve rather than as a fixed entity.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006:202) illustrate an example model of how these four dimensions to conduct self-assessment in relation to improving students' performance. In the model, an academic task set by the teacher in class, or set as an assignment, is shown as the trigger to initiate self-regulatory processes in the student. Engagement with the task requires that the student draw on prior knowledge and motivational beliefs, and construct a personal interpretation of the meaning of the task and its requirements. Based on this internal conception, the student formulates his or her own task goals. While there would normally be an overlap between the student's goals and those of the teacher, the degree of overlap may not be high (e.g. if the student wishes only to pass the assignment). The student's goals might also be fuzzy rather than clear (e.g. a vague intention or task orientation). Nonetheless, these goals would help shape the strategies and tactics that are used by students to generate outcomes, both internal and externally observable. Internal outcomes refer to changes in cognitive or affective/motivational states that occur during task engagement (e.g. increased understanding, changes in self-perceptions of ability). Externally observable outcomes refer to tangible products produced (e.g. essays) and behaviors' (e.g. student presentations).

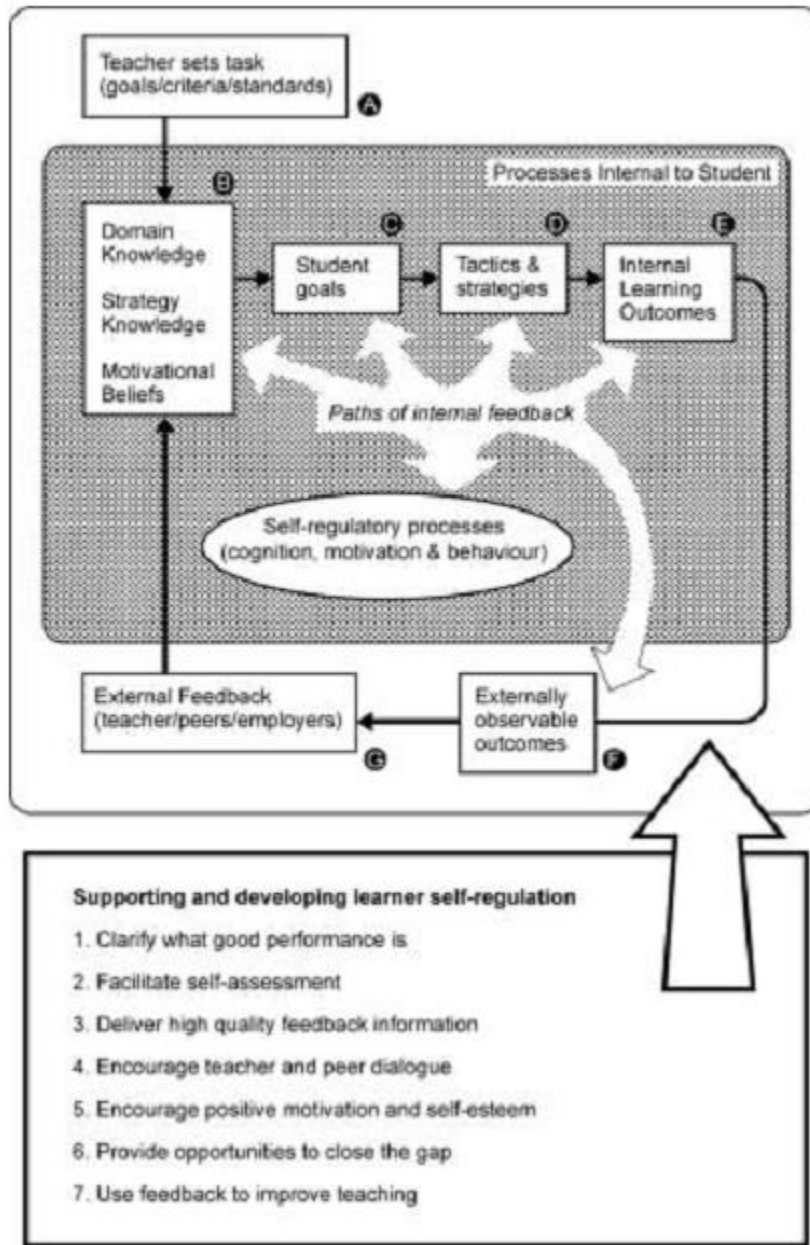


Figure 2: A
 model of self-regulated learning and the feedback principles that support and develop self-regulation in students(Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006)

Another model is proposed by Rolheiser(1996) in which he indicates that self-evaluation plays a key role in fostering an upward cycle of learning. When students evaluate their performance positively, self-evaluations encourage students to set higher goals (1) and commit more personal resources or effort (2) to them. The combination of goals (1) and effort (2) equals achievement (3). A student's achievement results in self-judgment (4), such as a student

contemplating the question, "Were my goals met?" The result of the self-judgment is self-reaction (5), or a student responding to the judgment with the question, "How do I feel about that?" Goals, effort, achievement, self-judgment, and self-reaction all can combine to impact self-confidence (6) in a positive way. Self-evaluation is really the combination of the self-judgment and self-reaction components of the model, and if we can teach students to do this better we can contribute to an upward cycle of better learning. The following is the model.

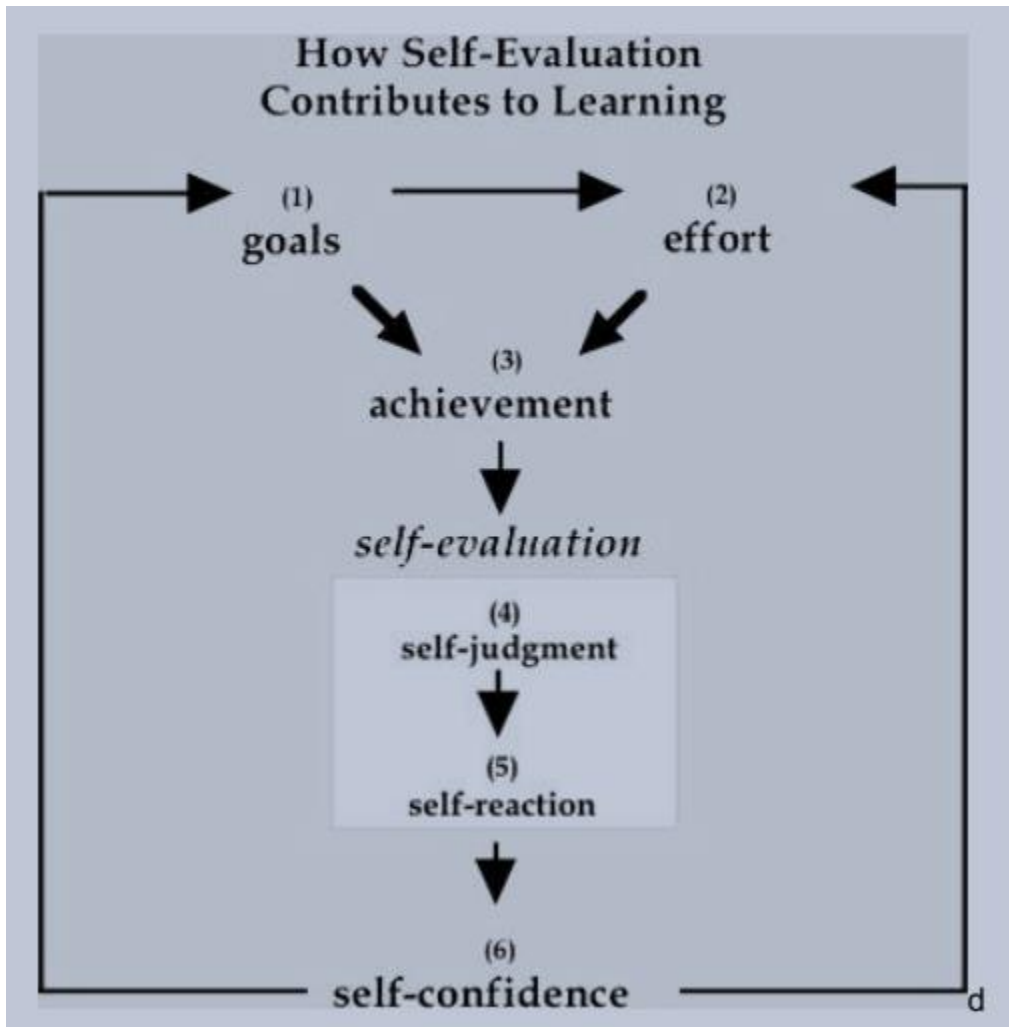


Figure 3:
Rolheiser Model of self-assessment

The above model by Rolheiser(1996) can be implemented using practically his Growth Scheme for Teacher Implementation of Stages of Student Self-Assessment. He identifies four stages of teaching student self-assessment (see diagram below). At each stage, initiating different levels of teacher and student involvement gradually gives students less structure and specific direction and more responsibility and freedom. In stage 1, teachers involve students in determining criteria. In stage 2 the teacher shows students how to apply the criteria to evaluate work samples. Providing examples of evaluated work helps students understand, specifically,

the meaning of the criteria and how to use them. In the third stage teachers provide students feedback concerning their application of the criteria. At this point it is helpful if they show students qualitatively different products to illustrate how criteria are applied. The last stage involves identifying subsequent learning goals and strategies that can attain the goals.

Stage 1 ➡ **Stage 2** ➡ **Stage 3** ➡ **Stage 4**

Level of Implementation	<i>Establishing Criteria</i>	<i>Teaching Students How to Apply Criteria</i>	<i>Providing Feedback to Students on Application of Criteria</i>	<i>Setting Learning Goals and Strategies</i>
Beginning	Criteria given to students for their reaction	Examples of applying criteria given to students	Teacher provides feedback	Goals and strategies determined by teacher
Intermediate	Students select criteria from a menu of possibilities	Teacher describes how to apply criteria	Feedback provided by both teacher and students	A menu of goals and strategies is provided by the teacher
Full	Students generate criteria	Teacher models how criteria apply	Teacher engages students in justifying their feedback	Student constructs goals and strategies

Figure 4:
Growth Scheme for Teacher Implementation of Stages of Student Self-Assessment.
Adapted from Rolheiser (1996)

Rolheiser’s “growth scheme” is useful to check how often teachers use student self-assessment and to determine any necessary improvements in the process. Modifications are needed at different grade levels, but even elementary students can understand and apply criteria to evaluate their own and others’ work. For example, rather than emphasized direct instruction in helping students understand criteria, teachers can help students identify criteria by examining examples of good and not-so-good products. At lower levels teachers can simply provide a list of additional learning activities; higher-level students generate their own ideas about what they need to do. Student involvement in determining how to self-assess is particularly valuable. It enhances student motivation by providing a sense of ownership and responsibility. Engagement also increases intrinsic motivation to base performance more on competence and less on rewards for performance.

Conclusion

There is sufficient information from research on self-assessment to answer the questions posed at the outset of this paper with reasonable confidence. Student self-assessment, defined as a dynamic process in which students self-monitor, and self-evaluate, is a critical skill that enhances student motivation and achievement. There is sufficient information from research on self-assessment to answer the questions posed at the outset of this article with reasonable confidence. There is persuasive evidence, across several grades and subjects, that self-assessment contributes to student learning and that the effects grow larger with direct instruction on self-assessment procedures.

In the current era of high-stakes accountability there is considerable pressure to focus only on student performance and to minimize the extent to which self-assessment is taught, experienced, and encouraged. Self-assessment represents a process that every teacher can emphasize. As this paper has indicated, sample research and theory prove the importance of self-assessment. When students set goals that aid their improved understanding, and then identify criteria, self-evaluate their progress toward learning, reflect on their learning, and generate strategies for more learning, they will show improved performance with meaningful motivation. Surely, those steps will accomplish two important goals - improved student self-efficacy and confidence to learn - as well as high scores on accountability tests.

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