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SELF-ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract

This study has the main aim to examine whether there is a significant difference between students' self-assessment of their speaking skills and teachers' assessment of students' speaking skills. In addition, the study also aims to determine whether students and teachers assess different components of speaking skill such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency significantly different from each other or not. Finally, the study aims to investigate whether students' self-assessment show differences in terms of their proficiency level in English, gender, and exposure to English outside the school. The data were collected via a self-assessment scale given to the participants and English language teachers' assessment of the participants based on a speaking assessment scale. The results show that the teachers and the students assess the speaking skills significantly differently from each other. The mean score of the teachers' assessment is 79.2 out of 100 while the mean score of the students' self-assessment is 61.7. These scores conclude that the teachers assess the students' speaking skills higher than the students themselves. In a nutshell, students evaluate their vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation and communication skills lower than their teachers. The results also show how insecure the students feel about their speaking skills as a whole. In addition, the results show that the students' self-assessment of their speaking skills and teacher assessment of speaking skills change depending on the students' level of proficiency, gender and exposure to English outside the classroom.

Keywords: self-assessment, speaking skills, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

Introduction

The main aim of this study is to investigate the contribution of self-assessment to students' learning and assessment process. Self-assessment is an alternative assessment type which requires students to assess their language learning process; how successful they are during the learn process and whether they achieve their goals or not. According to Nunan (2011) and Oscarson (2011), self-assessment, as an assessment tool, increases students' understanding of their own language skills by

enabling them to realize their strengths and weaknesses with a reflective approach. Besides, self-assessment enables learners with plenty of chances to reflect on and assess the methods and techniques utilized during their learning process.

It is alleged by Holec (2013) and Allwright (2016) that autonomous students are able to reflect on their own language learning process with their knowledge about their learning and are enthusiastic to collaborate with their peers. These students determine the goal of the learning process, take charge of their learning, share knowledge, plan and manage learning techniques and review them. In order to achieve all of these, students are required to be qualified and authorized so as to apply their autonomy. An important characteristic of autonomous students is their ability to make reflections on their own language learning process, and to make realistic assessments of their success during this process. Blanche, P. (2016) suggests that for a fruitful autonomy process, continuous assessment of the learning process done by teachers, peers and through self-assessment is essential.

Studies also report that self-assessment lessens the negative emotional influences of the traditional assessment methods. For instance, negative emotional outcomes such as anxiety, stress and fear of being assessed by teachers or other evaluators become irrelevant when students assess their own performance . In addition, the practicality and cost-effectiveness of self-assessment are two more reasons for language institutions to implement self-assessment in their programmes. Self-assessments are regarded as more practical than the traditional assessment methods because they are easier to design, construct, and apply and the process takes less time

Self-assessment of language skills has also been one of the major concerns in the field of language assessment research. There are numerous studies conducted on different language skills with participants from nearly all ages and with almost all proficiency levels in various learning environments. For instance, there are studies correlating self-assessments of receptive (reading and listening skills) and productive (writing and speaking skills) skills , and correlating reading, writing, listening, speaking skills, grammar and vocabulary development separately with one another.However, most studies on self-assessment seem to investigate self-assessment of reading, listening and writing skills but neglect speaking skills. In one of the few studies focusing on self-assessment of speaking skills, Harris (2014) states that self-assessment of oral abilities is harder to design, organise and apply.

As far as skills-based self-assessment research is concerned, the literature shows that there are more studies conducted on receptive skills than productive skills. In other words, there is plenty of research concentrated on listening and reading skills and less on speaking and writing.

There are very few studies conducted on self-assessment of language skills in the Kazakh context. These studies are generally focused on the reliability of self-assessment tools and students'

beliefs about self-assessment. This study is conducted with only Elementary level (A1) students, and its aim is to investigate the effect of self-assessment application on students' speaking skills improvement. That's why conducting research that focuses on the concerns mentioned above is both significant and essential. The present study aims to determine whether there is a distinction between the self-assessment of the English speaking skills of Kazakh learners and teachers' assessments of the learners' English speaking skills. Another purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of students' proficiency level in English, students' gender and their exposure to English via being engaged with extracurricular activities on students' self-assessment of their speaking skills. To conclude, the present study aims to shed light on whether students and teachers assess speaking skills in English differently from each other or not and how students assess their speaking skills in English in general and in particular for different components of speaking skills. Thus, the present study aims to contribute to the past research by providing insights about self-assessment of speaking skills.

Method

The present study aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

➢ Is there a significant difference between students' self-assessment scores and teachers' assessment scores regarding students' speaking skills in English?

➢ Is there a significant difference between students' self-assessment scores and teachers' assessment scores regarding components of speaking skills?

➢ Do students' self-assessment of speaking skills scores vary as students' proficiency level increases?

Participants

The participants of this study are 30 Kazakh learners of English with the age range of 14-15 studying at M.Abenova school Turkistan, Kazakhstan.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

Data collection tools that are used in this study include a self-assessment rubric, the participants' self-assessment scores of their speaking performance and their teachers' assessment scores of the students' speaking performance. The self-assessment rubric consisted of questions about the participants' demographic information, their use of English in after-school activities and their performance in speaking skills. The teachers' assessment scores of the students' speaking performance were obtained through their assessment given to the students in the speaking exam throughout the 2019-2020 fall semester.

The Self-Assessment Rubric

The rubric which was developed to collect data about how the students self-assess their speaking performance consisted of two sections. The first section included 19 questions about the participants' demographic information and their daily use of English outside the classroom. In the second section, there were 25 questions asking the participants to assess their speaking performance in English in terms of their use of grammar, vocabulary knowledge, fluency in English, ronunciation accuracy and their communication skills. In order to ensure content consistency in the student and the teacher participants' evaluation of the speaking performances, the rubric presented to the students was prepared according to the rubric which was used by the teachers in the speaking exam in which the participants were assessed. The items in the rubric were prepared in the form of "I can…" statements to be more comprehensible (Interagency Language Roundtable). The rubric was piloted and the actual data were collected two weeks after the piloting process. The participants were given approximately 20 minutes to assess their speaking skills with the rubric as it was understood that this duration would be enough based on the piloting experiences.

Findings

With the first research question we aimed to examine whether there is a significant difference between the assessments of speaking skills evaluated by the students themselves and their teachers. To answer this question, the data gathered from the students' self-assessment scale and their speaking exam scores given by the teachers were analysed with Paired Sample T-Test in SPSS.

As can be seen from the results, while the mean score for the students' self-assessment of their speaking skills was 61.7752 in general, the mean score for the teachers' assessment of students' speaking skills was 79.269. According to the results of Paired Sample T-Test there was a significant difference between these two groups' assessment of the students' speaking skills (P= 0.00). The results indicated that the students under evaluated their speaking skills as the students' self-assessment mean score was lower than the teachers' assessment mean score, which might also mean that the students were not aware of their own speaking performances and tended to believe that they were not competent in speaking skills. In other words, the way the participants perceived their speaking skills and the way the teachers perceived and assessed the students' speaking skills were not in line with each other.

The second research question of the study was as follows:

Is there a significant difference between students' self-assessment scores and teachers' assessment scores regarding components of speaking skills?

This research question aimed to investigate whether the students' and the teachers' assessment of different components/subskills of speaking skills differ from one another. In order to find an answer to this question, the data were analysed with Paired Sample T-Tests and the results are presented in the

tables below. Each language component assessed separately in the student self-assessment scale and in the teachers' assessment scale are analysed and presented separately.

Another question of the present study is related to how gender influences the students' and the teachers' assessment of students' speaking skills of English. The results showed that the male students assess their speaking skills as better than the female students. In other words, the male students think that they have better English speaking skills (M=64.9) than the female students do (M=58.7). This result shows that the male students trust in and feel more confident about their speaking skills than the female students. This may be related to the idea that male students may be more autonomous and confident towards language learning. In one study, which is not in ESL/EFL field, it was revealed that the male students might be more inclined to assess their verbal and numerical abilities higher than the female students (Wright and Houck,2015). This result is in line with the present study' result related to gender variable.

Conclusion

The outcomes of the study, in general, show that there are significant differences between the students' self-assessments and the teachers' assessment of the students' speaking skill and its components such as grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation and communication skills. Furthermore, the study also revealed that proficiency, gender and spending longer time on extracurricular activities have a significant impact on assessing speaking skills.

There are a variety of factors leading to this situation, one of which is students' readiness to assess their own performance. In other words, if students are trained on how to apply self-assessment, they are able to make logical judgements about their language learning. Students' lack of knowledge of components such as grammar and vocabulary may lead to inconsistent assessments between students and teachers. In order to have a better self-assessment process, students should be informed about these components. Also, the rubrics that are used in the exams can be shown to students and the criteria of assessment can also be made familiar to the students so that students can understand how to assess different components.

Another reason for the inconsistent results in the literature review might be related to students' individual differences such as their gender, age, cultural background, level of education and/or their length of exposure to the target language. In this study, among the individual differences, the relationship between the students' self-assessment and their gender and their involvement in extracurricular activities are examined. As indicated above, our results show that gender is significantly influential on students' assessment of speaking skills, namely, the male students tend to assess themselves as better speakers of English compared to the female students. Additionally, the time spent

on extracurricular activities has a significant effect on students' assessments. As the time spent on these activities increases, the students assess their speaking skills as better and more accurately due to the increased length of exposure to the target language. That's why, the new motto in language learning and assessment process should be "exposure makes perfect". It can be also alleged that extracurricular activities should be promoted and students should be encouraged to attend and do these activities in order to make them more autonomous, aware and motivated, which may lead them to self-assess themselves better. Schools and language institutions should create different extracurricular activities for this and it may be a part of their language education and assessment. These results reveal that there is a need for further research to consider the role of individual differences on students' self-assessment.

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