Original Article

Language

The Relationship between Self-, Peer-, and Teacher-Assessments of EFL Learners' Speaking

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ABSTRACT [ENGLISH/ANGLAIS]

Despite the importance and broad studies on tests and assessments during so many years, educationalists have a negative attitude towards the final teacher- administered tests. This study is conducted to investigate assessment in ELT classes for the purpose of satisfying language learners with their marks through comparing the marks given by three groups of assessors (self-, peer-, and teacher-assessments). This has been done with 25 upper-intermediate level students at Semnan University. A questionnaire was used to compare and contrast the learners' attitudes towards their involvement in assessment. The learner-assessors had a training session before the assessment task. The findings show that a strong correlation between self, peer, and teacher-assessments can be estimated through Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient formula. Also, involving students in the assessment makes the testing environment safe and stress free.

Keywords: self-assessment, peer-assessment, teacher-assessment, rater training, correlation coefficient, speaking

RÉSUMÉ [FRANÇAIS/FRENCH]

Malgré l'importance et de vastes études sur les tests et les évaluations pendant tant d'années, les pédagogues ont une attitude négative envers les tests finaux des enseignants-administrés. Cette étude est menée pour étudier l'évaluation dans les classes d'ELT dans le but de satisfaire les apprenants d'une langue avec leurs marques à travers la comparaison des notes attribuées par trois groupes d'évaluateurs (-soi, par des pairs, et des enseignants-évaluations). Cela a été fait avec 25 étudiants de niveau intermédiaire supérieur à Semnan Université. Un questionnaire a été utilisé pour comparer et contraster les attitudes des apprenants en vue de leur participation à l'évaluation. Les évaluateurs l'apprenant a eu une séance de formation avant que la tâche d'évaluation. Les résultats montrent une forte corrélation entre l'auto, par les pairs, et des enseignants-évaluations peuvent être estimées par produit Pearson formule Moment Coefficient de corrélation. En outre, la participation des élèves dans l'évaluation rend le coffre-fort environnement de test et sans stress.

Mots-clés: d'auto-évaluation, évaluation par les pairs, des enseignants-évaluation, de formation évaluateur, coefficient de corrélation, parlant

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of assessment is clear for everyone, especially those who deal with teaching and learning in educational settings. The importance and reasons of assessment are stated by some authorities in the field. Assessments are at the core of the educational process because they have a direct impact on the learning processes of students [1]. It is also emphasized that assessment of students' learning is an important task. It has a strong influence on students' approaches to learning and outcomes of their studies [2].

The term assessment brings the image of an end–of–course paper–and-pencil tests to mind which aims at telling both teachers and students how much the student knows and does not know. Assessment is more than test, and it includes a range of activities and tasks that are used by teachers to evaluate a student progress and growth on a daily basis [3].

Studies show that the end of course teacher-assessment provokes a sense of nervousness for the learners. It is stated that there is a sense of anxiety among learners about the assessment and test. In order to remove the negative sense from the learners they should be involved in the assessment process. They should carry the responsibility of the assessment themselves and do their teachers' job of assessment [4].

Some other researchers have conducted similar studies [5, 6, 7, 8]. In any of these studies, the researchers focus

on some specific aspects. For instance, [9] focused on the influence of peer feedback on self– and peer–assessments of oral skills. [8] focused on the validity of self–assessment in his study. [10] worked on the training and its influence on peer–assessment. [11] studied about the role of some psychological and personality traits of the rater on the accuracy of self– and peer–assessments, as an instance. These studies have been done with EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) students mostly rather than English language learners.

Despite all of the previous research findings and applications, there is a sense of disapproving about assessment for students. One reason can be the weakness of the tests designed to measure the learner ability. The low validity and reliability of such tests may be the cause of inaccurate estimation of learner ability.

The next can be the inability of the raters in testing. Most of the language learners in their language classes are not satisfied with the final marks given by their teachers; they think they deserve more. This might be according to the teachers' inability to rate the true ability of the learners (or the true score). Therefore, the students claim their knowledge is more than what is estimated.

The last reason can be the revolution in viewpoints towards the roles of the teachers and learners in educational settings. Contrary to the traditional teacher–centered teaching and assessment, the educational system is the witness of the more modern and student–centered type of assessment. This type of education leads to learner autonomy as is the case in most European countries.

This study focuses on the last two causes of learner dissatisfaction. If you ask your students to choose between these dichotomies, which of them would be more favorable to them in your opinion? (Traditional vs. modern assessment, teacher–centeredness vs. student-centeredness, subjective vs. objective measurements)

Based on the researchers' previous surveys, the students are inclined more towards the second part of each dichotomy[12, 13, 14]. The learners do not like their scores on the final exams mainly; most of them do not trust their teachers in marking their performances. As a result, they are afraid of the exam sessions; they think even though they try hard, they will not receive a satisfactory mark. Since attending the exam session is a must to pass the university courses, the learners or let's better say, the assesses go to the exam with a sense of anxiety. This happens to the majority of the students but not all of them.

It seems that the university students are tired of the traditional roles of the teachers and students. In traditional educational settings, the teacher is the transmitter of knowledge and the learners are the passive recipients of that knowledge. In the exam sessions, the teacher plays the role of assessor, and every individual student should provide the teacher what she/he has memorized during the term either rotely or meaningfully. This situation is really boring to both learners and teachers.

The students even do not know how the teacher evaluates their performances. Have you ever heard some students say: "I am sure that the professor hates me but loves other students? So, he gave me a lower mark although I tried and studied more".

This and other similar statements show that students are not satisfied with the marks they receive on the final exams. They suppose that the teachers do not have clear and objective criteria to do the assessment job. Therefore, it seems unfair to learners. In such a situation, what would be a good solution to the problem? In other words, what should the teachers do in order to avoid such problems and keep learners or assesses satisfied?

The purpose of self-, peer-, and teacher–assessments in this study was to grade learners and to record marks for the purpose of comparing the scores with each other. So the main focus was on the testing of the performance rather than the improvement of the learning. This study focused on assessment of learning compared with assessment for learning.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
The Participants

The study had been conducted with a group of mixed 25 EFL undergraduate students studying literature at the department of foreign languages at Semnan University.

The participants were supposed to pass the course of speaking. They were homogeneous in terms of their levels of proficiency. Although the participants of the study were at upper-intermediate level, they were grouped into three levels of week, strong, and medium. In other words, they were homogeneous among which there were strong to weak students.

The Instruments

A questionnaire was utilized for the purpose of comparing and contrasting the participants' attitudes towards the integration of self-, peer-, and teacher-assessments. The validity of the questionnaire had been

obtained before distributing among the participants by giving it to several experts in the field.

An oral assessment rating scale [15] and a grading chart were utilized for the purpose of judging the performance and recording the scores of each lecturer.

Procedure

The first step in the process of the study was the distribution of the questionnaire within the 15-minute time limit. After gathering the questionnaire, the overall procedure was explained to the participants. Then, the assessment criteria were explained to and discussed with the students in class with reference to the assessment forms. Since the learners were from the same language background the scale and the instruction on how to use it were presented in the native language. The training for the assessment procedure was provided to ensure that students understood what and how to assess. In so doing, students were introduced to the criteria and were asked to practice assessment before undertaking the assessment task. All assessors were asked to use the same evaluation form to record analytical scores and comments.

Having explained the way of using the chart and scale, the participants were asked to score the performances. The participants were then given 10 minutes to familiarize themselves with the contents of the scale and to think and focus on the task.

As part of the course requirement, students were assigned an oral presentation on a topic of their own interest, such as travel, education, hobbies, or club activities.

So, each learner was supposed to prepare and give an oral presentation lasting from 15 to 30 minutes. So, the task of oral presentation was done during the class time limit. During the assessment task, other students as well as the teacher utilized the grading chart to record the score. For the purpose of self-assessment, the voice of each lecturer was recorded and the lecturer was supposed to listen to his/her presentation and do the same as others did previously.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data, the mean score of peer-assessment was calculated and finally, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient formula was utilized according to the nature of the data.

RESULTS
Descriptive Statistics

In order to calculate the correlations between SA and PA, TA and PA, SA and TA, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient formula has been utilized through SPSS statistics 16.0. In the following tables v.1 is defined as SA, v. 2 as PA, and v. 3 as TA.

Table 1: This table shows descriptive Statistics of 25 Students

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
v.1	25	15.00	19.50	17.3760	1.48500
v.2	25	14.17	19.40	16.4712	1.25836
v.3	25	14.00	20.00	16.6000	1.85405
Valid N listwise	25				

v.1= SA, v.2= PA, v.3= TA

The descriptive statistics for the scores of the 25 students in speaking class has been indicated in table 1. The table provides the number of students, the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of the scores in speaking group.

Table 2 indicates the correlation coefficient between SA, PA, and TA.

Table 2: This table shows correlations between SA, PA, TA

		v.1	v.2	v.3
v.1	Pearson Correlation	1	.764(**)	.820(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	25	25	25
v.2	Pearson Correlation	.764(**)	1	.791(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	25	25	25
v.3	Pearson Correlation	.820(**)	.791(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	25	25	25

v.1= SA, v.2= PA, v.3= TA

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

The above table shows that there is a significant correlation between SA, PA, and TA. The correlation between SA and PA has been reported as: .764, between SA and TA as: .820, and between TA and PA as: .791.

The Analysis of the Questionnaire

The analysis of the questionnaire showed that the majority of the students were not completely satisfied with teacher-given marks. Therefore, they showed positive attitude towards self- and peer-assessments. Moreover, a large number of the respondents showed a positive attitude towards the students-given scores combined with the final teacher-assigned marks.

The majority of the respondents showed a positive attitude towards the student-given scores combined with the final teacher-assigned marks. One student claimed it is helpful in cases where teachers miss or disregard two or more points in evaluation. Some stated that it depends on the personality of the teacher. Most of the teachers make the final decisions themselves and do not like to involve students. Maybe they do so because of the students' lack of skill and experience in doing so.

A large number of the students were positive being assessed by the classmates. In the questionnaire, the respondents reported the feelings of happiness, sympathy, goodness, dislike, being honest, logical, proud, satisfied, mundane, responsible, arrogant, being helpful, serious, embarrassed, stressful and afraid of not being fair while assessed by their classmates.

More than half of the respondents reported being comfortable and making progress through self- and peer-assessments. But others felt worried, stressed, having low self-confidence, nervousness and depression. They believed self- and peer-assessments would be difficult and require experience and training.

A large number of students reported negative attitudes towards the teacher-assessment. They felt stressed and afraid of being ignored by the teacher. But an equal number stated if the teacher is a kind of person who does the assessment fairly, they feel satisfied. Additionally, if they have enough knowledge in the related course they have self-confidence and feel positive.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the results of this study which indicate a strong relationship between student-assessment and teacher-assessment besides the positive attitudes of the learners, the following conclusions and implications can be drawn.

1. Is there any Relationship Between SA, PA, and TA in Speaking Skill?

The null hypothesis for the first research question is that: There is no relationship between SA, PA, and TA in speaking skill.

It appeared that there is a significant correlation between SA and TA, PA and TA, and PA and SA in speaking group. In speaking class, all learners were involved in assigning score to the presenter. Therefore, the peer-assessment scores were the mean sores calculated from all of the participants. There has been a range of scores given by multiple levels of students, from weak to strong ones.

The involvement of the learners in the assessment process increases the reflective capacity and the level of the critical thinking. This is parallel with what Underhill [16] states. He believes that "where several learners are involved in a test task at the same time they can be asked to assess each other as well as themselves. This group assessment… makes the judgment more authentic as in real life,…, using the same scale, will help the learner to make his own self-judgment more critical and accurate".

For self-assessment it should be noted that students had difficulty deciding about their own levels of ability, and tried to skip it. They were interested in doing SA for the purpose of learning rather than testing. They could not easily assign mark to their own performances.

In the process of SA there is also the danger of over- or under-estimation of students' performances. It has been observed that weak students tend to over-estimate and strong students tend to under-estimate their own abilities. These findings are confirmed by AlFallay [11]. This estimation has not been under the focus of this study, and concluded only subjectively. But since the scores by the teacher are very similar to the scores by learners themselves, the stated problem seems to be less likely in the current study.

The teacher-assessment in this group has been done more objectively. The teacher was asked to go through the criteria and charts as well as the learners, and apply the assessment process as accurately as possible. He tried to be more objective and excluded non-target factors that he always considered in the assessment process.

2. Do the Learners have Positive Attitude Towards Self- Peer-, and Teacher-Assessments?

The learners have positive attitude only towards self- and peer-assessments.

The analysis of the questionnaire showed that although some were not interested, most of the participants had positive attitude towards their involvement in the assessment procedure. Those who did not like it reasoned that somebody with higher ability and knowledge should judge their performances; the learners are not able to do so; they may not be fair; they lack

enough confidence and experience. Also, self- and peer-assessments create stress, and friendship affects the results. But most of them were interested in doing so according to the following reasons:

1. The learners can enhance their input (in learning) by focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of their peers as well as their own.
2. It could raise the level of the students' critical thinking and reflective capacity by focusing on their own and their peers' performances and zooming on the mistakes and weaknesses.
3. This process helped students feel autonomous in the educational context. As they scored their own performances and their peers', the students felt a sense of autonomy.
4. It is better than teacher-assessment. They had less anxiety while assessed by peers than by teachers.

It reduced the burden of marking by the teacher. The final mark is a kind of a mutual agreement between the teacher and the student.

The high correlation between teacher and student-assessments indicates that the teacher-assessment can be supplemented with student-assessments in the context of productive language skills.

If the learners can be involved in the task of assessment the teachers' time could be utilized more productively on issues related to improving their teaching techniques.

By involving students in the assessment process teachers can make the testing environment safe and stress free. They can involve them in the assessment of mid-term exam and benefit from the results for the final exam although they are no more involved in the final assessment.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

No conflict of interests was declared by authors