Students' self-assessment of their own oral presentations: How much do they know?

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Abstract: In this age of standards-based education, student self-assessment promises to deliver improved student motivation and engagement, and learning. Correctly implemented, student self-assessment can promote intrinsic motivation, internally controlled effort, a mastery goal orientation, and more meaningful learning. Its influence on student performance—in both classroom assessments and large-scale accountability assessments—empowers students to guide their own learning and internalize the criteria for judging success (McMillan & Hearn, 2008). The main aim of this qualitative study is to investigate students' ability to assess their own oral communication skills. Data for the study were gathered from 40 participants composed of college students enrolled in an oral communications course. The speakers watched a video recording of their delivered speech in class and assessed their presentation using a provided set of guide questions. Their self-assessment was compared to their peers' and instructor's assessment of the same presentation to see whether the speakers were able to recognize their own strengths and limitations. A categorical content analysis of the speakers' self-critiques was employed in order to elicit codes. Results showed that students tend to overestimate their oral communication skills and may need more training in self-assessment and metacognition. The paper closes with directions for future research.

Key Words: oral communication; self-assessment; college students; speech; evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

Self-assessment is the practice of continuing reflection, self-judgment, and self-monitoring to summarize one's strengths and identify areas for improvement. This involves learning from one's experiences; judging one's personal, educational, and professional performance; examining personal characteristics based on evidence, external standards, and explicit criteria for the purpose of future quality and performance improvements. Research has shown that self-assessment can improve learner's communication skills, and can result in behavior change (Nonyel, 2015).

Self-assessment skill is useful to every learner. McMillan and Hearn (2008) observe that "Students need to self-assess to know when they are learning, how much effort they must expend for success, when they have been successful, when they are wrong, and which learning strategies work well for them" (p. 42). The reinforcement of one's knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors can enhance one's self-esteem and influence motivation by strengthening self-efficacy and readiness to change. Self-assessment is essential for lifelong learning for students, educators, and professionals.

Self-assessment can also help learners realize their own learning potential by improving self-awareness of their own beliefs and potential misconceptions. It may be used to promote ongoing appraisal of the qualities of one's performance, and reinforce one's cognitive abilities and skills. Through self-assessment, one can discover one's likes and dislikes, knowledge gaps, and opportunities for self-improvement. Self-assessment may also be used to improve morale, strengthen commitment to competent performance, and enhance motivation to take responsibility for one's professional growth. Self-assessment is usually facilitated by using and incorporation feedback from peers, teachers and/or preceptors as a learner sets goals and formulates action plans (Nonyel, 2015).

The ability of learners to assess their own skills appears to be especially critical in the area of oral communication. Global competitiveness and increased knowledge sharing have enhanced the importance of oral communication skills in today's graduates. Oral communication is usually considered evidence of learning and is frequently cited as one of the most desired graduate employability skills. Subramaniam and Raja Jarun (2012) conclude that due to the competitiveness and explosive nature of the market environment, there is a vital need to adequately prepare graduates with good English Oral communication skills before they go for their industrial training. Previous research, typically focused on employer perceptions, largely indicates graduate oral communication skills do not meet industry expectations. In the Philippines, Separa, Medina and Generales (2015) found that students' areas of difficulty can be said to be rooted from their concepts of what must be the standards of English. Oral communication anxiety stems from: expectation, training and experience, audience, self-worth, rejection, verbal fluency, preparation and previous unpleasant experience (Del Villar, 2010).

Most studies in self-assessment of oral communications skills have analyzed quantitative data. Mahmud (2013) correlated communication aptitude and academic success results indicate that accomplishing competency in oral communications is imperative in ensuring that students perform well academically. Oi (2012) found that students view self-evaluation as more useful than peer evaluation in oral communication tasks. A study in Malaysia conducted by Khatib and Maarof (2015) among technical college students revealed that all of the respondents possessed low self-efficacy beliefs meaning that they showed low confidence in their ability to communicate in English. This implies that technical college students are still weak in mastering the English language and their lack of proficiency in the English language will make them less "marketable."

According to Boud (1995), all assessment including self-assessment comprises two main elements - making decisions about the standards of performance expected and then making judgments about the quality of the performance in relation to these standards. When self-assessment is introduced, it should ideally involve students in both of these aspects. In the present study, the students were informed in advance of how they will be evaluated but they were not involved in the construction of the rubrics.

Malisuwan, Nasongkhlab and Sujivac (2015) argue that when students feel better about themselves, they do better in life. They found that the self-reflection process and feedback from peers affect the development of students' self-esteem.

Thus, the main aim of this exploratory study is to investigate students' ability to realistically assess their own oral communication skills as compared to their evaluators – in this case – their peers and teacher. It is hoped that the results of this study would serve to inform research and teaching methodology specifically the importance of training students in self-assessment.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

Forty students from the College of Business in a private university in Manila, Philippines participated in the study. They were all enrolled in an Oral Communications course with Composition Writing as the only prerequisite. The participants' ages ranged from 16 to 18 years and 22 were male. Each of the 40 participants delivered an informative speech and was evaluated by three peers and the course instructor. Each of the 40 was able to deliver a speech and evaluate a speaker once. The course instructor evaluated all the speakers for the aforementioned speech.

2.2 Instruments

A peer evaluation form and guide questions for writing a self-critique essay served as the instruments for data collection. Qualitative comments on the evaluation form and responses to the guide questions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the speech and the speaker were collected and analyzed. Both the peer evaluation

form and self-critique guide questions were divided into three categories: Organization, content and delivery. The course instructor used the same evaluation form as the peers'.

2.3 Procedure

Responses to the peer evaluation form and contents of the self-critique essays were tabulated and categorized into the three aspects that were evaluated in the speech: organization, content and delivery. Descriptive coding was then applied to the speaker's, peers' and instructor's comments. Categorical content analysis was utilized to compare the self-identified strengths and weaknesses of each speaker to those identified by their peers and instructor.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A comparison of the responses evaluating the speech revealed that the speakers and peers tended to focus more on the delivery as compared to the organization and content of the speech. Similarly, Miles (2014) found that students placed a high degree of importance on linguistic ability for oral presentations. In addition, Gil-Salom and Benlloch-Dualde (2016) revealed that pronunciation and fluency are two of student speakers' primary concerns when giving an oral presentation.

As regards self-assessment, compared to peer and instructor evaluation, results of the descriptive coding and frequency counts revealed that 30 of the 40 speakers perceived that their presentation had more strengths (60%) than weaknesses (40%). 35 out of 40 peer evaluators identified 70% of the presentations to have more areas of improvement than strengths, while the instructor identified 35 of the 40 speakers to have more areas for improvement (80%) than strengths in their oral presentations. A study conducted among Malaysian students by Khatib and Maarof (2015) found that all students in their sample showed low confidence in their ability to communicate in English. Students in the Philippines are apparently at an advantage over their Southeast Asian counterparts as English is a second rather than a foreign language.

Further, the students may not have had enough time or opportunity to reflect on their own strengths and areas for improvement based only on a single presentation. MacMillan and Hearn (2008) stress the importance of reflection stating that is a critical part of the self-evaluation process. Reflection helps students think about what they know or have learned while they identify areas of confusion, so they can create new goals. Evaluating what they learned, what they still need to work on, and how they can get there can all support deeper understanding rather than superficial knowledge. Nevertheless, the value of self-assessment should not be overlooked. As Gil-Salom and Benlloch-Dualde (2016) found in their study with students learning German language, assessment allowed students to detect those aspects to be improved and took the necessary actions for making it possible. Thus they are becoming "expert" evaluators as well as "experts" in the German language that they are learning

4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, self-assessment of the speakers in the present study did not show consistency with peer and instructor assessment. There may be several explanations for this. One is that the students may not be sufficiently trained to evaluate oral presentations. Another is that one oral presentation may not be a sufficient basis for evaluating oral communication skills. Lastly, students should be encouraged to carry out more critical and careful reflection. Oral communication classes may well employ more learning reflection strategies apart from self-assessment strategies and training. Students benefit from explaining their work and their own evaluation of quality through reflective activities such as conferences, written correspondence, and written self-reflections or checklists.

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