Comparative Consideration of Teachers' Attitudes Towards The Introduction of Self-Evaluation in Foreign Language Teaching in Different States

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Abstract

This research paper is an overview of the research conducted among teachers of German as a second foreign language in North Macedonia, Greece, and Spain regarding the issue of how willing teachers in different public educational institutions are to introduce self-evaluation as an examination method in regular foreign language teaching. Further, a comparison of the collected results is made from different aspects, such as from the perspective of the age and experience of each teacher, from the perspective of the type and size of the target group etc. Finally, we present the collected results as a percentage in order to see if the German language teachers in the mentioned different states in South Europe are open to implementing self-evaluation in foreign language teaching as well as what arguments and counterarguments they will present.

Keywords: *education, self-evaluation, language teaching, formative assessment*

1. Introduction

During our work with students learning German, we have often heard statements such as: *I rarely dare to speak German, because I am afraid of making mistakes*". On the other hand, we have heard statements by teachers, saying "*in my class we have a trusting atmosphere, the students are not afraid of making mistakes because they are allowed to participate in the formative assessment by evaluating their achievements*". So, we came to the idea to conduct a survey about self-evaluation (SE) as one of the ways of formative assessment and its impact on the process of acquiring a foreign language. More concretely, the questionnaire considers issues about introducing SE as an integral examination method in regular foreign language teaching, with its advantages and disadvantages supported by teachers' experiences.

While learning, each learner should have in mind the goal to be achieved, his current condition and how to bridge the differences between the first two points. The most common way of following this progress is the assessment or the evaluation of the achievements.

The term evaluation, in its broadest sense, means a process of gathering and interpreting information on the learning and the achievements in relation to certain criteria for success, which can be used to: inform students and their parents; provide support to teachers to modify their teaching; inform other competent structures that make decisions on educational policy[1]. The first conception that the term "evaluation" evokes is summative evaluation, which is about tests and examinations. These forms of revising may have influences on the respondent in giving answers and can even provide a wrong picture of the real abilities the learner possesses. Because of the dynamics of the development, as language competences are not linear, but develop dynamically and a dynamic system is represented as a result of the process, it is recommended to test more frequently (Grotjahn/Kleppin, 2017:36). Students' abilities are characterized by phenomena such as sudden setbacks, sudden advances, because of basic system restructurings or long-term perpetuation of wrong structures (fossilisation) (Grotjahn/Kleppin, 2017:36). To avoid such fossilisations, contemporary studies support the statement that effective students work best when they have insight into their own strengths and weaknesses. By being given the responsibility for their learning, students are nowadays considered as partners in the evaluation process. They take part in formative evaluation, as a diagnostic and cooperative interaction between the teacher and the learner. Formative evaluation refers to all activities to be undertaken by teachers and students, which provides information as feedback in order

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[1] Handbook, pp. 9

to be used in modifying the teaching and learning activities (Black & Wiliam, 1998[1]). The feedback should be as far away from evaluation as possible but aimed at increasing motivation. (Grotjahn/Kleppin, 2017:36)

Self-evaluation (SE) concerns us as an essential component in formative assessment. Self-evaluation is a process through which students assess their progress and receive information about their own achievements, whether initiated by teacher or by student himself. Teachers can get a better insight into students' learning and understanding, especially in the part that refers to learners' efforts and feelings. Students can develop metacognitive abilities and awareness of the importance of learning and can increase their reflection skills.

2. Methodology

We conducted a questionnaire on 65 German teachers in North Macedonia, Greece and Spain (with help of our colleagues Foteini Chatzi from Greece and Renata Jankowska from Spain, for what we are very grateful to them). Despite certain general questions related to the personality of respondents and their experience, the questionnaire includes *yes/no*-questions concerning the possible consequences of the application of self-evaluation in the teaching process, as well as tasks where they need to value some given specific aspects related to the use of SE and the respondents had to choose a number for each aspect to create an order from 10 (best) to 1. We processed and comparatively analysed the collected data.

We also used contrastive, analytical, observative and descriptive methods, as well as some field work (by having insight into certain handbooks and checklists for self-evaluation on schools).

3. Presenting the Results

Most respondents in North Macedonia (81.3%) and in Greece (61.6%) are between 30 and 45 years old, in Spain most are older than 45 (with 55%). 97% of all respondents are women, 100% are experienced teachers. All teach German in public schools, most of them, 97%, in North Macedonia and 92.3% in Greece work with children or young people. In Spain, however, 70% work with adults.

More than half of the respondents have already had experience with self-evaluation (SE) (53.8 in Greece, 72.7% in North Macedonia, even 90% in Spain). However, there are also those who have never heard of SE - in North Macedonia (9.1%), in Spain (10%) and in Greece (15.4%). More than 80% of the Spanish respondents and 63.6% in North Macedonia have already used SE in classes but only 46.2% in Greece. More than 70% of all respondents liked this method in general. However, there are also teachers who have not seen big benefits from its implementation: 15.4% in Greece, 27.3% in North Macedonia and 30% in Spain. All of them (100%) are willing to introduce new evaluation methods into teaching, but 10% in North Macedonia and Spain and 15% in Greece do not like to experiment in general.

Most of the respondents put the advantages in the foreground:

All respondents in Greece and Macedonia (100%) and 75% in Spain share the opinion that by practicing SE, learners can learn how to be self-critical; 100% in Greece, 90% in North Macedonia and 75% in Spain believe that SE has a motivating effect; 85% in Greece, 61% in North Macedonia, and 50% in Spain think that with SE, learners are encouraged to speak freely. 100% in Greece, 84% in North Macedonia and 75% in Spain think that learners should participate in the assessment process in order to create good collaboration with the teacher.

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[1] In Handbook, pp.12
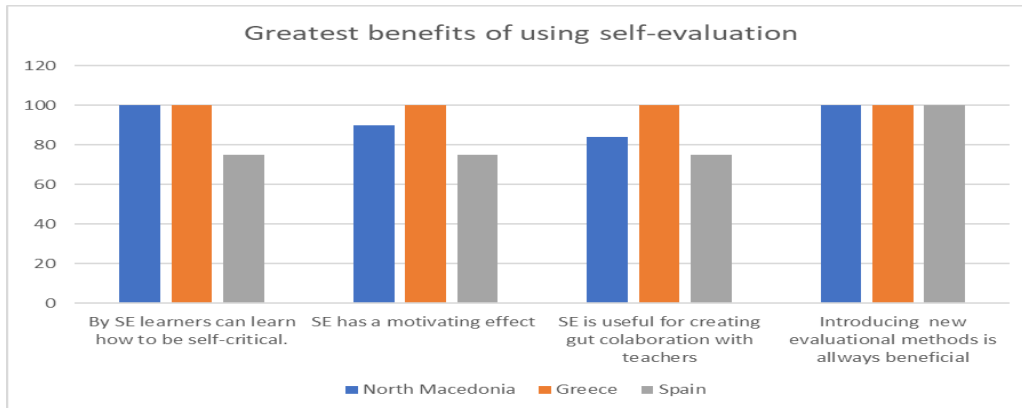
As for the disadvantages, 26% of the respondents in North Macedonia, 24% in Spain and 8% in Greece think, this method would impair the discipline in the class; 45% in Spain, 39% in North Macedonia, 38% in Greece think that students cannot objectively evaluate themselves. Around half of respondents in North Macedonia and Spain, but 38% in Greece think that learners could abuse SE. However, the percentage of those who are of the opinion: "Only I can best evaluate the learners' performance" is not small (34% in North Macedonia, 25% in Spain and 23% in Greece).
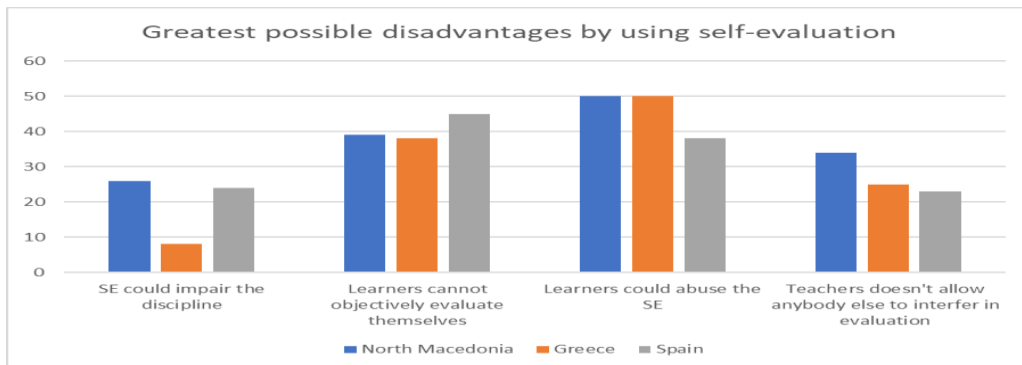
The ability to develop self-criticism is very important for most respondents; 100% in Greece, 75.8% in North Macedonia and 60% in Spain rated this aspect with 10, 9 or 8. It's good to try out new things and to experiment in classes, rated around 85% in North Macedonia and in Greece, but only around the half in Spain, with 10, 9 and 8.

As for the usage of grading as a tool to create discipline in the class, we have the most divided opinions. For North Macedonia and Greece the chart of this statement is colorful, from grade 1 to grade 10 and in Spain dominate the grades 1 and 3 with 60% in total. Nobody else should interfere in grading. The Macedonian teachers with 22.6% and the Greek teachers with 23.1% rate this aspect with 7 or lower and in Spain almost half of the respondents rate it with 1 or 2. Transparency is for the most highly valued with 10, 9 and 8 (North Macedonia with 90,3%, Greece and Spain with 80%)

The learners should be encouraged to become aware of common mistakes. In Spain 53,3% (10), in Greece 60% (10 or 9) and in North Macedonia almost 50% (10, 9, 8)

Learners should experience how difficult grading can be. In North Macedonia more than half of the respondents (57,6%) value this aspect with best grades: 10, 9 and 8, while in Greece 64,3% give 8 or 7; in Spain, 26,7% give 1 followed by 3,4,7,8 (13,3% for each of them).

Teachers are willing to teach students about the grading process by providing them with a checklist of key aspects. Around 30% of the respondents in Spain and North Macedonia value this aspect highest, while the Greek teachers give it mostly an 8 (46.7%), as highest grade.

SE is a waste of time. Absolutely not, in the three states this aspect is low rated, 51,5% in North Macedonia with 1,2 or 3, 43,3% in Greece (1 or 2) and 66,7% in Spain (1,2, or 3)

Learners can learn by recognizing mistakes. Most respondents give this aspect 10, 9 and 8 (in Greece 86,7%, in Spain 78,5%, in North Macedonia 69,8%,).

Conclusion

Most of the respondents have extensive didactic experience and use self-evaluation in their daily teaching. There is clear interest in experimenting with new teaching methods, especially by younger respondents (till 45 years), while in Spain, where the majority of the respondents are older than 45 and work primarily with adults, it is understandable that the interest in experimenting is lower.

More than 75% of all respondents think of the greatest benefits of SE. They underline that through this assessment methods learners can develop self-criticism, which has immense importance in the process of acquisition a new language; this method would help learners to be able to learn by recognizing their own mistakes; the greatest percentage of the respondents consider that participating in the assessment process could highly motivate learners. For almost all respondents, it is the transparency that is, most valued, as expected. Another result that did not surprise us is that even 60% of respondents in Spain give the lowest grade to the aspect that the evaluation ought to be used as a tool for improving discipline in classes.

Surprisingly, around 10% of all respondents have never heard of SE, and around 20% have not seen big benefits from its implementation. More than one third think that students cannot objectively evaluate themselves. We were also surprised to find that even around one third of respondents think "Only I can best evaluate the learners' performance".

So, taking into consideration the teachers' opinions and attitudes, we can confirm that learners can gain better results if they are aware of the final goals during the whole process of acquiring a new language, including the phase of assessment. We have understanding for sceptical teachers who are afraid of being manipulated by students. They should be better informed of the benefits of SE and we encourage them establish a better partnership with students.

References

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