



Using Video Recordings and Reflection Papers in Enhancing Communicative and Paralinguistic Skills in Higher Education Contexts

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Abstract

The tendency to incorporate an autonomous learning approach in higher education has been on the rise. An area that renders itself to learner independence is self-assessment. Self-assessment has many forms and can be utilized in higher education contexts to raise learners' awareness of their potentials as well as enhance their performance and skills. This study is aimed at exploring the impact of two self-assessment tools, namely video-recording and self-reflection papers, on the learners' communicative (verbal) and paralinguistic (non-verbal) performance in a communication and presentation skills course at Cairo University Faculty of Engineering. An online survey was conducted at the end of the semester to investigate students' perception on how the assessment tools affected their presentation performance throughout the course. Survey results showed a favourable attitude towards watching the videos and writing reflection papers. Students unanimously agreed that watching their video-recordings has had a positive influence on their subsequent presentation performance. Moreover, writing self-critiques helped them identify areas of weaknesses and strengths, the matter that improved their next presentation performance. However, students reported that assessment tools such as evaluation rubrics provided by the instructor have also been useful in guiding them to focus on both the macro and micro level skill when they watched their videos and wrote their self-reflection papers. In addition, students stated that receiving written feedback from the instructor has had a favourable impact on developing their presentation skills. The paper ends with a recommendation to adopt self-assessment tools in higher education contexts to provide a valuable learning experience to each student. It is worth mentioning that hugely depending on self-assessment methods while totally ignoring the use of guided rubrics and constructive feedback by the instructor may not provide the same learning experience due to students' inadequate understanding of self-evaluation protocols.

1. Introduction

The focus on learner autonomy and its impact on the learner's "successful functioning in professional life" has increased in the past few decades. [2] Learner autonomy is defined as "the ability to take charge of one's learning". [4] In order for learners to be responsible for their learning, they need to evaluate their learning progress and assess their performance. Non-traditional methods of evaluation such as self-assessment complement the unconventional learning approaches in enhancing student involvement. Self-assessment is one alternative to traditional evaluation methods. [2] John Heron [7] argues that self-assessment empowers students and shows respect to their "intellectual capacity of reasoning". He further believes that the more responsible and involved the learner is in the learning process, the higher the motivation and enthusiasm levels are. In this regard, Cotrall [5] agrees with Heron, and claims that "without reflection, learners cannot assess their past learning or plans for future action." Taras [16] calls for using self-assessment techniques to help students develop deeper understanding of their learning



needs, potentials and areas of weaknesses. She encourages the use of different self-assessment models depending on classroom dynamics, course design, class size or other variables that might affect the learning process.

This study explores engineering students' perceptions on how different self-assessment tools used in a humanities course influenced their verbal and non-verbal performance. The primary aim of this small-scale study is to investigate students' reactions after using the self-assessment techniques in an attempt to exploit the results to develop the course assessment tools to enhance learning.

Background

1.1 Self-assessment and students involvement

Learners realistically recognize their strengths and weaknesses when they are given the chance to reflect on, judge, rate, and mark their own work. [8] The impact of self-assessment techniques on improving students' motivation, enthusiasm and performance has been widely recognized. [2, 3, 6, 7] According to Nutly [12], "for students to be successful in developing an understanding of foundational discipline knowledge, peer and self-assessment are critical components, as these engage students from the outset in a process that inducts them into a culture of critical scholarly enquiry". Walser [17] reported that 86% of the participants in her study agreed that they were highly motivated when they were involved in self-assessment practices. Additionally, the self-assessment exercises Walser used in her study promoted students' reflective skills and provided them with opportunities to self-monitor and self-regulate their learning progress. Poon, et al [13] have revealed that even in educational systems that are rather resistant to innovative learning techniques, such as Hong Kong, learners display positive reactions to self-assessment when "appropriately framed and implemented".

1.2 Self-assessment and academic progression

In addition to increasing motivation level and involvement in assessment, research findings have indicated that learners who engage in self-judgment, self-observation and self-evaluation demonstrate significant improvement in professional skills and performance. [2, 3, 6, 18] Research examining the impact of self-assessment on third-year medical students reported that 74% of the student participants developed their performance considerably. [9] When examining the influence self-assessment techniques have on students in other disciplines such as pharmacy, science and engineering, improvement in skills development has also been observed and reported. [11, 13, 19]

1.3 Self-assessment and formal training

Some research suggests that learners are unable to make accurate judgments on their own work. Sufficient guidance is needed for learners to be capable of assessing their performance. Thus, learners may need formal training to be able to make reliable judgments. [11, 10] Mort and Hansen [11] in their study examining the accuracy of first-year pharmacy students in assessing their performance concluded that students faced difficulties in providing accurate judgments on their performance. They reported that students in the lower quartiles overestimated their performance while those in the upper quartiles underestimated their performance. They, in turn, concluded that for students to make accurate judgments on their performance, they have to be trained to objectively assess their learning.



In order to enhance the self-assessment protocols, Mort and Hansen suggest five ways to overcome students' inaccuracy in self-assessment: (1) involving students in various self-assessment practices, (2) giving "timely" and constructive feedback to students on their performance, (3) requesting students to provide evidence to support their self-evaluation, (4) using video to enhance self-assessment, and (5) providing adequate formal training to scaffold students in the area of self-assessment. Lew, et al [10] agree with Mort and Hansen and further argue that with more structured feedback and guidance from instructors, learners will develop "better meta-cognitive and self-reflective" skills.

1.4 Self-assessment and the 'dual car control' approach

Students are not psychics. On their own, they cannot determine what teachers expect in terms of both quality of work, and criteria of effective performance. They need guidance to avoid guessing the standards which teachers use to evaluate their learning progress and skills development. [1] Taras [16] believe that "self-assessment puts the learner in a dual control car" where not only the teacher, but also the learner functions as a professional who makes informed and reliable judgments on his or her performance. Andrade and Valtcheva [1] suggest using "criteria-referenced self-assessment" where students evaluate their work based on "explicitly stated criteria, goals and standards" provided by the teacher to promote the learning process.

Joan Sargeant [14] recommends implementing a multiple feedback approach rather than a dual feedback approach. She strongly believes that "self-assessment is not a solitary activity", and learners have to seek "reliable and valid external feedback" in order to fully benefit from self-assessment. Therefore, a call for using a 'directed self-assessment' model where learners use "multi-source feedback" to enhance their professional development was initiated. [15] In their "directed self-assessment" model, Sargeant, et al [15] suggest that learners encompass four phases: (1) receive feedback from external sources, (2) reflect upon the feedback, then reconcile and assimilate it with their own assessment, (3) plan for the use of feedback, and finally (4) use feedback to refine their performance. When learners are provided with multi-source feedback, they gain profound knowledge of their potentials and shortcomings. Consequently, learners better understand their learning progress and strengthen their self-assessment and self-regulation skills. [1, 14, 15]

2. Methodology

2.1 Design

This study adopts an exploratory research design where the researcher collected rich qualitative verbal data from the subjects.

The subjects of this study received formal training in communication and presentation skills during the first half of the course. They were asked to apply what they have learnt through giving three group presentations during the second half of the course. They were requested to videotape both the first and the second presentation performances, and watch them privately. Then, they were asked to reflect on their performance by submitting a self-reflection essay on each presentation detailing their points of strengths, points of weaknesses and areas they aim to improve in their subsequent presentation. For each of the three group presentations, a rubric was given to all participants a week in advance to be aware of the assessment criteria. All participants were encouraged to use the rubrics to evaluate their peers' performance and share their feedback with them. Written feedback and rubrics that were filled in by peers



were collected to be typed by the researcher and sent anonymously to students. The researcher also submitted typed feedback to students to provide multi-source feedback. At the end of the course, participants were encouraged to respond to an online survey to collect more information on how they perceived the various assessment tools they used throughout the course.

2.2 Subjects

The participants in this small-scale study were 73 engineering students enrolled in a Communication and Presentation Skills course. Most participants were sophomore students while a few belonged to junior and senior years. Each of the participants submitted two self-reflection essays after reviewing their video-recording and one peer feedback rubric. Only 28 participants responded to the online survey reflecting on the self-assessment experience.

3. Results

3.1 Results of reflection essays

In both reflection essays, students demonstrated critical evaluation and reflective skills. Half of the students in the first reflection essay as opposed to two-thirds of them in the second reflection essay were able to identify the strengths and weaknesses in their communicative and paralinguistic performance. This may suggest that the more learners practice self-reflection, the more they improve their critical evaluation skills. The students noticed their strong and weak moments, and were able to identify what they need to improve in their next performance. Nevertheless, not many of them improved the weak aspects in their subsequent performance. Some students provided very short essays lacking detail, but this could be due to their lower English language proficiency levels.

The following are quotes from students' essays reflecting on their verbal and non-verbal skills:

“I was talking with right English pronunciation and correct English phrases. Also, my voice was clear and had good eye contact with the audience”.

“I need to practice more so as not to look at the PowerPoint a lot”.

“I noticed that I have some problems that I wouldn't notice without watching the presentation like using the filler “ehhhh” between sentences or when I tend to forget a certain word and not moving around so much and just shifting my whole body or posture from side to side”.

“I was also glad to have shown my self-confidence, and did not get nervous throughout the presentation”.

“After watching my performance in Presentation#2, I can see that I got better. But I was cold and neutral although the content needed some expressions”.

“I stopped looking at the screen which made me more comfortable than the last time”.

3.2 Results of online survey

The online survey results showed that watching the presentation video-recordings (85.7%), receiving feedback from the instructor (71.4%) and writing reflection papers (53.6%) were the three most effective tools that helped them develop their presentation skills as shown in figure 1. It is noteworthy that 46.4% of the respondents believed that reading the rubrics before giving their presentations boosted their

performance. It was surprising that only 32.1% of the students regarded receiving verbal feedback from the audience/peers helped them develop their performance. 7.1% of the respondents reported that receiving written feedback from peers was helpful. It is intriguing that students did not use feedback from peers as much as they used other feedback sources.

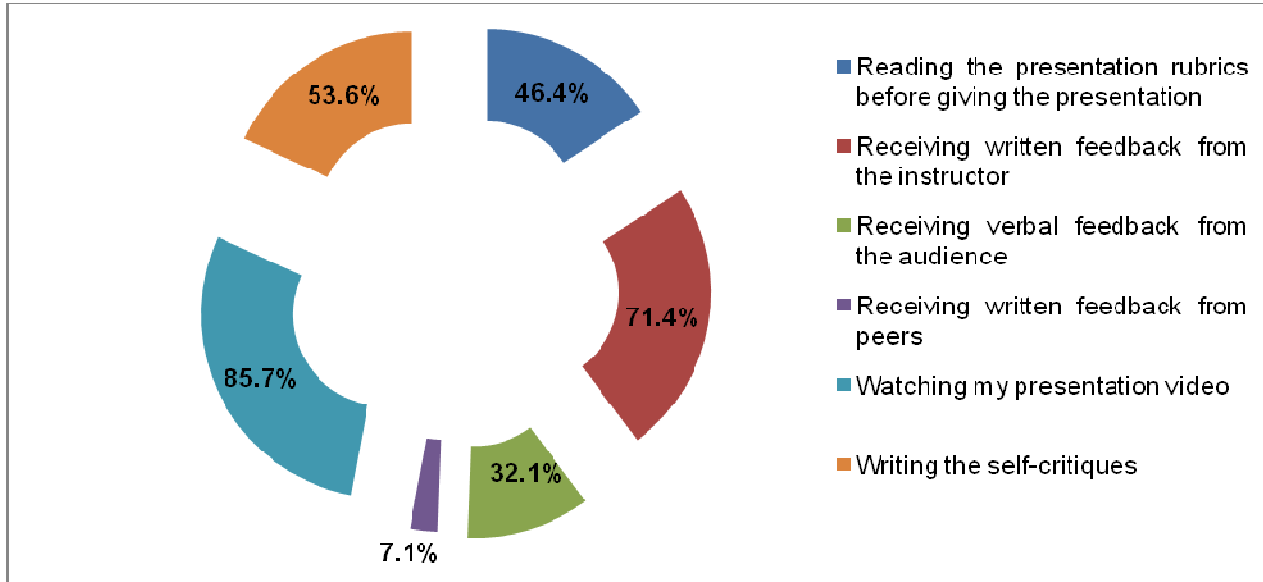


Figure 1. Students' responses on what helped them develop their presentation performance and skills throughout the course.

When asked how they felt after watching the video-recordings, 57.1% of the respondents reported that they felt satisfied, 28.6% were surprised, 14.3% were impressed, 14.3% felt dissatisfied, 10.7% were shocked, 7.1% were proud and 3.6% were annoyed. These results are visually illustrated in figure 2.

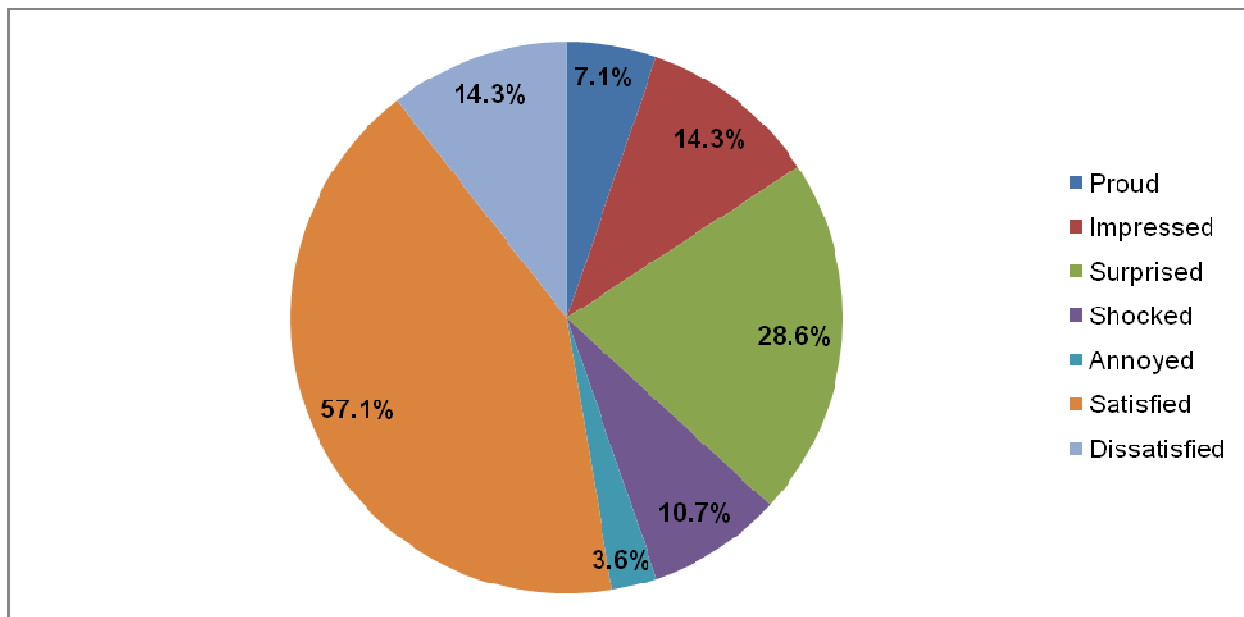


Figure 2. Students' responses on how they felt after watching their video-recordings.

94.6% of the respondents believed that reading the rubrics helped them understand how they will be assessed. 82% of the subjects agreed that writing the reflecting papers helped them improve their subsequent presentation performance. Moreover, 32.1% strongly agreed and 46.4% agreed that writing the reflection essays assisted them in noticing their points of strengths and weaknesses.

4. Conclusion

Self-assessment techniques empower the learners through motivating and engaging them, improve learners' performance, and promote life-long learning skills. However, findings of this small-scale study support Sargeant's claim [14] that self-assessment alone may not yield the aspired benefits and that external sources of feedback enrich self-assessment.

Findings show that when learners are invited to actively participate in the marking process, they may need guidance, feedback, criteria-referenced self-assessment to make more accurate and well-informed judgments of their performance and skills development. Thus, the findings of this study are consistent with those of Andrade & Valcheva [1] and Taras [16].

Results are also in agreement with what Mort & Hansen [11] reported regarding using video-recordings as a highly effective self-assessment tool in enhancing performance.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended to further investigate the effect of peer assessment on performance using a larger sample. Exploring why students did not make use of their peers' feedback may provide valuable input on what students regard as reliable sources of feedback.

5. References

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