

## FOSTERING STUDENTS' SELF-REGULATED LEARNING THROUGH SELF AND PEER ASSESSMENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*"Strong isn't about having a million strengths, rather it's about facing and dealing with our weaknesses". ~ Unknown.* Is our education system allowing our undergraduates to face and deal with their weaknesses? Or are we taking the students for a leisure walk in the park in higher education while neglecting essential lifelong learning skills for their future? This paper focuses on students' progress and development in terms of their skills through self and peer assessments. In this study, students were encouraged to identify their weaknesses and areas of concern based on one of the assessments given to them in the course. Then the teacher and peers used these concerns as an assessment tool to provide feedback to the students. Through this activity, it was found that the students were very goal-oriented and were able to notice their 'progress' – the key to learning. These assessment tools help students to realise that learning does not just stop at one point but happens continuously throughout their lives by reflecting on their lifelong learning skills. The outcome of this study could be useful to assist teachers to set self and peer assessment tasks as part of their course for every level in higher education.

**Keywords:** Self-Regulated Learning, Lifelong Learning, Assessment, Feedback, Reflective Practice

### INTRODUCTION

This is a reflective journey of a teacher who wanted to devise assessment approaches that encourages self-regulated learning (SRL) skills. Butler & Winnie (1995) mentioned that SRL skills include the ability to attend to teachers' remarks and peers' contribution as well as to monitor discrepancy between current and desired performance. These are the skills that the teacher wanted to see developed in her students.

The reason the teacher was interested to incorporate SRL into the curriculum design is because she realised that students need the 'will' to learn and the 'skills' to learn in order to be self-regulated learners. As a teacher, she felt that she is still in control in developing the students' skills to learn. Since assessment is a motivating factor for students, the teacher believes that the SRL skills could be developed and encouraged through appropriate assessments.

At this point, it is highlighted that lifelong learning skills (LLL) and SRL will be used interchangeably. This is in view of the European Commission (2001), LLL refers to all learning activities undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective. This reflects the two important components of SRL as well – the 'will' to learn and 'skills' to learn. Therefore, it cannot be denied that SRL and LLL are interrelated.

This paper analyses a year 2 course, Communication Skills for undergraduate students from the School of Science and Technology. It was realised that the nation's goal of producing lifelong learners may have to be reflected in the assessments and subsequently in the transferable skills. The next part will explain the aspects which led the teacher to emphasise self-assessments and peer assessments in her teaching practice.

### Problem Statement

In reference to the latest Malaysian Education Blue print 2015-2025, one of the goals highlighted is that the education system has to strive to produce **lifelong learners** so that learning does not stop only at one point but it happens continuously and constantly throughout one's life. Even, one of the institution's educational goals targets students to become independent, **lifelong learners** who actively pursue knowledge and appreciate its global application to economic, political, social and cultural development. Subsequently, the Program Educational Objective (PEO) and Program Learning Objective (PLO) of Bachelor of Psychology (BPSY) Program were analysed. PEO 4 aims to produce graduates with interest in research and lifelong learning and PLO 7 aims to produce graduates who are able pursue life-long learning in psychology-related fields. These objectives are related to one of the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF) descriptor which is to produce graduates who possess independent study skills to continue further study with a high degree of autonomy.

The question raised here is whether the goals are evident for the teachers and students especially in setting the right type of assessment. This is in view of Boud & Falchikov (2007) who mentioned that "it is necessary to frame assessment not in terms of individual student's perspective, but in terms of the intentions of the institution. If the

nation's goal and the institution's goal is to produce lifelong learners, then the objective should be reflected through the assessments in every level of the higher education setting. It is also crucial for academicians to make the goals transparent for the students to understand and work towards achieving the nation and the institution's goal.

With the concern mentioned in the earlier section, the recommendation that is proposed here is to incorporate self-assessment and peer-assessment as formative assessments of the course. Self-assessment and peer-assessment encourage SRL skills and to a certain extent these approaches become effective when they are used together. Falchikov (2007) emphasised that peer-assessment is sometimes seen as a mean of developing self-assessment skills.

One of the arguments for promoting student self-assessment in higher education is that it equips students to become lifelong learners who can evaluate their own performance after they have finished formal study (Brown & Glasner, 1999:116). This is exactly what our nation and institution echoes.

There are many challenges teachers may face in implementing self-assessment and peer-assessment. However, the concern here is about the validity and reliability of self-assessment and peer-assessment. In terms of self-assessment, Boud and Falchikov (1989) realised that high achievers were prone to underrate themselves and low-achievers may do the opposite. In terms of peer-assessment, the main concern is the friendship effect which can lead to over-marking (Sluijsmans et al., 1998). Because of these reasons, the teacher in this research decided to use these approaches only in terms of formative assessment. Brown and Knight (1994) highlighted that formative assessment contributes to self-directed learning and intellectual autonomy as learners start negotiating with tutors the areas of strength and weakness and eventually becoming more reflective. Formative assessment also focusses on the process of learning than the product itself. Students also obtain better results when they are working toward process goals rather than product goals, and when tracking progress toward overall goals of learning (Schunk, 1996). Incorporating self-assessment and peer-assessment as part of formative assessment also promote learners to progressively correct, improve or enhance their knowledge by themselves according to the need of the assessment.

## METHODOLOGY

At the end of the semester, 30 students were asked to complete a survey with the intention of finding out if the practice of identifying areas of concern was helpful or useful for the students. The questions were created as open ended in order to capture the participants' true perception in relation to self and peer assessment activities. The students' responses were analysed and divided into different themes.

Ethical consent has been obtained from the students for this research. The students had a choice to be anonymous. Since the activity is based on formative assessments, students' grades were at risk even if the responses were not favourable to the research. The participants clearly understood that the teacher wanted to know if there was a progress in the students' learning through self and peer assessments.

### **The Transformation of Teaching Practices**

This section explains how self-assessment and peer-assessment were incorporated into the teaching practices as part of formative assessments which eventually leads to summative assessment. The teaching practices leading to one of the assignments are highlighted here:

#### *Assignment: Persuasive Speech*

This assignment contributes 25% towards the coursework marks. For this assignment students have to present in a group of 3 to 4 members a persuasive speech using appropriate visual aids. The usual practice of the teacher is to show students the seniors' sample speech and have a discussion based on the assignment criterions that would have been given to them earlier. Subsequently, if time permits impromptu speech is carried out with teacher's feedback.

The changes in terms of teaching practices were made based on the 'future driven self-assessment' approach proposed by Tan (2007). This type of assessment encourages students to develop lifelong learning skills. According to Tan (2007) future driven self-assessment is a form of assessment that has power to sustain itself beyond completing the programme of study. Through this process, students may construct their own assessment criterions where it promotes students' capacity for exercising their own judgements. This is quite different from the teacher driven or programme driven self-assessment where the expectation comes from the teacher or programme but in future driven self-assessment students look beyond academic.

Chart 1 shows the progress acquisition process which helps students to go through self-assessment and peer-assessment systematically. Besides, it can be noticed that this process helps students to be more self-regulated learner by encouraging them to be active learners. As mentioned by Boud (2007), it is crucial for learners to utilise the information from feedback to complete the feedback loop and to contribute to the building of an understanding of how to utilise information from others effectively. As mentioned earlier in this paper, this is what Butler & Winnie (1995) emphasised that SRL skills include the ability to attend to teachers' remarks and peers' contribution as well as to monitor discrepancy between current and desired performance. The proposed progress identification wheel helps students to complete the feedback loop by becoming more reflective. With this, eventually, students will acquire the skills of identifying their progress which is the key to learning.

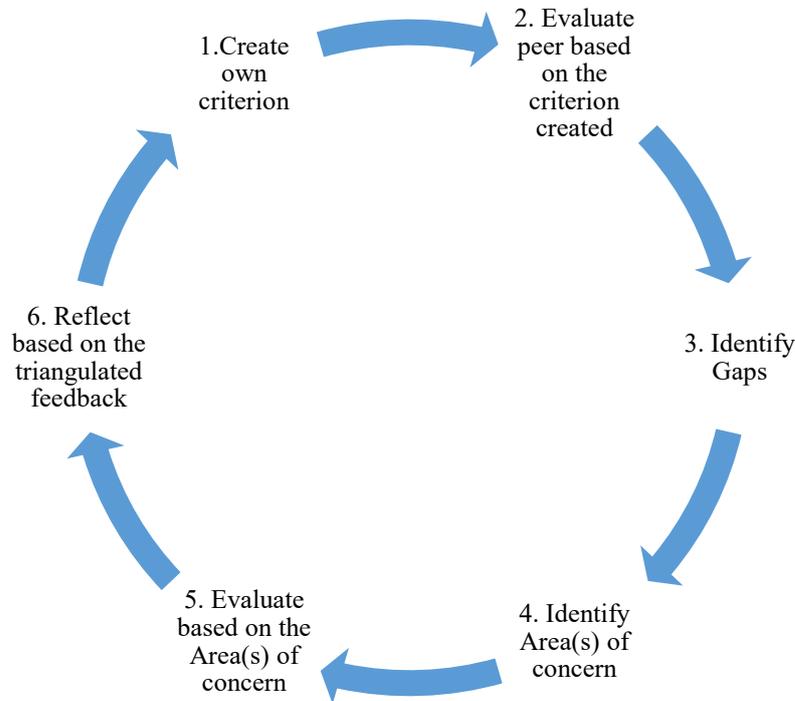


Chart 1: Wheel of Progress

Table 1 explains the teaching practices the teacher used based on future driven self-assessment. The first column of the table is connected to the points identified in the *Wheel of Progress*.

Stages as stated in the <i>Wheel of Progress</i>	Timeline of the semester	Teaching practices
1. Create own criterion	Week 1	<p>Students were individually asked to create their own marking scheme that reflects the criterion that they would assess if they are being evaluated for a speech.</p> <p>Students' criterions were shared through OneDrive document according to tutorial classes for peer feedback.</p> <p>Students discussed the criterions with peers and at this point some students added some points that they did not highlight earlier.</p> <p>It was realised that some students highlighted aspects that were their strengths and weaknesses based on their past experience.</p>
2. Evaluate peer based on the criterion created	Week 2	<p>The students were shown a video of their seniors' speech and the students evaluated that based on their own criterions. When they gave the feedback to the teacher, she asked more questions for them to reflect. This gives the teacher</p>

		opportunity to understand what the students meant. It also models the questions that the students could ask the teacher later when she gives them feedback in class.
3. Identify Gaps	Week 3	Only then the summative assessment marking scheme that is being used for the semester were shown and the students were asked to highlight the parts that they did not mention in the criteria they identified in Week 1. This helped the students to identify the gaps.
4. Identify Area(s) of Concern	Week 5	The students were asked to identify their <i>Areas of Concern</i> in terms of speech. These are the areas they are worried and concerned about based on their past public speaking experience.
5. Evaluate based on the Area(s) of Concern	Week 7 & 8	Impromptu speech practice was carried out individually. The teacher used the items identified as <i>Areas of Concern</i> as criteria for impromptu speech feedback. The teacher also asked the students to choose a peer to provide feedback based on the areas of concern. During the impromptu speech, their speeches were also recorded using the students' own gadget for self-assessment.  It was surprising to see some students were doing well in their areas of concern. It could be that it was their concern and they worked at it.
6. Reflect based on the triangulated feedback	Week 9 & 10	The teacher encouraged the students to view the video of their own presentation and asked them to evaluate and reflect on the comments made by the peer and teacher. This is where the feedback process is completed when the students utilise the feedback from teacher and peer by identifying their own progress.
	Week 11 & 12	Summative Assessment – Persuasive Speech Presentation

Table 1: Timeline of Teaching Practices

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reveals the findings of this study. The responses from the participants were categorised into different emerging themes as follows:

### *Assessment aligned with the future*

As Boud (2007) mentioned teachers must do more than just align assessment with the subject objectives but it is necessary to also align assessment with the future. Initially before the self-assessment and peer-assessment activities were carried out, the teacher was concerned if students would be interested but it was amazing to realise that many students were interested when it was emphasised that these tasks are relevant and useful for their future. In view of that, Boud (2007) also highlighted the importance of making explicit links to future in learning is vital. Some of the students highlighted that they were happy that there is a goal to achieve instead of blindly preparing without understanding the need for future. Some of the students' feedback are as follows:

1. *It helps me to focus on improving the weaknesses instead of practicing and preparing blindly.*
2. *It helps us to monitor ourselves.*
3. *It was very helpful as it enabled me to know clearly what to work on and how to work on it. By doing so I was able to improve my presenting skills.*

### *Progression from one point to another*

It can be noticed from the students' feedback that they were able to identify and progress from one point to another. When the students are given the opportunity to identify their areas of concern, the students have started to monitor or notice the gap they have. According Andrade & Evans (2013) noticing is a form of self-regulated learning skills in that learners must notice their own and others in order to recognise where they need to make improvement.

They also added that noticing helps learners to set goals, monitor progress and change performance. These are the skills that are necessary for learners in higher education.

Besides that, through this self and peer assessment activity the teacher at times realised that the concerns that have been identified by the students are no more a concern during the impromptu speech practice because the students have decided to put in more effort to improve the weakness. This is in line with Harris & Brown (2018) who mentioned self-assessment assist learners to put in more effort or try effective strategies when dealing with challenging task.

The following excerpts prove students' realisation of the importance of progression:

1. *It was helpful because when I compare my impromptu speech video with my actual presentation video, I can observe significant improvement in my presenting skills. I can feel myself improving even though there are still room for improvement. The impromptu speech made me aware of my own weakness such as fidgeting and poor gesture, so I can notice it and find a way to improve myself.*
2. *It guided me well throughout my preparation for the presentation. I felt more confident in terms of the preparation, however, I feel that there are certain areas that I should improve on. Besides that, identifying areas of concern made me to realise that I was weak or I was good in certain areas.*
3. *It helped me to be conscious of my weaknesses during the preparation as well as during the speech itself.*
4. *Make me realize if I was stuttering too much or too much movement so I can control better during the real presentation*

#### *Triangulation of feedback*

Another important aspect of the recommended task in this paper is the triangulation of feedback. It can be seen that the students are getting feedback regarding their areas of concern or any effort to improve from the teacher, peer and the student themselves. From Table 1, it can be observed that the teacher is providing feedback from the beginning of the task formation. However, the important aspect is when the students get feedback from the teacher and peer during the impromptu speech as well as when students get to record the video of their own presentation and assess it on their own. The application of this feedback is crucial for the students because it allows them to progress. There are three sources of evaluation of the same performance. At this point, the student may agree or disagree with the feedback obtained from the teacher and peer or the student may even make some efforts to improve himself or herself before the summative assessment. The following responses from the participants of this study reveal that they were appreciative of the fact there were more than one source of feedback:

1. *It made me reflect and reassess on previous presentations. I had a visual sketch board of my current presentation abilities and ideal presentation abilities. Remarks by teacher and peer helped to identify my blind spot and give direction as to what is expected/ should be avoided in future presentations.*
2. *The practice was helpful for me because before the practice, I always thought that I lack of confident, lack of English proficiency, always nervous and have trouble with time management during the presentation but after the practice, I get the feedback from my lecturer as well as my friend which shows me that confident and feeling nervous are not a problem for me and I should not pay too much attention on that, however I should pay more attention on the "true" problem like keep swaying and walking around. So during the practice before persuasive speech presentation, I kept remind myself not to sway too much.*

#### **LIMITATION**

There is a need to mention that there were a handful of students who did not want to participate in the future driven self-assessments as these were just formative assessments. Hence, for this group of students, regular discussions were planned and they were fine with it. This made the teacher realise that diversity is an issue to be looked into. It is believed there will be more and more issues related to diversity that teachers have to take into consideration as student population is getting diverse day by day (Biggs and Tang's, 2007). In regards to this, perhaps teachers should be prepared beyond aligning assessment with just intended learning outcome. Since the

student population varies in terms of culture, personality and learning abilities teachers should be informed to be observant about unintended or unexpected learning outcome (Biggs and Tang's, 2007) or even emergent learning outcomes (Megginson, 1994) as well.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has proven that teachers can be innovate in creating assessments. As highlighted by Bols (2012), it is sometimes very convenient to use the form of assessment that has been tried and tested so the acceptance of trying something new may be frowned upon by different parties who are involved in setting up assessments. Having said that, this paper gives the confidence to teachers that innovation in assessment is possible particularly to encourage learners to be more self-regulated.

This is crucial because identifying progress in learning helps students to improve and transfer the knowledge learnt from one course to another. Besides, it helps them to be engaged in the assessment instead of looking at assessment merely as a transitory tool to complete their studies.

Hence, it is best to emphasise identifying progress is the key to learning. Academicians should align the learning outcomes in accordance to the nation and institution's goal. However, that alone will not be sufficient. This is because right type of assessments has to be devised in order to fulfil the goals and eventually produce students with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.

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