EFL 학생들의 자기평가 도구의 활용에 관한 질적 분석
Qualitative Analysis of Using Self-Assessment for EFL Students

나경희[*], 표경현[**]
충북대학교[*], 단국대학교[**]

Kyeong-Hee Rha(kyeonghee@chungbuk.ac.kr)[*],
Kyong-Hyon Pyo(khpyo@dankook.ac.kr)[**]

요약

평가도구가 갖는 객관성은 평가의 주요 원칙 중의 하나이다. 그러므로 지금껏 자기평가도구는 객관성이 미흡하다는 이유로 공식적인 평가도구로 사용되지 못하였다. 본 연구에서는 우리나라의 대학생들이 영어 강좌를 수강하는 과정에서 자기평가도구의 사용에 대하여 어떻게 인식해 나가며, 또한 평가과정에 직접 참여하는 과정에서 스스로의 성취에 대한 평가를 어떠한 시각으로 바라보게 되는지에 대하여 양·질적으로 조사, 분석해보고자 하였다. 연구 자료로서는 학생의 자기평가지와 심층면담방법을 활용하여 분석하였다. 분석 결과, 다음과 같은 결론을 얻을 수 있었다. 첫째, 자기평가에 대한 인식의 변화는 소규모 활동을 진행하면서 긍정적으로 되어 갔으며, 또한 자기평가라는 기제는 학생들이 그룹 활동에 적극적으로 참여하도록 유도하는 장치로써 작용하고 있음을 발견할 수 있었다. 결론적으로 자기평가의 가치를 타당하게 이해하기 위해서는 자기평가 연구가 교실 현장의 사회문화적인 맥락에서 이루어져야함을 제안하고 있다.

■ 중심어 : | 자기평가 도구 | 활동이론 | 그룹활동 | 사회문화주의 |

Abstract

Achieving a certain degree of objectivity is one of main assessment priniciples to meet and self-assessment has been under-used as a formal instrument for assessing students' achievement due to lack of objectivity. Now, this research attempted to look into how students perceived self-assessment and how they engaged in the assessment process. Self-assessments and in-depth interviews with students were collected as main data sources. The results of data analysis are as follows. First, a student' perceptions of self-assessment have been observed to change over a course of a semester. Furthermore, changes in perceptions might have led students to get ownership of their learning. Conclusively, this research proposes that the research of self-assessment be accommodated into the socio-cultural context to demonstrate its desirable influence on students' learning.

■ keyword : | Self-assessment | Activity Theory | Group Activity | Socio-cultural Perspective |

I. INTRODUCTION

Educators and teachers have been paying great attention to learner autonomy and independence development[14]. As the pedagogical shift happens over time, Korea's English education has been trying

to escape from traditional assessment methods of tapping into simple knowledge by introducing an alternative assessment tool called performance assessment since the 7th National Curriculum. Highlighting the importance of performance assessment in the practice, assessment guidelines as part of the curriculum are explicitly providing varied alternative assessment methods that lead to learners' active and autonomous participation in their learning and assessment process[5][9][15][17].

The new assessment guidelines include detailed information of how to use various alternative assessments such as self-assessment and peer-assessment in the practice and schools are, in turn, trying to put the suggested alternative assessment to use as a valid and reliable one. Self-assessment as one of the alternative assessments has been recognized to integrate affective aspects of enhancing learners' motivation and attitudes by leading learners to participate in their own learning process with cognitive aspects of gathering knowledge in contents and abilities[13]. Self-assessment contributes to learner autonomy and independence development. Paik (1998)[16] maintained that self-assessment "provided an opportunity for learners to reflect on their preparedness, learning motivation, sincerity, satisfaction, relationships with other students, accomplishment levels, etc., and, at the same time, provided an opportunity for teachers to see if their observations of students and tests were valid."(p. 63) In other words, self-assessment has its pedagogical worth for teachers as well as learners.

As a matter of fact, a majority of previous studies about the alternatives[3][4][10][11] have focused on the functional value of alternative assessment to complement weaknesses of paper-pencil tests or large-scale standardized assessments. Their studies did not include the discussion of alternative assessment in terms of its goal and validity; instead, they centered on the difficulties of ensuring its objectivity or reliability. In other words, those research studies aligned their angles on the realistic difficulty that teachers face while scoring and grading in the classroom instead of focusing on possible learning values on the part of learners. As a result, those studies rather downgraded alternative assessment into secondary one that fills the void of the conventional assessment methods. As an attempt to protest the widespread view on alternative assessment, the current study purports to argue that the legitimacy of self-assessment used in the classroom is not drawn from the assessment itself or its reliability, but should be evaluated by looking into what students as assessment users perceive and, accordingly, how they engage in learning through the assessment process.

In order to achieve the research purpose, the study tried to reveal possible changes over time in a particular student (with a pseudonym of MH)'s perceptions of self-assessment and understand what brought changes in her perceptions during her interactions with other students in a small-group discussion setting. In particular, a great interest was on how MH's perceptions of self-assessment were initially set and changed over time during interactions with other students in her learning community. The specific research questions are stated as follows:

1. How do the student's perceptions of self-assessment change over time?
2. What are behind the student's changes in her perceptions of self-assessment?

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Also known as cultural-historical activity theory,

Activity theory is 'a philosophical and cross-disciplinary framework for studying different kinds of human practices as development processes, with both individual and social levels interlinked at the same time' ([6], p. 25). Originally, the concept of activity theory started from Vygotsky[18][19]. However, activity theory was well-established by Leontiev [12][13] as a system itself and later interrelations between activity systems were added by Engestrom[1] to the point of including sociocultural and constructive perspectives.

Activity theory directly addressed the nature of individual development, human activity, and social context. From a Vygotskian perspective, the properties of any given activity are determined by a particular setting, goals and sociocultural history of the individuals. And the individuals are agents who act upon the world and engage in activity, constructing their environment in unique ways[12]. Leontiev[12] pointed out that human purposeful activities are distinguished on the basis of their motives and the objects toward which they are oriented. In other words, the theory suggests that we need to take into consideration the individual's goals and motives for engaging in any particular activity while looking into his/her actions.

Activity theory emphasizes that explaining the activity of individuals requires uncovering the motive and the interrelationship of this motive with the selection of goal-directed actions. Motives are realized only in specific actions that are goal-directed and carried out under particular conditions. Actions are directed at specific goals and are socio-culturally designed means of fulfilling motives. Activities are differentiated from each other by their objects and motives and not necessarily by their concrete realization of actions. At the same time, same activity can be realized through different actions and with different forms of mediation. Therefore, an individual's motive determines which actions will be maximized and selected and how they will be operationalized in a particular setting.

In line with the emphasis that activity theory place on human motive, Lantolf and Pavlenko[8] believed that "second language learners have to been seen as more than processing devices that convert linguistic input into well-formed (or not so well-formed outputs (p. 145)." They argued that learners need to be appreciated by their human agency. The new concept, human agency is closely associated with motive mentioned in activity theory. Lantolf and Pavlenko[8] wrote, "Human agency is about more than performance, or doing; it is closely linked to significance. That is, things and events matter to people. Agency links motivations to action and defines a myriad of paths taken by learners (p. 146). And they further argued that "agency is not an 'anything goes proposition,' but is instead shaped and reshaped by a learner's unique concrete history (p. 156)." They furthered their argument that "agency is a relationship that is constantly co-constructed and renegotiated with those around the individual and with the society at large" (p. 148). Within this framework, learners are conceptualized "first and foremost as individuals whose formation as thinking and learning beings depend on the concrete circumstances of their specific histories as language learners and as members of the communities of practice to which they belong and to which they aspire"[7].

III. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Context

The study took place in an English major elective

class titled "Current English Practice" with a size of 30 students. The class consisted of students with 20 English major, six double major, and four non-English major students. The aim of the class was to help students to develop their English proficiency with a focus of current affairs and issues. Unlike traditional classes where reading and understanding text in the area of current issues is the main target for learning and instruction, this course intended to enhance students' listening and speaking abilities through English group discussions.

The class met twice a week. Each week a new topic was introduced; new learning material with one or two articles and discussion questions prepared by the instructor was uploaded at the school e-learning system for students to access and print out for use. During the first class of the week, the whole class hour, 50 minutes, was devoted to <pre-reading discussion>. This task with three to five discussion questions was a warm-up step prior to reading articles in the following class. Those questions were to arouse students' interest and motivation of a topic to be covered, so that students could exchange their ideas and views. During the second class was assigned to understand the given reading articles. Groups decided how to manage this task; some groups summarized each paragraph together while others took turns reading each paragraph out loud and tried to translate into Korean. Students were encouraged to help one another when having a difficulty understanding particular sentences or expressions. At the same time, they were also encouraged to ask for teacher's help whenever possible. During the third class, students started to work on questions in <post-reading discussion>, by which they could check their understanding of the core issues covered in the articles. Compared to the pre-reading discussions, students could well organize

their thoughts and opinions because they have already built on the knowledge from the text. Each group kept a record of their responses to each discussion question. When group work finished, students were led to a 20-minute class-level discussion time.

2. One Participant in the Group

For the purpose of this research, a group of four students were selected as a focus group and, one female student with an alias of 'MH' among the focus group was selected as a focus participant. All of them were majoring in English; however, they had different English proficiency levels. The following is the demographic information of the students in the group.

Table 1. The Group's Demographic Information

Students	Majors	Experience w/SA
AL	English & Japanese	No experience
YD	English & Trade	No experience
BJ	English	No experience
MH	English	No experience

As the table above indicates, the students' major are in English and do not have any experiences with self- assessment. A further in-depth interview indicated that all four students had a strong desire and needs toward English-learning.

3. Data Collection
1) Self-assessment

During the research period, a total of eight self-assessments, in-depth interviews with a focus group and a focus participant, and group observations of the researcher were gathered to answer research questions. A self-assessment was made up of three categories of closed-questions and one open-ended question Again the closed questions were broken

down into three parts: three questions <Class Preparation> to help students prepare before class, eight questions <Class Participation> to check students' class participation, and three questions <Class Reflection> to give students a chance to reflect on their learning in class. The proportion of self-assessment in the grading system was 10 percent, which students were fully aware of. The other assessment methods and their proportions are: attendance, assignment, group assignment, midterm exam, and final exam.

2) In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted in the researcher's office after class since their mid-term examination. Interviews with MH, a focus participant, continued every week until the last week of the semester; interviews with four students of a focus group took place three times on weeks 9, 12, and 15. Interviews lasted for 1-1.5 hours per session on average. Two structured and two unstructured questions for interviews were prepared. Two structured questions are as follows: 1) initial perceptions of self-assessment 2) factors affecting the changes of perceptions of self-assessment. The whole process of interviews was audio-taped under the permission of research participants.

4. Data Analysis

Two kinds of data were collected for the study: quantitative data of eight self-assessments and qualitative data from in-depth interviews. A frequency analysis was briefly done for the assessment data, and a coding process for theme classification through repeated readings of in-depth interviews. Under the Vygotsky's activity theory[18] [19] which is the research framework for data analysis, MH is the target subject engaged in small-group activity, self-assessment is the target instrument, and a group of four students is the target community sharing group activities.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

1. Perceptions Toward Group Interaction

Interviews with MH indicated that MH had a goal of enhancing her English speaking abilities, so that she signed up for the class. she mentioned that most classes she took in the previous semesters were lecture-oriented classes. She did not have enough experience of small group activities; then, she was somewhat surprised to see that class activities were done for small group discussion in English.

> MH: *I was shocked at the fact that students had to do group work, ... and sharing opinions in English, so .... I never took a class like this with a Korean teacher.*
> [from the first interview]

MH's personality seemed to hamper building relationships with other classmates. As indicated in the excerpt above, furthermore, she was scared due to the lack of exposure to English-only group-oriented classes. The researcher's group notes also indicated that MH's group participation was minimal and didn't take any initiatives in group activities at the beginning of the semester. She only responded to the questions (if any) of group members. A minimum of eye-contacts or gestures were observed. A minimum level of interactions with group members was observed. Data from in-depth interviews indicated that she stayed in close contact with very a few friends in the English department, but she didn't talk to classmates sitting next to her. She mentioned that she didn't feel a need to interact with others in class.

2. MH's Initial Response to Self-assessment

MH's personal traits revealed in her social and cultural background had a great impact on self-assessment, an instrument utilized in order to enhance class learning and instruction. The following transcription between MH and the researcher well shows how MH initially felt about self-assessment.

MH: *I felt bad after understanding what the self-assessment was like. Small-group work, English-only discussion, constant interactions with other students, and all these ... and forcing us to do something ... those I never used.*

[from the third interview]

MH regarded self-assessment as a means of giving additional load to her study, and seemed to strengthen her negative attitude toward self-assessment frequently by associating it with small group work. As more interviews proceeded, MH expressed her negative point of view on self-assessment based on distrust in the result of self-assessment. Even though self-assessment had only 10 percent of the final grade, MH expressed her difficulty in assessing herself on her own class preparation and participation. The following data well documents how she felt about the subjective nature of self-assessment.

MH: *... the yardstick of assessing oneself is not definitely same, I think. Nobody can check if everyone did in the objective manner, so we can give ourselves good marks regardless of what we do. ... That's why several students would feel skeptical about the use of self-assessment.*

[from the fifth interview]

The weakness of self-assessment with low objectivity and reliability that MH has pointed out is not a new issue in the assessment field. Language testers and school administrators have been reporting those problems of self-assessment when it's administered and utilized in class classrooms on a large scale[2][10]. MH's concern is valid as long as the objectivity of 'self' is extremely difficult to enhance to an acceptable level for test use.

3. Changes in Perceptions over Time

The focus student showed her greater participation in class preparation, pre-reading discussion activity, article-reading activity, and after-reading activity, with greater interactions with group members after the midterm exam on week 7. As her participation in class work increased, so her perceptions of class participation and self-assessment went up. As [Table 2] indicates the upward trend of MH's self-assessment scores over time, her performance in <Class Preparation> and <Class Participation> has constantly improved.

Table 2. MH's Self-assessment Scores

Session	Before discussion	During discussion	After discussion
1	1.5	2.2	3.0
2	2.8	2.2	2.9
3	3.2	3.5	3.2
4	4.1	4.0	4.0
5	4.0	3.9	3.9
6	3.5	4.2	4.1
7	4.1	4.3	4.2
8	4.2	4.5	4.1

The above table shows that MH's scores in <Preparation before discussion> and <Participation in discussion> increased. Despite the early notice of the administration of self-assessment, MH's scores were rather low during one to two sessions due to her lack of attention or weak understanding of the new

assessment. After session 3, she made an effort to read her material and look up new vocabulary before class started. However, her level of participation did not go up proportionately with that of preparation.

MH's positive changes in self-assessment were well found in the teacher's observation notes as well as her own evaluations in the self-assessment. On session 6, MH was observed to participate in class activities with a smile on her face for the first time. Although it was hard to say that MH was as active as the other group members, it was definitely a big change compared to her previous participation. She was observed to be satisfied with her own changes by trying to complete group tasks, following the group flow with eye-contacts exchanged. In addition, she was found to wrap up her self-assessment paper by checking and reading over items in a sincere manner. Furthermore, MH's positive changes in attitudes toward self-assessment were corroborated by the interview as follows.

> MH: *I realized that my group members' hard work was not for getting high scores... They were really serious in their study. They tried to make more opportunities to participate in discussion from their preparation work. When I was hesitating to participate at the beginning of the semester, they tried to give me a hand like ... So I wanted to work better with them by working on self-assessment. The more preparation, the better participation I enjoyed in the group activities.*
>
> [from the eighth interview]

4. Group Members' Perceptions

MH's semester-long changes in thoughts and behaviors toward self-assessment from negative to positive can be theoretically explained. When self-assessment is used in such socio-cultural space as a small group, its impact goes into the other members in the same group beyond the individual learner. The self-assessment made in the social space is not value-neutral free of its socio-cultural space but value-laden affected by the space where the self-assessment is put.

The impact of community that has brought changes in MH's perceptions toward self-assessment and her responses, acceptance, and resistance process are as follows. What was first revealed by interviews with focus group members is that some of the group members were positive toward the teacher's class mode and they had a great interest in communication-oriented English-learning with small group work. Although those 4 members were new to self-assessment, they were positive about its introduction to the class. Among the group members, BJ was very satisfied with self-assessment, mentioning its positive help in her study. She said 'I feel the need to study ahead of and after class, but it's extremely difficult to do them with my own will. That's why I strongly welcome the use of self-assessment as part of class activities.' Next, KS also added her own experience of using self-assessment in detail. The biggest change since self-assessment was introduced was KS' preparation before class. While working on <Class Preparation> in the self-assessment, she read articles and looked up new words, which led to a greater understanding of the articles. KS even tried to make her own responses to discussion questions after a good grasp of reading material.

However, a few group members also expressed their concerns over self-assessment when first introduced. These concerns were in line with MH' ones, rooted in a lack of objectivity as an assessment and a comparison of assessment methods used in

other classes. As time went by, however, those initially-sceptical members came to accept self-assessment as a means of aiding students' learning by helping them make efforts and time before/during class.

Overall, MH's group community functioned as a learning community – cooperating on the group tasks, eliciting more participation of group members for the goal of maximizing their learning, which is very different from conventional language learning classrooms where students usually take lectures. Unlike individual learners who are lonely islands separated from others without meaningful interactions, the focus group is likened to a boat sailing toward a learning goal that individual students have set by utilizing each other's resources and relying on each other. Then, the nature of self-assessment used in the learning community is completely different from the classroom of a composite of individual islands. In other words, when self-assessment is used for the purpose of formative assessment, it's critical to understand in what space self-assessment is administered.

5. Instructor's Views Toward Students' Perceptions

The socio-cultural space surrounding MH is both MH's small group (focus group) and the whole classroom made up of 6 other small groups. First of all, between-group direct interactions were minimally observed while most of the students were into within-group interactions as purported by the class instructor. However, there was one member of the class who had a great impact on learning in group works: the teacher. She played a role of directing all class activities starting from initiating small group activity, providing learning materials, administering self-assessment to finally sharing groups' discussion output on a class level and wrapping up the class. As well as the role of the director, the teacher inspired students in groups to carry out tasks and work on self-assessment in a responsible manner. Such a role of a class facilitator is extremely important to provide a maximum level of language affordances to students through small group discussion activity and self-assessment.

V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at understanding changes in a student's feelings, experiences, and perceptions of self-assessment over time in the small group learning environment. Self-assessment was under focus to see how it was perceived in the group community. MH's changes in perceptions toward self-assessment were analyzed by eight self-assessments, and in-depth interviews during about a three-month-period.

MH's initial participation observed during her small group activities was mediocre; she didn't try to participate with her own will. She did nothing but respond to questions to her group members. In-depth interviews with MH also supported her participation pattern in class. MH stayed in close contact with only a few specific friends and she didn't try to expand her relationships with other classmates sitting next to her by talking to them first. Simply she didn't feel it necessary to communicate with other classmates. However, about one month after the semester started, MH's participation pattern has changed; she went with the group flow, working on the group tasks. This change was also observed in her responses to self-assessment; the higher the scores were in the self-assessment, the more satisfied MH was with the group work, hence greater participation and confidence in group discussion activity.

Over time, MH's perceptions and attitudes toward self-assessment have greatly changed. Her initial anxiety over discussion activity and self-assessment has turned into relief with the support of the other group members. MH came to utilize self-assessment as a means of boosting her study while interacting in her group. In line with the study of Lantolf and Genung[7], this study corroborated that the learner does not stand alone isolated from her socio-cultural space.

It is necessary to understand the usefulness of self-assessment in a bigger picture, not just confined to the test itself. The bigger picture includes time, place, and socio-cultural impacts such as class environment and atmosphere, the influence of learning community like group members' participation, perceptions and attitudes and so on, and the rules of community where self-assessment is being used. MH had an internal attribute that could see the usefulness of self-assessment, but it isn't the case with all the learners. In other words, it cannot be concluded that self-assessment had a uniform or similar impact on all group members. Learners' perceptions of self-assessment are not identical (shouldn't be identical) due to their unique socio-historic backgrounds as individuals, nor can be measured on a quantitative scale. Therefore, the efforts of language testers and educators to understand the nature of self-assessment in vacuum do not lead to a productive discussion of its pedagogical effects or values in class.

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저 자 소 개

나 경 희(Kyeong-Hee Rha)   정회원

▪2001년 5월 : University of Missouri-Columbia(Ph.D)
▪2003년 9월 ~ 현재 : 충북대학교 사범대학 영어교육과 교수

<관심분야> : 영어독해교육, 교사교육, 교수방법, 질적 연구

표 경 현(Kyong-Hyon Pyo)   정회원

▪2001년 1월 : University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign(Ph.D)
▪2004년 9월 : 단국대학교 외국어대학 영어과 교수

<관심분야> : 교실평가, 대안평가, 양적 연구, 교수방법