STUDENTS’ SELF-ASSESSMENT IN PROJECT-BASED WORK

Alvyda LIUOLIENĖ¹, Regina METIŪNIENĖ²

Mykolas Romeris University, Ateities g. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mails: ¹alvydavilnius@gmail.com; ²nmregina@yahoo.com

Received 27 May 2014; accepted 17 November 2014

The article aims at exploring the benefits of self-assessment as it is an important skill for lifelong learning and for critical reflection on one's own performance. The authors of the article focus on students’ self-assessment of their language proficiency skills and achievements in working on projects. Students’ reflection on their learning has numerous benefits, such as motivation, self-direction, greater responsibility, decreased intimidation and fear of the audience, development of critical thinking, etc.

The paper presents the analysis of a questionnaire based on the research of respondents’ self-evaluation of working on the project. The study has aimed at finding out the students’ attitude towards project-based learning and their assessment of their personal progress in respect of the development of their language proficiency skills.

Keywords: self-assessment, project, self-evaluation, performance reflection.

Introduction

Positive self-assessment and self-confidence largely precondition successful activities of every person. Self-assessment, defined by social psychologists, is the process of looking at oneself in order to assess aspects that are important to one's identity. C. Seldikides and M. J. Strube suggest that “the self-assessment motive will prompt people to seek information to confirm their uncertain self-concept rather than their certain self-concept and at the same time people use self-assessment to enhance their certainty of their own self-knowledge” (Seldikides, Strobe 1997). As we progress through life, we continue to develop and learn new information. Every person sometimes thinks about his/her achievements and progress at work or some other activities. During their studies students may also want to reflect upon their progress. C. Rolheiser and J. A. Ross define self-assessment as students’ judging the quality of their work, based on evidence and explicit criteria, for the purpose of doing better work in the future (Rolheiser, Ross 2013).

Self-assessment is extremely significant in the learning process. Students should be taught how to assess themselves in order to achieve better results. It has been proved that self-evaluation enhances motivation and progress in the learning process. It also promotes students’ development as independent learners...
Students’ self-assessment in project-based work

Alvyda Liuolienė, Regina Metiūnienė  Students’ self-assessment in project-based work

(Burkšaitienė, Teresevičienė 2008). Therefore, it has always been the focus of attention of teachers and scholars.

The present article seeks to explore the benefits of self-assessment as it is an important skill to develop for lifelong learning and to be able to critically reflect on one’s own performance. The authors of the article focus on students’ self-assessment of their skills and achievements in working on projects.

Thus, the objectives of the article are to review and explore the benefits of students’ self-assessment and to overview ESP students’ self-assessment related to project-based work. The main methods of the research are 1) the analysis of methodological references and sources as well as comparison of different sources on students’ self-assessment and 2) the analysis of the questionnaire based on the research of the respondents’ self-evaluation of working on the project. The respondents were Erasmus students of law at Mykolas Romeris University and students of law of Mykolas Romeris University.

Benefits of self-assessment

Student self-assessment occurs when learners assess or grade their own performance. According to researchers on knowledge acquisition, e.g. at UNSW, Sidney, Australia, self-assessment involves objective reflection on and critical evaluation of students’ own progress and skill development, the identification of gaps in their understanding and capabilities, the perception of improvement of their performance, the acquisition of skills of independent learning and critical thinking (Student Self-Assessment: Overview 2011). This point of view is supported, among many others, by Lithuanian researchers at Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania. For instance, J. Šliogerienė suggests that innovative teaching contexts and various teaching methods allow students to weigh and evaluate their linguistic competencies by themselves (Šliogerienė 2006).

Students’ reflection on their learning might have numerous benefits. Here are some of the most important ones for the efficient learning process.

− Motivation. “Self-assessment gives students a concrete sense of participation in the learning process” (Dornyei 2001). Positive results and achievements can increase students’ motivation to study better and to learn more.

− Self-direction. According to Gatehouse, self-direction means that students, having become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, would set realistic goals for themselves and organize their work more efficiently (Gatehouse 2001).

− Greater responsibility. Having assessed their individual work and having found positive and negative aspects, next time students are likely to prepare and perform better. Thus, personal involvement in the work is much stronger.

− Decreased intimidation and fear of the audience. Many people do not feel comfortable speaking in public. Students should be taught to overcome this fear. According to Smith and Frymier, “public speaking texts and instructors typically encourage students to practice speeches as a means of managing anxiety and enhancing performance” (Smith, Frymier 2006). Students might be afraid of the teacher’s assessment and bad marks. Yet, when they reflect their own performance, they can calmly concentrate on the strengths and weaknesses of their work without worrying about whether they will pass or fail.

− Development of critical thinking. Without any feedback from their peers and the teacher, the students are able to objectively and critically evaluate their achievements (http://teaching.unsw.edu.au/self-assessment).

For university students, self-assessment and reflection skills are to be upheld and developed regularly. As S. Cassidy explicitly explored the ability of “inexperienced” students to self-
assessment, in his findings he suggested that while self-assessment skill undoubtedly develops, becoming more effective during students’ academic career, inexperienced students do have the capacity for self-evaluation and should therefore be included in self-assessment activities (Cassidy 2007).

Project-based learning

According to J. Šliogerienė, innovative teaching/learning techniques allow to foster learners’ autonomy and reflection (Šliogerienė 2012). Therefore, to practice self-assessment skills the method of project-based learning was chosen by the researchers as it teaches students skills necessary for modern specialists in their professional fields as well as content and language proficiency skills. These skills include communication and presentation skills, organization and time management skills, research and inquiry skills, self-assessment and reflection skills, group participation and leadership skills (What is Project-Based... 2013). It is an instructional method that provides students with complex tasks based on challenging questions or problems that involve students’ problem solving, decision making, investigative skills, and reflection that includes teacher facilitation, but not direction. Project-based learning is focused on questions that drive students to encounter the central concepts and principles of a subject hands-on. Students form their own investigation of a guiding question, allowing them to develop valuable research skills as they engage in design, problem solving, decision making, and investigative activities. Project-based learning is an innovative technique that promotes and practices new learning habits, emphasizing creative thinking, reflection and self-assessment skills.

Projects may differ according to the aims and goals students pursue; they can be individual and group projects. At the beginning of the professional language studies students are asked to carry out individual projects and be involved in more definite and precise spheres of interest, such as providing the information review on separate institutions and their functions, development of law systems or reform of the judiciary, etc.

As students acquire more academic knowledge, experience and skills, when they become more confident in the usage of a professional language, projects related to problem-based topics are assigned to groups of students. Assigning projects to groups of students sets a frame which leads to the development of the cooperation between the teacher and the students and motivates the students to explore the field, to learn new things and professional vocabulary related to the discussed issues. If structured well, group projects can develop language skills of reading, speaking and writing, promote important intellectual and social skills and help to prepare students for a work world in which teamwork and collaboration are increasingly the norm (http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/ DesignTeach/Design/InstructionalStrategies/ GroupProjects/index.html).

The evolving needs of the global employment market have encouraged universities to train their students to take responsibility for their own learning and continuous personal and professional development. Consequently, project-based learning has been recommended as an effective methodology for enabling students to assume that responsibility. In the project-based learning, problem-based learning context, the learning and assessment processes focus strongly on student group work (Tan, Leng 2005).

The authors of the article aimed at finding out the students’ attitude towards project-based learning and their assessment of their personal progress in respect of the development of their language proficiency skills (reading, speaking, writing and enhancing professional vocabulary).

As group projects, beside other aims, are usually used to practice team work, most often the evaluation for the submitted assignment is given for the team. Both learning and con-
tribution of an individual student is not quite clear, therefore, in this case the teachers were interested in students’ personal attitude towards their progress.

**Stages and participants of the research**

In the research, 90 students of Mykolas Romeris University were surveyed. All the respondents were undergraduate students of law of Mykolas Romeris University where Legal English is taught for two semesters in the study programme. Erasmus students who had chosen Legal English classes at Mykolas Romeris University also participated in the study.

At the beginning of the second semester the students were instructed how to work in team projects and the tasks were assigned. Being involved in collaborative group projects requires that students identify key learning issues and take responsibility for their own learning as well as understand the responsibility for the team results. Time management is an important factor for the successful results of the project; therefore the students were reminded to plan their time to ensure that they make steady progress and have regular project team meetings. It has to be mentioned that the participants of the research had already had the experience of working in individual projects and submitting the results of individual research in the form of presentations. It is different when students carry out group projects, as then they usually distribute tasks among the members of the team. Thus it is very important to work with partners and co-operate with them. The team members have to learn how express and defend their interests, how to compromise and negotiate and reach the anticipated results.

The students formed the teams of 3–4 students according to their spheres of interest as the project topics had to be related to problem-based issues in legal and social fields. With project-based learning, problem-based learning assignments vary widely in scope and sophistication; students are presented with a problem or they point out the problem themselves and they begin by organizing any previous knowledge on the subject, posing additional questions, and identifying areas in which they need more information.

At the initial stage during the discussions with their teachers, the groups of students briefed their ideas on projects and submitted the plans. When the project brief was clarified the students began researching. This stage involved the group deciding on areas of responsibility for each member of the team. The largest amount of information was found in the internet, they read and spent a lot of time researching literature to find what was directly relevant to the project topic.

Having located and evaluated the relevant information, the students wrote the first draft of their part of the project. While processing the information they had to regard the fact that the findings of the project were to be presented orally to the audience, therefore, they adapted a written text to be delivered orally. In producing a collaborative project, there is a need to decide as a group how to join the individual elements into a coherent whole in the best way in order to make the final presentation logical and consistent.

Ultimately the students presented their two month work, the final product of the research, in a public event – oral presentation with follow up activities and discussions on problem-based issues of the topic for the audience. The project as a product of a team work was evaluated by peers and the teacher.

The very last stage was the administration of the survey designed to find out the students’ attitude towards project-based learning and their assessment of their personal progress in respect of the development of their language proficiency skills. The respondents expressed their reflection (absolutely disagree, disagree, don’t know, agree, fully agree) on the following statements:

- I improved my online reading skills.
- I gained more confidence in speaking for the audience.
− I learned how to adapt a written text to be delivered orally.
− My professional vocabulary increased.
− I learned to work in team and accept responsibility.
− Project-based learning is an attractive learning method.
− Project-based learning is an efficient learning method.

This graph shows a survey of 90 students regarding their positive opinions on four language skills developed while working on the project.

Figure 1 shows a survey of 90 students as regards their self-assessment on four language skills developed while working on the project. The relative frequency of the occurrence of positive answers reflects the students’ attitudes towards their achievement; the achievement is subjective, in fact, it reflects a sum total of positive feelings towards the four types of language acquisition as achieved by an individual in a team effort.

As the chart shows, the survey proved that absolute majority of students are in favour of project-based learning, since more than 70% of respondents recorded positive self-assessment regarding the progress of their language skills (reading, speaking, writing and professional vocabulary). From 76.6% to 93.3% of respondents agreed or fully agreed that they improved their online reading skills. From 70% to 83.3% of surveyed students stated that they improved their speaking skills; they stated that they gained more confidence in speaking for the audience. However, it has to be pointed out, that speaking skills development was acknowledged by the smallest number of respondents in comparison to other skills. The greatest positive response was given to the development of professional vocabulary; it achieved 90% of positive responses in two groups. The development of writing skills was positively assessed by 70% to 86.7% of the respondents.

Figure 2 presents the results of a survey of 90 students regarding their hesitation (“don’t know”) or negative opinions on the progress of four language skills developed while working on the project.

None of the respondents questioned the impact of the project-based learning on the development of professional vocabulary. Just a few students were not quite sure about their progress in professional vocabulary building. 16.7% of Law students (Group 1) were not satisfied with their progress in speaking and writing skills whereas they were surprisingly satisfied with the progress of their reading skills.

Fig. 1. The relative frequency of the occurrence of positive responses
Series 1 – students of Law of Mykolas Romeris University (Group 1)
Series 2 – students of Law of Mykolas Romeris University (Group 2)
Series 3 – Erasmus students at Mykolas Romeris University
It has to be pointed out that all three groups were highly motivated and obviously demonstrated enhanced skills of speaking while delivering their project outputs and professional usage of legal vocabulary in final presentations and discussions.

The group which enjoyed working in team most of all and learned to accept responsibility was the group of Erasmus students at Mykolas Romeris University; there was just one respondent whose self-assessment was negative and one who was not sure about his progress after the completion of the task. The same group expressed the greatest favour in project-based learning, only two respondents gave negative evaluations. Whereas the students of Law of Mykolas Romeris University were not so sure about the skills of working in team and the responsibility gained in fulfilling project assignments, 14.6% of respondents disagreed with the statement and 13.2% of respondents did not have their opinion on that point. However, on the whole the students of Law of Mykolas Romeris University had an absolutely positive opinion on project-based learning: 94.5% of respondents evaluated this method as an attractive and efficient learning method.

The project approach challenges students to think for themselves, carry out research, solve authentic problems, meet deadlines and manage much of their own learning. The teachers do not take these skills for granted; they have to be trained constantly. It may seem that the survey results are too positive, the students might have overestimated the development of their skills and they need more critical attitude towards their progress.

**Conclusions**

Self-assessment is the key element of the learning process in a team, as it implies reflection on one's role in team activities and, through those activities, on one's progress in a number of learning skills. Though unconditionally subjective, the self-assessment leads to critical thinking and (positive or negative) positioning of the individual against a task and a team. Self-assessment, if carried out in specific fields, such as elements of language acquisition, is a guided activity which highlights aspects of learning which either yield highest satisfaction or, on the contrary, signal absence of confidence or resignation.

Project-based learning, though being a complex activity, creates multiple opportunities for students, and teachers, to reflect upon different stages of progress and to employ the spirit of the team for the best results. The success of the team is shared between its members, thus the ultimate result yields high satisfaction (or, technically speaking, in case of a failure, high dissatisfaction), which is, to a certain extent, unmotivated and even elated, yet the value of the self-assessment in project-based work is in the confidence students gain in a number of fields, both social and professional.
References


What is Project-Based Learning? [online] 2013 [cited 27 October 2013]. Available from Internet: http://pbl-online.org/About/whatisPBL.htm

SAVĖS VERTINIMAS PROJEKTŲ METODO GRĮSTOJE VEIKLOJE

Alvyda LIUOLIENĖ1, Regina METIŪNIENĖ2

Mykolo Romerio Universitetas, Ateities g. 20, LT-08303 Vilnius, Lietuva
El. paštas: 1alvydavilnius@gmail.com; 2nmregina@yahoo.com

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas savęs vertinimo universitetinėse studijose būtinas, nes tai skatina savarankišką veiklą, ugdant profesines kompetencijas, didina studento atsakomybę, skatina studentų bendradarbiavimą, atliekant grupines užduotis, ir mokymąsi visą gyvenimą.

Autorės pateikia tyrimo, analizuojančio studentų savęs vertinimą, aspektus atliekant grupines užduotis užduotis. Tyrimo dalyvavo Mykolo Romerio universiteto teisės studijų pirmojo kurso studentai ir Erasmus mainų programų studentai, pasirinkę teisės anglų kalbos studijų programą. Straipsnyje pateikiamos statistiškai apdorotos ir išanalizuotos studentų nuomonės apie jų savęs vertinimą, atlikus įvairias grupines užduotis. Absoliutūs respondentų dauguma teigia, kad jų savęs vertinimas yra subjektyvus, o neįvertinamas, nes individualios vertinimo grupės fone, taigi sėkmė ar nesėkmė konstatojama lyginant ir skatina motyvaciją tolesnei pažangai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: savęs vertinimas, įvertinimas, projektų metodo veikla, reflektavimas.