

Evaluating the Impact of Self-Assessment as an Assessment for Sustainable Development Strategy in Higher Education

Short abstract (200 words)

The higher education literature testifies to an extensive interest in self-assessment (SA) because it emphasizes learner responsibility and metacognitive skills. SA also aligns perfectly with the aims of Assessment for Sustainable Development (ASD) as it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs. Moreover, SA promotes learner-centred pedagogy which sees students as autonomous learners and emphasizes the active development of knowledge rather than its mere transfer and/or passive learning experiences. The present case study, which used a mixed-method approach, explored the use of SA as an ASD practice aiming to help students improve their writing performance, self-regulation, and motivation. In terms of this semi-experimental study, forty-four undergraduate students used SA of writing for one semester. Students' pre-test and post-test scores showed that SA improved undergraduate students' writing performance significantly. The outcomes from students' pre- and post-implementation surveys revealed that SA had a strong impact on students' self-regulation. Finally, considering the findings from students' focus group discussions and self-reflective reports, the current study concludes that SA was challenging but it considerably improved students' critical thinking and sense of personal accountability.

Keywords: self-assessment, Assessment for Sustainable Development, self-regulation, Higher Education, writing, motivation

Long abstract (800 words)

The current study explored the use of self-assessment (SA) in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) as an Assessment for Sustainable Development strategy that enhances undergraduate students' writing performance, self-regulation, and motivation. SA is a key feature of autonomous, experiential and action-oriented learning (Kolb, 1984; Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013), which is defined as 'self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to the attainment of personal goals' (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 14). As an ASD method, SA allows learners to reflect on their performance taking into consideration explicitly defined assessment criteria and identify where they are in their learning journey and what they need to do to achieve their final learning goals without causing unnecessary stress to themselves or to others acknowledging their limitations and setting higher but feasible targets.

Previous research highlights the positive impact of SA on L2 writing performance (Iraji et al., 2016; Mazloomi & Khabiri, 2018) but there is a gap in the literature regarding the use of SA as an ASD strategy and its impact on students' self-regulation (Fathi et al., 2019). The present study explored the use of SA with undergraduate L2 students and addressed the following three research questions:

- (1) What are university students' perceptions of the benefits and problematic areas of SA of writing as an ASD strategy?
- (2) What is the impact of SA as an ASD strategy on undergraduate students' writing performance?
- (3) What is the impact of SA as an ASD strategy on university students' self-regulation?

The participants of this study were 44 first-year students, aged 19-28, who studied BA Business Management at London Metropolitan University. These students were international L2 advanced learners who faced considerable challenges with their writing skills as they regarded

writing as a boring and daunting task. The researcher decided to use SA in combination with TA to improve students' writing skills, self-regulation, and increase students' motivation towards writing as this combination is beneficial according to previous research (Andrade, 2019) and promotes sustainability in assessment (Boud, 2000).

This semi-experimental case study sought to describe the use of SA in undergraduate education. Three-hour sessions were held every week for one academic semester (13 weeks) during which the lecturer revised the basics of essay writing. A writing survey adapted from Tseng et al. (2006) was administered to students to measure their level of writing self-regulation before and after the intervention.

To compare the impact of SA on students' writing performance, students had to write a pre-test to determine their level of achievement before the intervention and a post-test to detect students' progress while they practiced SA. Students received training in SA (3-hour session). The overall aim was to help students have a clear understanding of the rubric used for SA and the benefits of SA as an ASD strategy. Students were asked to write two essays in 2 drafts. For each one of the drafts, students recorded their self-assessment based on the rubric providing both marks and comments and then received additional tutor feedback, coaching and mentoring to help them develop their SA skills. During the implementation, students were asked to write anonymously in a self-reflective journal the researcher kept after providing a self-evaluation. Students were also asked to take part in semi-structured focus group discussions every 3 weeks. Finally, the researcher also kept field notes to further triangulate the data she had in terms of this intervention (Natow, 2020).

The findings of the current study revealed that students improved their writing performance and self-regulation considerably as SA as an ASD strategy equips learners for the challenges of learning and practice they will face once their current episode of learning is complete. By improving their self-regulation, SA prepares learners to undertake assessment of the tasks they face throughout their lives (Boud, 2000) promoting lifelong learning. SA as an ASD strategy fosters students' ability to make judgements, the desire to construct students as reflexive learners and the goal that assessment helps form dispositions for practice helping all learners, irrespective of their background, achieve their full potential by developing their 'informed judgement' (Boud, 2000). Students reported feeling more autonomous as learners and able to reflect on their own performance but confessed that SA requires additional time and training to allow participants to better understand the assessment criteria and reap the benefits of this alternative assessment method. Moreover, the current study indicated that SA should be given due importance as it promotes the aspiration of HEI to generate self-regulated learners and promote Education for Sustainable Development goals. The use of SA as an ASD strategy can be regarded as a promising idea to help students become lifelong learners, but further development is needed to determine how sustainable assessment skills can best be taught.