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## Engineering lecturer's perceptions of student self-assessment in enhancing technical oral presentation skills

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### Abstract

In recent years, self-assessment (SA) has been increasingly implemented as an alternative method of assessment in tertiary educational contexts. The research described in this paper employed semi-structured interviews as an instrument to evaluate engineering lecturer's perceptions towards student SA in developing their non-verbal communication skills in technical oral presentations. A sample of 10 engineering lecturers from a technical university participated in the study. Semi-structured interview data revealed that most engineering lecturers viewed student SA positively and they reported on student SA as providing learning values because the latter viewed student SA as a learning aid. The results further showed that student SA could promote the students' learning, an increase of students' willingness to deliver oral presentations and self-enabling. Therefore, student SA can be a powerful method to increase learning by raising the awareness of the necessity of non-verbal communication skills in delivering technical oral presentations.

Keywords: Engineering lecturers, non-verbal communication skills, perceptions, self-assessment, technical oral presentation

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## 1. Introduction

Self-assessment (SA) is one of the alternative assessment methods that have frequently been used in recent years (Falchikov, 2013; Suñol et al., 2016). SA is a process by which students evaluate their own abilities (Salehi & Daryabar, 2014) and is used to raise learners' awareness of their individual progress (Ariafar & Fatemipour, 2013). Several studies have frequently concluded that SA is reliable. In this context, reliability means the consistency and steadiness of the scores produced by a measurement tool that can possibly be determined in various ways.

Bachman and Palmer (1989) found that a multilingual group of students of English as a foreign language in the United States was reliable to self-rate their oral communicative abilities. In addition, another example of success with student SA arises from Blanche (1990) who investigated the ability of a number of students of French as a foreign language in the USA in order to estimate their own speaking performances. The researcher found that 'the overall accuracy of the self-evaluations is impressive' (Blanche, 1990) when it was compared with teacher's assessment. A number of other educators and researchers found student SA to be a successful method in assessment (e.g., Brantmeier, 2006; Little, 2005; Rivers, 2001) and revealed it to be a reliable method of improving student's skills and abilities (Ekbatani & Pierson, 2000a).

Moreover, SA is usually viewed as one of the pillars of student autonomy. The opportunity for students to evaluate their own progress is seen as one of the fundamental elements of self-directed language learning and, therefore, helps them to emphasize their own learning (Harris, 1997). It was reported in Little's (2005, p. 321) study that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio adopted SA system and learner-centered education, as they generate learning where learners 'take full account' of their SA. Therefore, lecturers transfer a part of their responsibilities to students and increase students' awareness of skills (Little, 2005). In a learner-centered curriculum, students are encouraged and advised to not only be test-takers but also to be dynamic participants in the assessment process (Ekbatani & Pierson, 2000b). By integrating SA into classroom learning, teachers as well as students acknowledge the assessment as a mutual responsibility and not as the only responsibility of the teacher (Oscarson, 1989). Furthermore, SA can be an extremely useful complement to teacher assessment and helps to lessen the assessment burden (Dickinson 1987). This is mostly significant in situations where there are a large number of students in a classroom where SA can assist to compensate by giving a formative and continuous element of assessment, in contexts where the other practical assessment measures may be periodic tests only.

In certain situations, most passive learners' first concern is to pass examinations and to obtain good marks, which will eventually contribute towards many opportunities such as furthering their studies or employments. Even within this context, the strategy of SA can actually help them to be dynamic and to recognise autonomy for their own learning. In addition, Chamot and O'Malley (1994) stated that SA can help students to locate and identify their own strengths and weaknesses of the task that has been assigned to them plan methods to complete the given task and to obtain better marks (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). This, in turn, will then aid students to build lifelong learning habits in a certain performance and to improve the strategies to analytically and critically evaluate their own knowledge and skill levels (Sullivan et al., 1999). In addition, Little (2005) argued that employing the strategy of SA would potentially 'bring the learning process into a closer and more productive relation to tests and examinations than has traditionally been the case' (Little, 2005, p.324) bringing in more in line with learner-centered pedagogical approaches presently favoured in a second language teaching and learning as well (Little, 2005).

In conclusion, it seems that learners evaluated their own performances or linguistic competence accurately relatively, as student's and teacher's scores correlated significantly in many studies. This result is promising because as Little (2005) argued that strategy of SA procedures has the possibility to tie assessment with assessment and provide important diagnostic feedback to both students and teachers. This feedback may help those tertiary students who might be unconscious of their weaknesses and strengths of their performances before using self-appraisal (SA) and feel frustrated and demotivated when confronting comprehension difficulties (Graham, 2006). Therefore, the outcomes of this study have clear inferences for engineering undergraduates as well as lecturers to employ the SA strategy among their engineering undergraduates. It was reported by Benraghda and Radzuan (2017) that SA offers learner to be independent in their learning to decrease their anxiety level, particularly in delivering oral presentation as anxiety was found presence among ESL engineering learners in oral presentations (Radzuan & Kaur, 2011). Hence, it may enhance undergraduates' oral presentation skills and be better prepared for future engineering workplaces.

The idea of possessing self-confidence, being less anxious, motivated, self-esteem and self-efficacy was all related to positive views and attitudes about the use of SA strategy. A study conducted by Nasri, Roslan, Sekuan, Bakar and Puteh (2010) examined lecturer's perceptions of the use of SA in Brunei. They found that in Brunei, lecturers had held positive perceptions of SA as this type of assessment could help them to promote the student's skills. The lecturers also showed willingness to use SA among their students.

According to Nasri et al. (2010), most of the respondents (95%) in their study had agreed that SA could encourage active learning and develop self-confidence among students while 80% of the participants had thought that SA would be suitable to cultivate creative and critical thinking skills. Moreover, it was reported that the lecturers in their study had noted that much of the important impact of SA was related to students' enhanced non-verbal communication skills. Besides, SA would provide knowledge and understanding as opposed to attainment of certain scores or grades provided by summative assessment (i.e., the traditional paper-and-pencil test).

In similar vein, Peng (2009) had examined a teacher's perceptions of SA assessment in delivering oral presentations in English as Foreign Language (EFL) context. It was revealed that the teacher had been in favour of the SA before and after the assessment activities (pre- and post-assessment). In addition, the teacher had better understanding pertaining to how his students felt about SA. In addition, the students also had favourable reactions towards the assessment which increased their in-class concentration and participation during oral presentations. This was evident from Peng's findings as the respondents reported that SA led to increased participation among them. Overall, it can be said that the lecturers were satisfied with the effectiveness of the SA; therefore, the lecturers perceived the strategy positively.

Takahashi and Sato (2003) noted that SA is one of the new attractive alternative assessments which raises students' awareness of their individual progress and encourages students to become willing and autonomous learners. Takahashi and Sato (2003) examined university lecturer's perceptions of SA among students. The researchers found that the respondents revealed positive perceptions about the notion of student SA and demonstrated their willingness to continue using SA among their students. Furthermore, teachers mainly considered SA strategy as an easy practice to be conducted among students and accepted it as a helpful assessment for students to improve their speaking skills. The study had concluded that in the integration of assessment into teaching, 'teachers and students [would] develop the capacity to monitor and take responsibility for their own learning' (Falk, 2001, p, 182).

In De Grez et al. (2012) and Salehi and Daryabar (2014) studies, SA or self-evaluation is a process where an engineering undergraduate grades his own oral presentations. Many researchers have

constantly scrutinised whether engineering undergraduates were competent to perform significant contribution to their own assessment (e.g., Benraghda & Radzuan, 2017). SA which is also named as self-rating, self-evaluation or self-appraisal has been frequently used to enhance tertiary student-centered learning. Many studies concluded that SA strategy was reliable (Benraghda & Radzuan, 2018; Salehi & Daryabar, 2014). In this regard, the reliability of the assessment referred to the consistency and steadiness of the scores produced by a measurement instrument that could be determined in numerous ways. For instance, a study by De Grez et al. (2012) pointed out that a multilingual group of female engineering lecturer (FEL) learners in the United States was able to self-grade their oral communicative competencies. Furthermore, another instance of success with student SA strategy was found in Bachman and Palmer's (1989) study. The study investigated a number of student's competencies with French as a foreign language in the USA, to estimate their own speaking performances. The researchers realised that the general accuracy of student's self-evaluations was impressive (Bachman & Palmer, 1989). In addition, a number of researchers posited that SA technique was a successful and effective method in assessment. The researchers also demonstrated that SA technique was a reliable method of augmenting student's competencies and abilities (Ritchie, 2016) Thus, the present study aims to answer the following research question: What are the engineering lecturer's perceptions about SA technique in the context of delivering oral presentations? The next section details the methodology employed in the current study.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. The Study

The participants of the current study were final year engineering undergraduates from the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Earth Resources (FCEER) at Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP). A total of 130 final year engineering undergraduates from FCEER delivered their undergraduate research project (URP). URP is the compulsory final year undergraduates' research project, in which it will be presented to panel of internal and external evaluators at the end of the students' final year engineering programme. It is divided into two phases, URP 1 and URP 2. URP 1 is the phase where the students are required to present their research proposal, while in URP 2, the students have to present their research findings to the panel.

Of 130 final year engineering undergraduates, only 12 volunteered to be involved in this study. Only engineering undergraduates who have been involved in the final year project presentations are eligible to be part of the study. Of the 12 engineering undergraduates, 5 engineering students were majoring in soil engineering structure, 3 engineering undergraduates were majoring in environmental engineering and 4 were majoring in highway, respectively. Table 1 shows the number of engineering undergraduates participated in the study based on their majors.

Table 1. Number of engineering undergraduates based on academic majors

Academic Majors	Frequency
Soil engineering structure	5
Environmental engineering	3
Highway	4
Total	12

Besides the final year civil engineering students, faculty lecturers were also involved in this study. This article only reports the qualitative findings which were gathered from the interviews with the faculty lecturers.

## **2.2. Participants**

There were a total of 10 lecturers (7 males and 3 females) from the FCEER participated in this study. All these engineering lecturers have more than 10 years of experience in teaching and assessing the URP2.

## **2.3. Research Instrument**

### **2.3.1. Semi-structured interview**

The purpose of involving the engineering lecturers in the present study is to examine their perceptions of SA in enhancing the oral presentations skills of the engineering undergraduates. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 lecturers. The engineering lecturers were interviewed based on non-probability sampling. Creswell (2012) posited that in non-probability sampling, the researcher selects the participants based on convenience. The interview protocol consists of seven open-ended items. The items were adapted from Peng (2009).

Each individual interview took about 30 min and was recorded on a digital audio recorder and was transcribed manually. To ensure a systematic description of the data and analysis of the interview data, the participants in the semi-structured interview were coded as illustrated in Table 2. For instance, MEL 7 indicates a male engineering lecturer whose interview code is 7. While, FEL2 refers to an FEL whose interview number is 2. The interview responses were classified and analysed thematically.

Table 2. The illustrations of the participants' coding

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Interviewee's number</b>	<b>Code</b>
Male engineering lecturer	7	MEL
Female engineering lecturer	2	FEL

## **2.4. Data analysis technique**

All interview data were transcribed and analysed manually. Repeated themes were searched for and categorised together and later were coded (Creswell, 2012). To validate the transcriptions, they were given to the interviewees again after the process of transcribing the interviews was completed.

## **3. Results**

Results demonstrate that the engineering lecturer's perceptions pertaining to student SA in enhancing the oral presentation skills of technical oral presentations can be clustered into three main

themes: (1) Positive attitude towards SA, (2) promoting learning and (3) an increase of engineering undergraduates' willingness in an oral presentation, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes emerged from interviews

No.	Themes
1	Positive attitude towards SA
2	Promoting learning
3	An increase of engineering undergraduates' willingness in an oral presentation

### 3.1. Positive attitude towards SA

The theme attitude concerns with the impressions of the engineering lecturers on the use of SA technique in delivering a technical oral presentation. Based on the data collected, most of the participants (90%) revealed positive attitudes towards the use of SA among engineering undergraduates as a supportive assessment to the engineering undergraduates, particularly before conducting the actual oral presentations. A FEL responded, 'SA is a supportive technique for engineering undergraduates to lessen their anxiousness and boost their confidence level' (FEL/7). Clearly, SA can increase the undergraduates' self-confidence in delivering oral presentations.

Furthermore, other engineering lecturers also demonstrated positive attitudes about SA in terms of its usefulness for the undergraduates themselves. For example, MEL2, MEL3, MEL4, MEL5 and FEL2 perceived SA as 'effective, workable, a good technique, helpful and a good strategy' for the students to apply, in this context, in developing their presentation skills. Some of the excerpts are illustrated below:

MEL5: Using SA among engineering undergraduates is effective. It is a technique to help the engineering undergraduates to boost their presentation skills.

MEL3: SA is a good technique to be applied to tertiary students. Engineering undergraduates need to realise their own performances in oral presentation.

MEL4: SA is very helpful to engineering undergraduates. They can use this assessment to empower their skills and to deliver successful presentations.

In addition to that, the lecturers also mentioned that SA gave opportunities for the students to identify their weaknesses and strengths in their own presentations. Their opinions are as illustrated in the excerpts below:

MEL1: SA is workable when they have to scrutinise their own performances and identify their weaknesses and strengths.

FEL2: SA is a good strategy to be used among my students. By implementing SA, students can see their weaknesses and thus can improve their presentation skills and the way they deliver their contents in the presentations.

As shown above, the engineering lecturers in this study were keen towards the use of SA of oral presentations among engineering undergraduates. Apparently, majority agreed that SA helps enhancing the undergraduates' confidence and developing their presentation skills. It was also pointed out that through SA, the undergraduates could identify their strengths and weaknesses.

### 3.2. Promoting learning

The second theme that emerged from the interview transcription analysis is SA promotes learning. One FEL2 shared her concerns regarding oral presentations among her engineering students. She claimed that from her observations, some students were anxious in delivering oral presentations. This could be due to their presentation experiences in various contexts. For that reason, she claimed that her 'students are in need of numerous activities to help them making effective oral presentations and I strongly believe that SA is one of the best techniques for inspiring them to learn more about oral presentations' (FEL2).

The other participants also had similar opinions that SA could be a stimulating activity to enhance the undergraduates' learning presentation skills. As SA helped the undergraduates to overcome their weaknesses, it is believed that SA could motivate them to give better presentation performances. Below are the examples of the excerpts:

MEL1: SA is a successful learning technique to promote student's skills and it helps them to overcome their weaknesses.

MEL5: It (SA) helps engineering undergraduates to go through the learning process to better perform oral presentations.

FEL7: Concerning SA, it is a step to boost the students' learning of making oral presentations.

From the findings, it shows that participants believed that the undergraduates are in need of assistance to enhance their self-confidence and competencies in technical oral presentations. According to the participants in this study, SA has the potential to encourage undergraduates to learn more about technical oral presentations. In addition, they also believe that SA could be a part of stimulating and exciting classroom activities to promote effective technical oral presentation.

### **3.3. An increase of students' willingness to deliver oral presentations**

The engineering lecturers (60%) reported that SA could increase the engineering undergraduates' willingness in delivering an oral presentation. Based on the engineering lecturer's experiences with engineering undergraduates' oral presentation performances, when the engineering undergraduates are assigned to perform an oral presentation, they become anxious due to the low scores received from their lecturers. This feeling is a predominant factor among many undergraduates at a university that hampers their willingness and engagement to make oral presentations effectively. Therefore, according to participant's perceptions (engineering lecturers) on SA, the key success for the engineering undergraduates to become successful presenters is perceived to be SA. Willingness can increase the levels of non-verbal communication skills of the undergraduates' oral presentations and in various communicational contexts and lessen their anxiousness. An engineering male lecturer commented, 'one of the outcomes of SA is to lower students' nervousness and to become willing and passionate towards their oral presentations' (MEL/6). In addition, other participants claimed the willingness of the engineering undergraduates on performing oral presentations as follows:

FEL7: Engineering undergraduates can enhance their performances by self-assessing their own presentations before they go for their actual oral presentations (URP2). It (SA) will make them keen to learn and improve the quality of their presentation performances. SA is a truly helpful technique.

FEL2: Most students have very weak presentation skills, especially in terms of language. Students do not care to be good presenters (does not matter just do it as it goes). Therefore, by implementing SA, students will be more responsible and inclined to make oral presentations.

MEL3: SA encourages weak engineering undergraduates to do better in practising more and more in delivering the oral presentation and assessing themselves for better learning of presentation skills.



MEL1: SA helps engineering undergraduates to do more oral presentation performance.

MEL4: Using SA, engineering undergraduates can then become willing on enhancing their own non-verbal communication skills of their oral presentation performances.

The participants (engineering lecturers) of the current study viewed that the increase of the willingness of the undergraduates in an oral presentation is as an outcome of implementing SA strategy among engineering undergraduates in enhancing non-verbal communication skills of technical oral presentations. Moreover, the engineering lecturers reported to encourage the engineering undergraduates to make the oral presentations through SA exercises to improve successful oral presentations in their URP2.

#### **4. Discussion**

This paper aims to get the perceptions of the engineering faculty lecturers on SA and how it impacts the undergraduates' non-verbal presentation skills, in particular, and their performance in technical oral presentations, in general. This study found some common perceptions about SA and technical oral presentation skills. The participants hold positive opinions about SA as a method used to improve the weaknesses of the engineering undergraduates in relation to delivering non-verbal communication skills of oral presentations. Terms used such as boosted self-confidence, being less anxious, highly motivated, increased self-esteem and enhanced self-efficacy demonstrates positive perceptions and attitudes of the participants regarding SA use by the undergraduates.

The findings of the present study corroborates with findings from the study conducted by Nasri et al. (2010) with Brunei lecturers. The study found that Brunei lecturers hold positive perceptions on the use of SA as it could help them to promote their students' active learning, self-confidence, cultivate creative and critical thinking skills. Similar findings were found by Peng (2009) that EFL teachers favoured alternative assessment in enhancing student's competencies in oral presentations. The participants from both studies (Peng's and this study) agreed that the impact of SA on the students' oral presentation skills enhancement was effective. The participants of the present study also claimed that by implementing SA, the students developed more efforts and sense of responsibility in their own learning and became independent and autonomous learners (Takahashi and Sato, 2003). Findings also reveal that SA gave opportunities for the students to monitor their abilities, strengths and weaknesses in their oral presentations. Realising these fundamental elements will help the students to develop their desired skills and capabilities (Ariafar & Fatemipour, 2013).

By involving students in the assessment process, they learn the qualities needed for good performances, how to set personal goals and finally develop the habit of self-reflections (Rolheiser & Ross, 2003). All in all, the findings of the present study revealed that the idea of engaging the engineering undergraduates in SA was welcomed by the engineering lecturers as it benefits the students in enhancing their competencies in oral presentations.

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the perceptions of 10 engineering lecturers on the implementation of SA among Malaysian engineering undergraduates in enhancing their technical oral presentation delivery. Since the engineering undergraduates must present their final research project orally to a set of internal and external industry panels, therefore these undergraduates would have to be reasonable skilled in technical oral presentations. Adequate or effective oral presentation skills will determine the marks and grades of their URP course, and this is very vital for the undergraduates. Through the



application of SA, it is perceived to have given an array of benefits to the undergraduates to achieve academic excellence (Murphy & Barry, 2016; Salehi & Daryabar, 2014). Since oral presentation is one of the most highly involved communicative events by professional engineers (Mohamed, Radzuan, Kassim & Ali, 2014), SA has a lot of potential to prepare and equip the Engineers To Be to become effective technical oral presenters at their future workplace.

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