



Self-assessment and Language Learner Autonomy: An Exploratory Study in a Vietnamese University

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the role of self-assessment in developing language learner autonomy in the Vietnamese higher education context. Specifically, it focuses on how the assessment for English language learning is currently conducted and how this relates to learner autonomy. Despite the Vietnamese government's official requirement for learner autonomy, Vietnamese higher education's language academic context provides presently little space for autonomous learning. The idea of self-assessment is relatively unfamiliar and has, therefore, been little investigated. Based on qualitative data from observations and interviews with 38 university students, this paper presents the understanding of learner autonomy in Vietnamese higher education. In particular, the findings suggest that self-assessment may be a useful operational approach for fostering language learner autonomy in Vietnam and other similar settings. Also, they highlight the demand of promoting self-assessment literacy and the importance of self-assessment principles within the local context.

1. INTRODUCTION

Autonomous language learning, including the notion of self-assessment (also named as self-rating, self-correction, or self-evaluation), is a topical area of research. The question about learners' ability to assess their learning progress attracted the discussion of many researchers such as LeBlanc and Painchaud (1985), Blanche and Merino (1989), Janssen-van (1989), Klenowski (1995), Gardner (2000), Berry (2009), Taras (2010), Brown and Harris (2013), Panadero et al. (2016), Shelton-Strong (2018). This research area also gathered attention from researchers about how to utilise self-assessment to foster learner autonomy (LA) in an exam-oriented context where English language is a compulsory subject for EFL learners (Harris, 1997; Gardner, 2000; Little, 2004b, 2005; Tholin, 2008; Berry, 2009; Little, 2009; Little & Erickson, 2015; Panadero et al., 2017; Han & Fan, 2019). For example, Berry (2009) conducted an empirical study about the relationship between self-assessment and LA in English learning and proposed suggestions for carrying out self-assessment in higher education. Sierra and Frodden (2017) further discussed self-assessment strategies in developing LA in an English course at a Colombian university. Yet, there appears little investigation into learners' views about self-assessment and its correlation to their learning practices. In the light of this, the present study aims to explore: (1) Vietnamese students' responses and attitudes towards self-assessment in their English learning, and (2) whether their current English learning practices supported the development of self-assessment for autonomous learning. Although this study is conducted in one national context, the findings might be of broader interest and may also be applied elsewhere in other East Asian countries, which share an exam-oriented culture (Liu & Feng, 2015).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The use of self-assessment in this study is based on constructivist theories, which identify that learning is constructed on the students' reflections on their learning (Gagnon & Collay, 2001). From the constructivist view of Brooks and Brooks (1999), Kaufman and Brooks (1996), assessment is conducted continuously by both students and teachers during the learning process. The assessment forms are varied, such as writing reflective pieces, discussing what students have learned, and asking why this knowledge is useful in the world or requiring students to demonstrate and apply skills they have acquired. These forms are considered authentic, which offer students and teachers an opportunity to think again about what they have done and plan for future learning (Gagnon & Collay, 2001). Learner autonomy requires learners' reflective involvement in their learning process. Therefore, authentic assessment can help to foster learner autonomy (Lamb, 2016).

In an autonomous learning environment, where teachers are considered facilitators, learners should play a central role in evaluating learning outcomes (Cotterall, 1995; Little, 2011). This role may be enacted through either peer- or self-assessment. From a constructivist viewpoint, both peer- and self-assessment require students to make decisions about the standards of performance expected and judge the quality of performance concerning these standards (Boud, 1995; Murakami et al., 2012). The focus of this study is on self-assessment as one means by which students can be actively engaged in reflection and deciding on their learning.

The use of self-assessment in this study is further based on learner autonomy theories, which identify self-assessment as integral (Little, 2011). In other words, as self-assessment emphasises student responsibility and making judgments, it is considered an essential element of learner autonomy (Boud, 1995; Klenowski, 1995, 2012). Little (2011) stated that "*the development and exercise of learner autonomy depend on a reflective process in which evaluation, including self-assessment, plays a central role*". Dickinson (1987) provided three reasons for self-assessment, which confirms self-assessment as a vital part of learner autonomy: (1) learners' ability to evaluate their language learning facilitates the learning process; (2) learners take some responsibility by being involved in the process of self-assessment; and (3) the burden for the teacher in the learning process is reduced.

Regarding a view of advancing learning and through the process of self-assessment, Klenowski (1995, 2012) and Lee and Butler (2010) argued that by gaining deeper insight about their own strengths and weaknesses, students can have proper capabilities to set learning goals, monitor learning plan, evaluate achievements, and further determine implications and routines for future actions. Through self-assessment, students also understand "*the amount of assistance and effort needed to accomplish their goals, to develop a variety of strategies, and to employ them effectively*" (Lee & Butler, 2010). Besides, self-assessment also gradually enhances students' critical attitude toward learning, supporting them to achieve full autonomy (Chen, 2008). Figure 1 captured students' engagement in reflections on learning processes and teaching experiences (Klenowski, 1995, 2012), as the essential to sustain the relationships of the learning cycle towards learner autonomy. In other words, students can become autonomous in learning by engaging in such reflections.

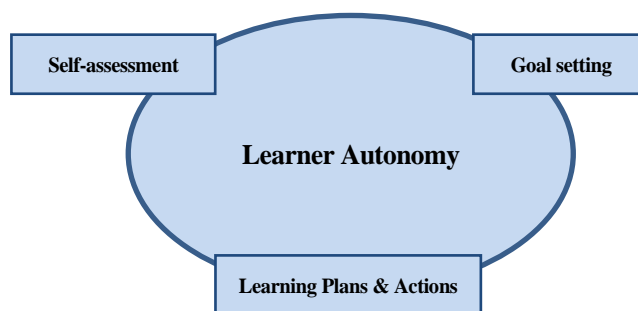


Figure 1. The learning cycle to achieve learner autonomy
(adopted from Klenowski (1995, 2012), Lee and Butler (2010), and Little (2011))

2.2. Using self-assessment to foster language learner autonomy

Several prior studies on using self-assessment to promote learner autonomy in English education in many countries have been conducted (Mahdavinia & Ahmadi, 2011; Adediwura, 2012; Gholami, 2016; Panadero et al., 2016; Panadero et al., 2017; Sierra & Frodden, 2017; Shelton-Strong, 2018). For example, Mahdavinia and Ahmadi

(2011) investigated the use of portfolios as a means of self-assessment to promote learner autonomy in English learning for students in an Iranian university. The portfolio involved the students in writing reflective essays to discuss what they had learned in previous class sessions and provide their own opinions and understanding in each session. Another writing was students' reflection at the end of the term. There were two evaluators for each student writing to ensure the reliability of the assessment. Participants were 34 female students who were attending a general English course. Data were collected through the students' essay writing, interviews with some selected students, and observations conducted by an independent observer. The study found that portfolios promoted student responsibility for self-assessment. The students reflected that they were able to assess their improvement. The study concluded that the use of portfolios increased the development of self-assessment skills, promoting learner autonomy to the students. Shelton-Strong (2018) conducted a study with 80 participants in four English classes at the tertiary level in Japan. The students had opportunities to experience self-assessment and peer-assessment of speaking tasks and project work for one semester. The results revealed that students developed their metacognitive skills and awareness. In other words, they demonstrated LA through reflection.


In summary, the critical point to make self-assessment productive relates to the issue of learner training. In other words, implementing student self-assessment is considered as a practical response to address the reliability and validity of self-assessment. Regarding such importance of students' self-assessment activities, there are research questions underlying the role of teachers in forming and sustaining those habits.

2.3. Teacher's role in the self-assessment process

From a constructivist aspect, assessment and self-assessment in particular challenges the traditional teacher-student relationship as it "blurs the artificial barriers between teaching, learning, and assessment to forge a culture of collaborative inquiry and improvement in the classroom" (Moss & Brookhart, 2009). Researchers such as Gardner (2000), Morrison and Navarro (2012), and Willison et al. (2017) identified that self-assessment requires a changed role between learners and teachers. The degree of this change depends on the degree of learner autonomy. The more dependent on teacher support that learners need, the less autonomous they demonstrate (Willison et al., 2017). Gardner (2000) further stated that self-assessment does not merely mean to leave students "to fend for themselves"; but rather "[i]t is about teachers creating opportunities for students to make responsible choices which individualise assessments to their own needs". It is also about whether teachers open a dialogue or facilitate interactions with learners during their instruction (Dann, 2002). Accordingly, to foster learner autonomy, self-assessment techniques, as Gardner (2000) warned, "need to be introduced carefully and accompanied by considerable awareness raising and support" (p.49).

This study employed McMillan and Hearn's (2008) growth scheme for teacher implementation of student self-assessment to clarify the teacher's role in the process of self-assessment. This growth scheme was adapted by McMillan and Hearn (2008) from Rolheiser and Ross's (2001) practical model of four stages to teach student self-assessment.

Table 1. Model for helping students to develop learner autonomy through self-assessment, adapted from McMillan and Hearn (2008)

Stages of self-assessment	Degree of role changing 			
	Teacher	Teacher	Student	Student
Establishing criteria	Give criteria	Negotiate and select criteria from a menu of possibilities		Generate criteria
Applying criteria	Give examples of applying criteria	Model how to apply criteria	See, understand how to apply criteria	Apply criteria
Generating feedback	Provide feedback	Provide feedback		Justify feedback
Setting goals & Action plans	Determine goals and action plans	Provide a menu of goals and action plans	Select from the given menu	Construct goals and action plans

The model indicates that students are gradually given opportunities to engage in self-assessing their learning during each of the four stages. That is, the burden of the assessment job is shared step by step between teachers and students. First, teachers and students negotiate to determine the assessment criteria. Students are encouraged to select

appropriate measures from a menu of possibilities. Second, students are taught how to apply these criteria to assess their learning. This stage requires teachers to give examples and model for students to see and understand the criteria' application. Third, students apply their initial comprehension of the criteria and their application to provide feedback and receive teachers' feedback. Teachers further help students to justify the accurate feedback. Fourth, with teachers' help, students construct their learning goals and plan to achieve their goals. That is, teachers, gain students' involvement in selecting from a menu of goals and plans.

In sum, although the emphasis of self-assessment is on students, teachers still play a vital role in autonomous teaching and learning environment. This involves teachers providing support and guidance for students to attain skills gradually in self-assessment and independence in their learning (Klenowski, 1995, 2012).

2.4. English language training and learner autonomy at Vietnamese higher education context

In the context of globalisation, Vietnam has recognised autonomy and communication in English as crucial factors in its determination for international integration (Vietnamese Assembly, 2005, 2019; Vietnamese Prime Minister, 2008, 2012). However, young Vietnamese workers are passive and have limited English communicative ability even after years of studying at tertiary level (Vietnamese Prime Minister, 2008, 2012; Education First, 2017). In responding to these challenges, there is an urgent requirement, as stated in Vietnamese Education Law, to develop learner autonomy (Vietnamese Assembly, 2005; MOET, 2013, 2014).

With the target of improving the situation, the government has undertaken the National Foreign Languages Project 2020. The outcomes required for undergraduate students are based on the 6-level Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: (1) non-English-major undergraduates (level 3 - B1); (2) primary English students (from diploma program - level 4 - B2, and from bachelor program - level 5 - C1). Such regulations focus on the outcome of language achievement rather than the development of language use.

However, the current English pedagogy and assessment in Vietnam give rise to many challenges to meet the policy requirement. The practices of teaching and learning English in Vietnam experienced several limitations such as lack of qualified English teachers, weakness in English communicative skills, or outdated textbooks (Education First, 2017). According to a survey in late 2016 by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, only one in five students achieved that level in 2015. It was concluded that the project outcomes that the government targeted for language proficiency were too ambitious. Recently, the government has updated the newly amended project towards the universalisation by 2025. The new strategic objectives regarding university level include: (1) 100 per cent of foreign language majors of universities must apply output criteria for students upon graduation while 80 per cent of other majors must also use the criteria; and (2) 100 per cent of a student majoring in foreign language teaching must follow professional criteria and fulfil the requirement of foreign language teachers' competences.

In such a context, English teachers are likely to be trapped between society's need for improving learner autonomy and practical communicative skills and pressure to prepare students for final examinations at university. In other words, teachers are caught by the tensions between the two assessment cultures as Hamp-Lyons (2007) classified: a learning-oriented culture (focusing on individual learners' progress in language learning) and an exam-oriented culture (focusing on learners' mastery of language proficiency). In line with this problem, many countries such as Hong Kong or Korea have been actively promoting formative assessment (including self-assessment) as a priority solution of their assessment reform (Butler & Lee, 2010). Owing to this trend and the practical need in Vietnam, research on this topic cannot be underestimated. In other words, this exploratory study aims to contribute to the developmental trend of such research. Specifically, it focuses on exploring how the assessment of English language learning is currently conducted and how this relates to language learner autonomy. In particular, the study seeks to answer two following questions:

- (1) What are Vietnamese students' responses and attitudes towards self-assessment in their English learning?
- (2) Do the students' current English learning practices support the development of self-assessment for autonomous learning?

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

According to the theoretical framework, self-assessment in this study draws on theories of constructivism and learner autonomy. First, from the lens of constructivists Gagnon and Collay (2001), learners construct their learning based on their reflections, which involve self-assessment. Second, theories of learner autonomy, according to Little (2011), identify self-assessment as crucial. It is necessary to engage learners in the assessment process and provide them with opportunities to self-assess their learning, fostering learner autonomy (Gardner, 2000; Klenowski, 1995; 2012).

In this qualitative study, the perspectives and learning practices towards self-assessment of 38 second-year students in two EFL classes from a Vietnamese university were explored. The findings have implications for teaching students to assess their learning to develop learner autonomy.

3.1. Research site

The study was carried out at a medium-sized Vietnamese university. The students were assigned to classes by the institution according to their majors. For each non-English primary class, there were approximately 35 to 45 students with varying levels of English proficiency.

3.1.1. Participants

Among XXX classes at the chosen university, invitations were sent to 4 randomly selected classes. The confirmation of participation was reached only if both teachers and the majority of students agreed to cooperate. Any student preserved their right to not participate or to withdraw whenever they want. Finally, a class of 38 second-year EFL students and their teacher volunteered to contribute to further processes. Participated students had five 45-minute periods of English per week for two 9-week semesters. Before the commencement of this research, the course had been taught for three weeks. All students were non-English majors. There was one English teacher per semester. In-depth interviews were conducted with four students who were willing to participate.

3.1.2. Introducing the curriculum and assessment regulation at the research area

The aims of this second-year English course included the development of communication skills in a range of everyday situations. Other purposes were the development of skills in writing and comprehension of short and regular texts. This course's overall goal was for students to achieve scores ranging from IELTS band 3.0 to 3.5.

The leading textbook used for the course was Book Three in the "New English File" series (Oxford University Press). Semester one comprised a total of 45 periods: each unit of this nine-unit textbook accounted for ten periods of in-class learning. Two periods were allocated for excursions, such as visiting a tourist attraction. Of the remaining three periods, two were for testing, and one was for the introduction to the English course and the study guide.

Regulation for testing and evaluation comprised three elements: (1) devised oral and written tests by teacher, (2) standardised tests and (3) final test. The first element usually involved homework or preparatory work checking. The second element was two timetabled tests or progress tests. Each lasted for one period taking place after every two units. The final multiple-choice test was designed to assess listening and reading comprehension. The writing section included the assessment of sentence building and writing full sentences from prompts. For the final test of the first semester of the school year, one section asked students how they would respond in some everyday situations. One such example was when "you want to ask someone the direction to the nearest post office". The final test of the second semester of the school year involved a face-to-face interview of about five minutes for each student. The speaking test included: (1) introducing "yourself", and (2) talking on a given topic. The former involved questions and answers about the students, such as name, date of birth, and family. The latter was adapted from section two of the IELTS speaking test. The students were given a card with a topic and suggested questions for discussion. For these students, the topics were derived from their curriculum, for example, describing a place, describing a person, or talking about daily routines.

3.2. Research procedure

A class observation of the current English assessment practice was conducted before the four students' in-depth interviews. As stated earlier, this data collection method of class observation aimed to obtain information on assessment practices in classroom by teachers and students to complement the interviews. The main reason to use observation as a supplementary source for interview data is that it "allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated" (Merriam, 1998). Before the observation, as Creswell (2008) suggested, an observational protocol was designed to get the descriptive information on the setting. During the observation, the critical area to be explored was the interactive dialogue between students and teachers, which is considered an essential dimension of student self-assessment (Klenowski, 1995; 2012).

All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. As Butler and Lee (2010) explained, the primary reason is that the students can self-assess their performance more accurately in their first language than in their target language. The interviews were arranged to occur at a room on the university campus at the participants' convenience and were audio-recorded. All the data were first typed verbatim into electronic documents. To analyse the data, the researcher used three steps as Creswell (2008) suggested including (1) obtaining a general sense of material, (2) coding the data, and (3) generating themes. The researcher used NVIVO version 12.0, a useful qualitative data analysis tool, to manage these data. For example, expressions about the difficult skills in students' English learning were categorised

under learning weaknesses. These three steps were conducted in Vietnamese. Then the data was translated into English. To ensure validity, the researcher employed different translation techniques including back translation and consultation with other people, as suggested by Brislin (1970), Bracken and Barona (1991), Birlini (2000), and Chen and Boore (2008). Both English and Vietnamese versions were further used for direct quotations. In addition, to eliminate ethical issues, the researcher numbered participants and use different names to present their messages.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Students' reflections on their learning achievement and progress

- *"It's difficult to check by myself."*

In responding to the question about how the students assessed their learning achievement and progress, there was agreement that self-assessment was challenging to conduct. The students usually evaluated their work with other peers and with the teacher. An extract from Dzung is illustrative:

Interviewer: *"After completing your homework, how do you know your answers are correct?"*

Dzung: *"It's difficult to check by myself. I usually compare it with my friends."*

Interviewer: *"When in class, how do you check your work?"*

Dzung: *"We compare with each other, and then we compare with our teacher's response."*

The students appeared to show that self-assessment was beyond their ability. In other words, they were not confident in assessing their learning tasks. Such a response is not surprising, as Derwing (2003) and Derwing and Rossiter (2002) stated that second language learners often find it challenging to identify their own mistakes. Furthermore, these students recognised that collaborative assessment could help them define their learning achievement and progress. The constructivist theory highlights the vital engagement of student-led evaluation in the whole process of assessment. According to Ross (2006), if students are taught how to assess their work realistically and accurately, their self-confidence and learning will be improved. It can be inferred that these students' autonomous learning could be enhanced if they were equipped with skills of self-assessment and peer-assessment.

- *"Listening is the most difficult for me in learning English."*

The students described their weaknesses in talking about their English learning. All of them assessed speaking and listening as their weaker skills. For example:

Minh: *"Speaking is so hard, mainly how to express your ideas. Although I have learned many words, I can't link the words together to make meaningful sentences...I think I know many words, but my problem is how to use them to speak fluently."*

Hanh: *"My listening comprehension is not good. I misunderstand words that sound the same. They seem to be pronounced the same."*

Dzung: *"Listening is the most difficult for me. I don't understand anything in the listening lesson. I think grammar is easy... Another difficulty for me is I don't know how to speak when standing in front of many people, even though I have prepared for it."*

Le: *"My listening skill is bad, so I don't comprehend anything. Most of our pronunciation is not correct."*

These responses aligned with the students' reflections about their out-of-class learning activities, mainly speaking and listening. Accordingly, once the students identified their weaknesses, they then carried out their learning for improvement. This learning cycle, as determined by Rolheiser et al. (2000), "results when students confidently set learning goals that are moderately challenging yet realistic, and then exert the effort, energy, and resources needed to accomplish those goals". In other words, these reflections indicated aspects of student ability to set learning goals, a crucial element of learner autonomy (Fried-Booth, 2002).

4.2. Teachers' role in the process

- *"I like the teacher to evaluate my work."*

The students generally said that they accepted friends' evaluations. However, they preferred teachers who were more expert to evaluate their work.

"I think the classmates' assessment is accurate to some extent. I like the teacher to evaluate my work because she is more experienced" - Minh.

"I want the teacher to give us a quick check of our homework in the workbook. If we work ourselves without answer keys, there must be mistakes that we don't recognise. At the examination, the same errors may lead to low marks. Such results demotivate us" - Le.

The above data indicated the student views of assessment with both teachers and students' engagement as their preference. Although the students stated that they could give peer-assessment, they did not appear to believe in all degrees of their assessment accuracy and would prefer feedback from the teacher. The reason, as explained by Ross (2006), is "because they [the students] lack the cognitive skills to integrate information about their abilities and are more vulnerable to wishful thinking". According to Rolheiser and Ross (2001), if students are taught how to perform self-assessment systematically, the accuracy of their self-assessment will improve.

There was an overlap between the student's preference for assessing their work and the current assessment practices in their class. Students were given opportunities to give feedback on their peers, and then the teacher elaborated on their answers.

Two snapshots representing the main lesson activities are now presented (Table 2 and 3) to illustrate the class's current teaching and learning practice, using the suggested protocol of Lemke (1990). The dialogue between the teacher and students was translated into English. (E) and (V) denote the speakers' use of English and Vietnamese, respectively.

Table 2. Snapshot 1

Class: GE3	Teacher: Ly Tran
<p>After using the photos to explain to the students so that they understood the notices' meaning, Ly asked the students to match each notice with its rule. For example:</p>	
<p>The notices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SILENCE: Exam in progress 2. Tonight's film: Pirates of the Caribbean. Entrance free 3. Course fees: to be paid in advance 4. No food here, please 	<p>The rules:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. You have to pay before you start. b. You mustn't talk near here. c. You don't have to pay to see it. d. You mustn't eat here.
<p>The students worked individually for five minutes. Then Ly called for the students' answers. Following was an example of the teacher-student dialogue:</p> <p>Ly (E): Number 1, the first notice? Students (E): c. Ly (E): Good. Now, how about number 2? Students (E): a. Ly (E): No, it's wrong. The correct is b.</p>	

Table 3. Snapshot 2

Class: GE3	Teacher: Ly Tran
<p>Ly asked the students to do task (c), which required them to write correct sentences about the school regulations where the students were studying English by using "we have to, we don't have to, or we must" to complete the sentences. The students worked individually for about seven minutes. Then Ly called upon two students to come and write their answers on the board. Ly checked sentence by sentence with the whole class.</p> <p>For example: These were two answers from Manh [which he wrote on board]: We have to [come to lessons on time.] We don't have to [turn off our mobile phones.] Ly (E): Now the first one [Ly read Manh's answer]... "We have to"...[Ly asked of the whole class] correct or not, whole class? Students (E): Correct. Ly (E): Good [she then put a tick next to his answer] How about the second [Ly read Manh's answer]... "We don't have to"...[Ly asked of the whole class] correct or not, whole class? Students (E): No. Ly (V): In class, can we turn on our mobile phones? Students (E): No, we have to turn off. Ly (E): [Put a cross next to Manh's answer] We have to ... [She read aloud and wrote on the board at the same time]</p>	

It can be seen that to practise the use of the grammar points of the lesson, in the first snapshot, Ly's focus was on providing answer keys. Ly used questioning approach to draw out the students' responses. She offered her answers after each student response. In the second snapshot, Ly indicated her attempts to engage the students in peer-assessment. She questioned other students to assess Manh's work. She tried to help the students construct their understanding by providing clues. Manh did not appear to have the opportunity to assess his work before the teacher's final judgment. Besides, the two snapshots indicate that the teacher was the one who initiated the questions and elaborated on the answers. The students appeared to play a passive role in answering, as the teacher requested. If Ly provided Manh with an opportunity for self-assessment, according to Hebert (1998), students would internalise instructional goals and apply them to future efforts. In other words, from a constructivist view of learning, these students' autonomous learning could be promoted when they engaged in self-assessment.

4.3. Discussion

4.3.1. Students' responses and attitudes towards self-assessment

The students had a sense of goal setting, and they tried to improve their weaknesses. Evidence for this can be seen through the students' reflections about their shortcomings and their learning actions, such as practising listening and speaking exercises. However, in self-assessing their achievement, the students did not appear to be confident. That is, the students considered that self-assessment was a difficult task and was beyond their ability. According to Scharle and Szabó (2000), self-confidence contributes to the development of learner autonomy, and learner autonomy brings learners a feeling of self-confidence. Autonomous learners need to believe that "*they are capable of managing their learning, and they can rely on themselves, not only on the teacher*". A pilot study exploring learner autonomy via a distance learning program in a local university in Malaysia by Kaur and Sidhu (2010) found that students need the confidence to learn autonomously. This study's findings align with the theoretical framework in identifying the crucial role of self-assessment in developing learner autonomy. There is thus a need to help learners use self-assessment and be guided and supported in how to do so.

Although the students accepted peer-assessment, they still believed more in the accuracy of teacher feedback. In other words, the students regarded themselves as having low level of expertise, being unable to provide answers with a high level of reliability. Yang et al. (2006) indicated that teacher feedback may only lead to students' perceptions that assessment is the teacher's job and that there is no desire for self-correction. Accordingly, there is a suggestion from Strijbos et al. (2010) for teachers to use assessment exercises with well-designed instructions to engage students in sharing the assessment burden with teachers and further improve student learning.

4.3.2. Students' current assessment experience

The current English teaching and learning practices demonstrate a limited opportunity for student self-assessment. First, from the student reflections, it is evident that outside class, they usually compare their answers with peers to check their learning achievement. In class, they take opportunities to check with their teachers.

The teacher takes on the role of an evaluator and "answer key." Assessment, as observed, focused on eliciting the right answers from the students. This assessment mode does not align with constructivism, which encourages teachers to engage in dialogue with students and allow them to explain the learning tasks. As apparent from snapshot one, the teacher gave the answers immediately after getting the students' responses. This raises an important question about how to teach students to self-assess their learning.

In addition, the teacher did not create opportunities for the students to assess their learning. Snapshot two shows that the students were engaged in giving feedback about their peers before the teacher elaborated on their answers. According to constructivism, assessment in an autonomous learning environment is conducted by teachers and peers and students assessing their work. This finding raises another question about teachers' awareness of the benefits of self-assessment for the development of learner autonomy.

As stated earlier about the regulation for testing and evaluation in this university, the classroom teacher decided the first two elements - the teacher devised oral and written tests and standardised tests. Together the proportion of these two elements constitutes one-third of the total points. The final tests accounted for two-thirds. This current regulation indicates that test results played a decisive role in measuring learning achievement. Previous studies by Blanche (1990) and Chen (2008) found that assessment practices can positively correlate between self-assessment and tests. A low correlation, as identified by Janssen-van (1989), occurs when students lacked training. In such situations, Harris (1997) suggested using student portfolios (learner diaries and progress reviews) as a useful tool that could help students compare their assessment with test results and then plan their actions to improve future learning. Harris (1997) further suggested "*the integration of self-assessment with everyday classroom activities, so that self-*

assessment becomes a part of the writing process and part of regular procedures for dealing with listening, reading, and speaking” (Harris, 1997).

5. CONCLUSION

Learning is “a socially organised activity that is inseparable from its sociocultural locus in time and space” (Tsui & Ng, 2010). This study expanded prior understanding of self-assessment in English language learning, regarding low proficiency EFL learners. Overall, the value of self-assessment is not just about much more benefit for the learners, but also generating gains for teachers. In particular, there are two primary findings of this study. First, the higher awareness teachers have about the benefits of self-assessment, the easier for them to encourage active learning through self-assessment. For instance, students’ self-assessment can help teachers save correction time as well as reduce student dependence on teachers’ feedbacks. As a consequence, teachers can be able to create opportunities for students to assess their learning. Second, students need to be trained in how to conduct systematic self-assessment confidently. As this paper was not able to tackle the issue of teacher involvement in such training activities, the researcher would like to suggest future investigations around this research area.

There is no research that can exclude itself from mistakes (Vuong, 2020). Besides the above contributions, there are several limitations of the current work. First, the research sample contains low proficiency EFL learners only, which causes difficulties to generalise the findings to a broader range of learners. Second, the EFL curricula in different universities in Vietnam are not consistent, regarding their structure and implementations. Therefore, it is difficult to extend the scope of this study with other replication research.

Overall, the study also proposed a practical model to teach students to evaluate their learning progress and achievement. The model might assist Vietnamese students in improving learner autonomy through self-assessment, as well as serve as a case study for EFL teachers and learners in other emerging countries.

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