



The Power of Self-Assessment in Foreign Language Education¹

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ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that self-assessment is a key learning strategy for autonomous language learning, enabling students to monitor their progress and relate learning to individual needs. Since the last two decades, training students in self-assessment has gained increasing currency and has been investigated in a considerable number of studies. In line with this background, the present study aimed at investigating the potential of self-assessment ability and attitudes towards studying English. Two hundred sixty five students studying at Bulent Ecevit University School of Foreign Languages Department of Basic English in the 2016-2017 academic year participated in the study in a pre-test post-test control group design. The results indicated a significant effect of self-assessment in creating positive outlooks toward English language learning. The implications of self-assessment in ELT by the European Language Portfolio are discussed. This article will also make some practical suggestions for carrying out self-assessment at university level.

Keywords: Self-Assessment, Language Learning, European Language Portfolio, Learner Style Inventory, Unit Based Checklist.

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Yabancı Dil Eğitiminde Öz-Değerlendirmenin Gücü¹

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ÖZET

Kendi gelişimlerini görmelerini sağladığı için ve kişisel ihtiyaçlarına cevap verdiği için özerk dil öğreniminde öz-değerlendirmenin temel dil öğretim stratejisi olduğu yaygın olan bir görüştür. Son yirmi yıldır, öğrencileri öz-değerlendirme yapabilmeleri için eğitmek yaygın olarak kabul görmüştür ve birçok çalışmada da araştırılmıştır. Bu bilgiler ışığında, mevcut çalışma öz-değerlendirmenin İngilizce öğrenimine karşı tutumları ve yeterlilikleri artırması potansiyelini araştırmayı hedeflemiştir. Çalışmaya 2016-2017 akademik yılında Bülent Ecevit Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu Temel İngilizce Bölümü'nde öğrenim görmekte olan 265 öğrenci katılmıştır. Çalışmada test-tekrar test tekniği kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar öz-değerlendirmenin öğrencilerin İngilizce öğrenmeye karşı tutumları üzerinde etkileyici bir fark yarattığını göstermiştir. Öz-değerlendirmenin Avrupa dil portfolyosu, öğrenme stili envanteri ve ünite odaklı kazanım listesi aracılığıyla geliştirildiğinin uygulamaları aktarılmıştır. Bu çalışma ayrıca öz-değerlendirmenin üniversite seviyesinde uygulanması ile ilgili pratik öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Öz-Değerlendirme, Dil Öğrenimi, Avrupa Dil Portfolyosu, Öğrenme Stili Envanteri, Ünite Odaklı Kazanım Listesi

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, training students to monitor their own learning has gained a great deal of importance. One's ability to be aware of and monitor one's own learning is defined as meta-cognition (Garrett, J., Alman, M., Gardner, S., & Born, C 2007). Self-assessment is considered to have a key role in meta-cognition. Imel (2002) recognizes two kinds of meta-cognitive skills; one is self-assessment (also termed self-rating and self-evaluation. Therefore, learners who use meta-cognitive self-assessment are aware of their abilities and perform better than those who are unaware of their abilities. Self-assessment is defined as involving students into the process of the assessment of their own learning (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Tan, 2007). Student self-assessment is an important strategy to involve them into their own assessment process of learning. The effect of self-assessment on language teaching and learning has been described and researched in a large number of studies (see Maslovaty & Kuzi, 2002; Pope, 2005; Sadler, 2006; Tan, 2004, 2007). In language teaching, self-assessment is often used to promote student centered learning, to boost insight into the learning process and to encourage active learning. Sadler (2006) points out that although a teacher can provide environments to facilitate growth or progress, the student is the one who must take action to fill the "gap" between where she currently is in terms of understanding and where she is heading. Thus, students are expected to continuously monitor and evaluate their own learning and think about the ways to improve it.

1.1. Review of Literature

Autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (Holec, 1981). Students can take charge of their own learning through self-assessment. Students' self-assessment should be a part of the pedagogic process in all educational systems as it satisfies their educational, emotional, psychological and social needs and promotes their self-actualization and personal growth (both emotional and intellectual). During the process of self-assessment, learners develop critical-analytical skills and a better self-awareness. Additionally, since they are treated as equal partners in the learning and assessment processes, their self-esteem and self-respect are enhanced and they develop a positive self-concept as their opinions are valued. This has, in turn, a positive impact on their motivation which constitutes a key feature of successful learners (Ushioda 1996). By taking charge of their own learning process and learning outcomes, learners can 'appreciate their strengths, recognize their weaknesses and orient their

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learning more effectively' (Council of Europe 2001: 192). As a result, the assessment process becomes more transparent and it enables learners to achieve their short and long-term goals more easily.

Governments, institutions, schools and teachers seek the ways through which they can foster learner autonomy, motivation and attitudes towards learning English. There are many strategies not only teachers but also students can adopt to boost motivation and learner autonomy inside and outside the classroom by the help of self-assessment tools. One effective way of introducing and establishing self-assessment of foreign language achievement and proficiency in L2 education is through The European Language Portfolio (ELP), which is a document whereby language learners through formal or informal education can record and reflect on their own language learning and experiences of culture. The ELP is one of the ways to help consolidate learner autonomy and motivation and ELP depends on the principles, and learning and teaching philosophy drawn by the CEFR so as to be an effective learning tool.

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is a self-assessment tool which enables users to record their intercultural experiences and linguistic achievements gained both inside and outside a formal classroom setting during the process of learning the target language (Mirici, 2015). The ELP, which is a document whereby language learners can possibly keep record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experience whether at school or outside school (CoE, 2001. Mirici (2015a: 2 as cited in Mirici & Kavaklı, 2017) states that the ELP enables learners "to monitor their own learning process on a life-long basis as well as to develop respect for cultural identities and diversity".

According to Mirici (2008, p.1), "the ELP is a concrete attempt to harmonize foreign language teaching activities within the European context and to improve the quality of communication amongst European people, who have different languages and cultural backgrounds." The ELP is based on basic principles such as reflective learning, self-assessment, learner autonomy, plurilingualism, intercultural learning, which enables to foster skills for life-long learning. Furthermore, as Glover, Mirici and Aksu (2005, p. 90) stress, the ELP encourages language learning through reflection, self-awareness, and motivation. Additionally, Little (2005) asserts that effective use of the ELP is possible if learners use checklists, in which target skills is specified with "can do statements" of each skill based on CEFR.

The ELP is a language learning and reporting instrument developed by the Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe. It consists of: (a) a language passport which summarizes the learner's linguistic identity, language learning and language qualifications in an internationally transparent manner, (b) a language biography which enables learners to assess themselves, set learning targets, monitor their progress and record learning and intercultural experiences, and (c) a dossier in which learners keep samples of work that best represent their L2 proficiency. The ELP serves a double function: (a) its documentation and reporting function enables learners to record their proficiency in different languages and their learning experiences in a comprehensive, comparable and transparent way so that they can be widely recognized across Europe, (b) its pedagogical function lies in the fact that it enhances learners' motivation and helps them to reflect on their learning experiences, plan their learning and learn autonomously. These two functions of the ELP are complementary and they are performed through learner self-assessment (Little 2005: 325).

Language learners are engaged in a constant process of formative and summative self-assessment in the three components of the ELP for pedagogical and reporting purposes respectively on the basis of the common reference levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe 2001). In the language *passport*, learners provide an overview of their language proficiency, according to six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) and five skills (listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing), at a certain time, using the scales and descriptors of the CEFR. This is a summative form of self-assessment as the focus is on the outcome of the L2 learning process and it serves a reporting function since learners provide a record of their linguistic proficiency and cultural skills to inform external educational authorities, future employers, etc. In the *language biography*, learners are invited to assess their learning progress according to functional 'I can' checklists arranged by levels and skills on a regular basis. This component invites learners to reflect on and assess the 'process aspect' of learning which implies formative self-assessment that becomes, as Little and Perclovà (2001: 55) argue, 'as much a habit of mind as an activity' because it forms an integral part of the language learning experience. These 'I can' checklists have multiple functions because they not only provide assessment criteria for self-assessment and assessment by others, but they also reflect learning and teaching objectives and suggest communicative tasks and activities. In this way, the ELP constitutes an

interface between learning, teaching and assessment as learning, teaching, self-assessment and assessment through testing and examinations can all be oriented to the same behavioral descriptors (Little 2005: 323).

As far as the *dossier* is concerned, learners have to think critically when selecting samples of their work to prove the claims made in the passport and biography and need to regularly update these samples as their proficiency level changes. Once again, this presupposes learners who are capable of assessing their level of proficiency in order to select the appropriate samples of their work to include in or exclude from the dossier.

The second self-assessment tool is the learner style inventory through which the students can detect their learning styles and try to enhance their learning by empowering each learning style or the ones that address them. It also enables the learners to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, it helps the learner to be able to choose the suitable job for them, to detect the way s/he approaches to the problems and her/his objectives.

Finally, the third self-assessment tool is the unit based checklists which are conducted at the end of each unit to make the students aware of how much they achieved each unit's objectives. They are very helpful not only to the teachers but also to the learners in that it enables the learners to see how much they achieved the objectives of each unit and get feedback, as a result revise it or continue.

Since the ELP, learner style inventory and the unit based checklist are believed to foster learner autonomy and self-assessment, this study aims to look into the effect of different self-assessment tools as the ELP, learner style inventory and the unit based checklist on students' attitudes towards learning English.

2. Research Questions

- Is there a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of learners towards learning English according to their levels of language proficiency?
- Is there any relationship between ELP use as a self-assessment tool and the attitudes towards learning English in Turkish EFL context?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants & Setting

The study was conducted in an EFL setting, at the Department of Basic English at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, Zonguldak, Turkey, where university students study English for general purposes during a complete academic year before they start their university education at their departments. 40 B1 level and 40 A2 level and 1855 A1 level students at the Department of Basic English at Bülent Ecevit University, Zonguldak, Turkey participated in the study. The students were all four-year undergraduate students. The medium of instruction at the university is English for the English Language and Literature Department and English Language Translation Department. The study was carried out with the preparatory school students of these departments. At the beginning of the academic year, students were given an English Proficiency Examination and the students getting 60 and higher grades on this exam started their education in their departments. The students whose English were not sufficient enough to pass this exam were divided into three levels (A1, A2, B1) according to the result of the placement test and start English Preparatory Education in groups of 15 to 20 students.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

The data collection instrument used for this study is a questionnaire adopted from Dörnyei and Csizér (2006) in a variety of Hungarian researches and from a recently designed questionnaire by Ryan (2005). It was used by Göztepe (2014) and before she used it, the instrument was given to two experts for revision and stating their opinions on the questionnaire in terms of the specified context with some interviews. During these sessions, the potential problematic items were recognized and they were either

edited or erased. After this process, the questionnaire consisted of 43 items: 6 of them about demographic information and background knowledge and 37 questions in Part I and II. Part I consists of the questions 7 to 23 (17 questions in total); the participants were asked to indicate the degree of their feelings or opinions about the questions on a five-point Likert scale. Part II consists of questions from 24 to 43 in which the participants were asked to define the extent of their agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale. Before administering the first questionnaire, an informed consent form that provided

Table 1

The items of the questionnaire focus on the following domains:

Domains	Questionnaire item no.
Integrativeness	7, 12, 17
Attitudes to L2 Community	8, 10, 11
Cultural Interest	13, 14, 15, 16
Attitudes to learning English	18, 19, 20, 21, 22
Criterion Measures	24, 25, 26, 43
Ideal L2 self	27, 28, 29
Ought to L2 self	23, 30, 31
Family influence	32
Instrumentality promotion	9, 33, 34, 35, 36, 40
Instrumentality prevention	37, 38, 39, 41
Fear of assimilation	42

There are eleven subscales in the attitude scale. The first is integrativeness and cultural interest, which refer to desire to learn the language to communicate with members of the community (e.g. 17. How important do you think learning English is in order to learn more about the culture and art of its speakers?'); attitudes to L2 community and learning English are related to the set of beliefs that the learner has towards the L2 community of the target language and also towards the language, and these attitudes may control the learner's motivation to the learning itself. (e.g.11. How much do you like to meet people from English-speaking countries?'); criterion measures refer to assessments of the learners' intended efforts toward learning English which is related to Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 31) and Ideal L2 Self attributes that a person would like to possess (e.g. I would like to study English even if I were not required); Ought-to L2 Self is relevant to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible unexpected results. This dimension corresponds to the less internalized type of instrumental motive. (e.g. My parents believe that I must study English to be an educated person. '); and finally, instrumentality (Promotion-Prevention) refers to the idea that in today's globalized world, learning English as a lingua franca is a must for people to be professionally successful, and instrumental motives involve some personal goals such as career development, earning more money, or finding a good job (instrumental promotion), while there are some regulations of duties or obligations such as passing English to graduate (instrumental prevention) (e.g. How much do you think knowing English would help your future career?'). Participants made their responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1= 'not at all, 5= 'very much'). Before administering the first questionnaire, an informed consent form that provided students with general information about the study and the questionnaire was given. Students were ensured that participation in this study was voluntary and their responses would be kept confidential.

3.3. Data Analysis

This study includes quantitative data. To this end, the quantitative data for this study was gathered through the attitude questionnaire. All the quantitative data was analyzed using a statistical software program; namely, SPSS version 22.00. While analyzing the quantitative data by means of SPSS, such tests as Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to see the reliability of the questionnaires; a mixed ANOVA to see if there is a significant difference between the two implementation of the questionnaires, a MANOVA to see if there is a significant difference among different level of students in terms of their attitudes towards learning English were run.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Is there a statistically significant difference in the attitudes of learners towards learning English according to their levels of language proficiency?

265 (Female: 165, Male: 100) preparatory school students studying at Bülent Ecevit University School of Foreign Languages Department of Basic English participated in the study. 36 students were B1 level (English Language and Literature: %100 English Department) and 37 A2 level (%30 English, engineering, management) and 185 were A1 level (English Translation: %100 English (N: 146) & % 30 English: management & engineering (N:39)) students. The age of participants ranges from 17 to 24, with an average of 20.

Table 2
Demographic information about the participants

		N
Proficiency	A1	185
	A2	36
	B1	37
Major	Lang & Lit (%100)	37
	% 30	75
	English translation (%100)	146
Gender	Female	165
	Male	100

The statistical results of the Likert-scale questionnaire were calculated using the software SPSS (22.0). Since there were 3 groups to compare, a One Way ANOVA test was used to analyze the effect of these groups on their attitude towards learning English. In Table 6, ANOVA descriptive are presented:

Table 3
Students' attitudes across proficiency levels

	ANOVA				
	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	df	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.26	5.63	2	26.56	.000
Within Groups	108.36	49.38	51	.21	
Total	119.63		51		

When the Table 3 is examined carefully, it can be seen that groups have an impact on the relevant scores. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out to determine if there were any significant differences in the participants' attitudes towards learning English according to their levels of language proficiency. The results indicated that there was statistically significant difference among the groups, $F(2,54)=26.56$, $p<.05$, with a strong effect size ($\eta^2>.14$). Additionally, the results of Tukey's post hoc test revealed differences between B1 group and other groups with B1 groups having higher mean score ($M=4.07$) than A1 ($M=3.95$) and A2 ($M=.3.56$) levels.

4.2. Is there any relationship between ELP use as a self-assessment tool and the attitudes towards learning English in Turkish EFL context?

A repeated measures test was run to see if there is a change in the attitudes of the learners after they use ELP as a self-assessment tool. At the beginning of the term, these students were given the attitude questionnaire before they started using the ELP. After 14 weeks of using the ELP, at the end of the term, the students were given the same questionnaire (test-re test). Repeated measures test was run to see if

there is a change in the attitudes of the learners after they use the ELP for 14 weeks. Table 4 shows the results of the repeated measures test.

Table 4

The results of the repeated measures test for students using ELP + Learner Style Inventory + Unit Based Checklist as a self-assessment tool

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Check 1	4.08	.30	50
Check 2	4.10	.42	50

When the table is examined, it can be clearly seen that there is a change in the attitudes of the learners after they use three different self-assessment tools namely ELP, learner style inventory and unit based checklist. It may be because of the fact that using all these self-assessment tools makes the students become aware of the process they are in and secondly since these students were English Translation Students, they are more willing to learn English. The change is not very much, but there is an increase in the results.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the the effect of self-assessment via European Language Portfolio, unit based checklist and learner style inventory on students' attitudes towards learning English. The data was collected through questionnaires. The results of the study indicated that the ELP, learner style inventory and unit based checklists are tools which can promote self-assessment on the condition that they are used effectively both by the teachers and students and as a consequence support having more positive attitudes towards learning English. Additionally, it was found that the students felt positive towards the ELP and working with it, except for the fact that they had limited information about the ELP and used it correctly in their classes as part of the curriculum.

In addition, the findings of the study indicated that both the teachers and the students believed that the ELP was a tool for self-assessment and that the ELP could be used as a tool to promote self-assessment and to create learner-centered classrooms in Turkey. Thus, promoting self-assessment is not as difficult as it is thought to be, and the ELP, learner style inventory and the unit based checklists are important tools which can promote it.

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