

The Role of Self-Assessment in On-the-Job Teacher Training

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Abstract

When we speak of “training by means of questions”, as the most widespread form of training in language teaching, the question of self-assessment is more than ever vying for attention. Self-assessment is an active rational strategy of on-the-job training, which allows teachers to identify ways of improving their job skills.

In this article, we intend to offer a pedagogical reflection, which, by providing teachers with the appropriate means, helps to assess their teaching efficiency, their autonomy, and real personality through proper self-awareness. For this, the contributions of self-assessment to on-the-job training are undeniable when it comes to managing one’s own shortcomings in teaching.

Keywords: Self-Assessment, On-the-Job Training, Teacher, Self-Knowledge

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Introduction

It has always been said that *to teach is to learn twice*. Thus, a teacher learns first when he is being trained and for the second time, when he works as a teacher. By taking the model of *reflexive practitioner* as an example, researchers highlight for the practitioners the necessity to analyze, assess, and reflect on their performance with the aim of learning from it (Perrenoud, 1998, p. 121). According to them, reflecting on one's performance can take various forms including self-assessment approaches. Consisting of three essential stages, namely, self-observation, self-diagnostic, and self-correction, self-assessment helps teachers spot the problem and its causes and encourages them to experiment with new ideas and be open to necessary changes.

However, studies on self-assessment indicate that interest in it goes far beyond the field of teaching and is linked to the interest in human life, his reflection, his actions, and his self-awareness. On the one hand, it is said that reflection is an integral part of self-assessment and self-knowledge is a veritable objective of self-assessment. On the other, self-assessment is said to be a constituent element of the action itself. In other words, it is a constant and spontaneous assessment which accompanies the action while it is taking place. On this matter, we will elaborate and speak of an assessing power that is present in every human being. Therefore, the question is not to determine whether it is necessary or not to include self-assessment in the strategies because it already belongs in them but to find out how to develop and take advantage of it in achieving one's goals.

Back to our field of interest, i.e. teachers, their on-the-job training and their self-assessment, we will try our utmost to answer two questions:

- What contributions does self-assessment make to on-the-job teacher training?
- To what means can teachers have recourse to orient their self-assessment, more properly?

We believe that efficiency, autonomy, and personality are the three essential criteria to which teachers can refer for enhancing their training. In this regard, they may resort to approaches such as written self-assessment, feedback, questionnaire for learners, teaching-oriented readings, previously developed tests, and retraining.

To see this article through, we will certainly not content ourselves to a merely descriptive methodology; rather will conduct a field study in which we will apply self-assessment approaches in a French class

Background

The history of what we know today by the name of self-assessment, is closely linked to that of self-knowledge, question which has always concerned human mind and the answer to which is considered as the only solution to numerous individual and shared problems. The question of self-knowledge was raised in ancient Greece, from the famous precept of Socrates: *Know thee, thyself*. In the 19th century, rival psychologies like behaviourism and psychoanalysis reject the question condemning all introspective experience and dedicate themselves to studying behaviour. As a result, Socrates' precept is abandoned for some time before once more philosophers took up the subject, in order to

find an answer to the questions: Am I? Who am I? referring to Descartes' famous sentence: *I think, therefore I am* (Angelerques, 1975, p. 12).

Today, self-knowledge is a widespread concern in the world of religious, philosophical and psychological reflection. It does not belong to any particular doctrine. In religion, it is considered as the examination of one's conscience by God, knowing oneself, one's actions, behaviours etc, helps human being to abstain from all vice and sin and to discover in him the spiritual, thinking being. In psychology, *self-knowledge is considered as an introspective experience which for each person involves, taking oneself as object, treating oneself as one treats other objects, observing oneself, criticizing oneself* (Angelerques, 1975, p. 99). As far as teaching is concerned, research on metacognition- constant monitoring by the subject of their cognitive processes in order to be in better control of them- affirms that effective learning is based upon self-knowledge.

At this point a question arises is that: Whatever the definition of self-knowledge (examination of one's conscience, introspective experience or constant monitoring of cognitive processes by the subject) how can it be achieved?

It is to find a valid response to this question that self-assessment is called upon.

What is Self-Assessment?

Etymologically speaking, self-assessment is composed of two parts: *self* and *assessment*. As far as assessment is concerned, it is widely accepted that its importance lies in the fact that it allows, by means of the useful information it provides, a

rational change in the event of a crisis or an imbalance. Influenced by social factors, assessment in all its forms and shapes reveals traces of subjectivity, which was formerly thrown away into the unknowable. This subjectivity reaches its zenith in a type of assessment, where the actor-assessor is the same as the assessed subject that leads to *self-assessment*. So far, word *self*, its attachment to the term *assessment*, has other consequences. Although assessing the assessed-subject is a conscious act performed by others, the act of self-assessment is carried out almost unconsciously.

In fact, self-assessment is concomitant to most of the individual's actions. It is a constituent element of the action. To explain this phenomenon, R. Amigues refers to an assessing and correcting power which is present in every one, and allows us to take our self-assessment to its final stage (G. Nunziati, 1990, p. 51). In other words, we can define a spontaneous and constant self-assessment, which one carries out in the course of actions and which leads checking their adopted strategies by spotting their weak and strong points.

For example, in case of a speech, imagine an M.A. student in FFL (French as a Foreign Language) presenting his paper. Although, he has his own talking habits and gestures, but, depending on the interlocutors (here the jury members and the audience), he is likely to feel the need to modify his habits. Thus, while speaking, just as he is reasoning or justifying, he attempts to speak correctly and convincingly. In other words, he consciously selects every word before using it. He assesses the word (in gender, in number, and

semantically) to be able to *fine-tune* his expression in the very course of his speech.

Different Stages of Self-Assessment

Just as an assessment process can consist of three stages i.e. set of information (about the assessed subject), its interpretation (about the assessor), and finally choosing ways of correction, a process of self-assessment requires the one who puts it into practice to try at least three approaches.

→ **Self-observation** (of oneself and lifetime situations): The individual questions himself and analyzes his action; what did I do?

→ **Self-diagnostic** (interpretation): The individual gives meaning to whatever he finds in self-observation; how can I interpret the action? What is the value of the action I carried out?

→ **Self-correction** (correcting the action): the individual selects his approach(es) and decides on ways of improving the action. What do I decide to do? How do I reorient my approach?

In every day life, the first two stages often take place simultaneously i.e. when we are thinking about and analyzing what we did; we are indeed assessing and interpreting our actions. That is why reflection is said to be an integral part of self-assessment (G. Figari, 2001, p. 121).

Self-Assessment and Teaching

In teaching, depending on the learners' or teachers' training, self-assessment defines two activities:

1. *Self-assessment and the learner:* Particular interest in this goes back to the 80's when we witnessed on the one hand a return to personal responsabilization and on the other to study on metacognition. From then on, the learner is considered as an actor as well as equally responsible for his learning; his active role in the process of assessing is also proved. Here, self-assessment appears to be the learner's constant and virtually unconscious assessment of his own performance, which allows him to reorient his approaches by tracing his weak points.

2. *Self-assessment and the teacher:* It takes years for a teacher to become a professional. For this reason, an appropriate initial training is necessary but by no means sufficient. That is why, today, constant self-assessment by the teacher is known as the most widely used method in language teaching. In his book entitled, "Formation" R. Galisson urges teachers to proceed to regular self-assessments by asking themselves a number of questions in the field they work in and attempt to answer the questions themselves (Galisson, 1999, p. 6). Thus, self-assessment involves the teacher in scrutinizing not only their teaching but every thing that has to do with their teaching.

Contribution of Self-Assessment to the Teacher's On-the-Job Training

One of the major challenges of training to teaching professionals and on-the-job teacher training is developing the actor's autonomy and consequently his capability to enhance his performance, with

reference to criteria such as efficiency and personality.

1. Efficiency: In fact, there are three main reasons, which cause the anxious teacher to question the efficiency and the quality of his teaching:

First, the astonishing rate at which knowledge is developing in various fields of study, which requires the teacher to improve if he wishes to keep abreast of the latest developments.

Secondly, day-by-day modification of students' demands. Although a teacher belongs to an older generation, the people he deals with will always remain young. This calls for a special aptitude to understand the youth and to adapt oneself to them.

Thirdly, job insecurity, which is prevalent in any society threatened by unemployment. In today's world where job competition is becoming tougher and tougher, a teacher who does not improve risks losing his job.

According to Simpson, assessing one's own efficiency can be a starting point to a rational change and can help the teacher to improve in the most judicious way.

2. Autonomy: A relatively experienced teacher has his own teaching strategies and a certain autonomy that he has acquired in the course of his initial training or through his real-life experiences. Nevertheless, constant development in most fields in recent years and the question of professionalization compels the teacher to constantly develop his autonomy and basic competences. In order to adopt more appropriate and operational personal strategies and to come up

with more motivating learning techniques, the teacher who wishes to become a professional in his job, will have to proceed to an assessment of his performances.

3. Teacher's personality in self-assessment: Thought of as a human career, teaching is a demanding job that requires both knowledge and the ability to communicate. In teaching, competence consists, largely, in getting over distances and differences, both at the interpersonal and intercultural levels, which might hinder communication. Teacher's personality plays a paramount role in forming a good interpersonal relationship in the class and with colleagues.

"A teacher cannot go far in understanding others, nor will he be able to help them know each other unless he makes an attempt to work out his own personality. If he does not go down that road, he will continue to see his students through spectacles of prejudice and deviations imposed by his own needs, fears, anxieties, hostile impulse, etc (Simpson, 1976, p. 102).

Whereas, in order to get over these distances, the first step for a teacher is to reach a better self-knowledge and then become aware of his real personality by assessing his actions, behaviour, etc....

Various Practices of the Teacher's Self-Assessment

No matter what the aim of the teacher of assessing himself is (to measure the efficiency of his teaching, to work out his personality traits, or to improve his autonomy), there are different ways and tools one can have recourse to when necessary.

Various practices of the teacher's self-assessment	
Practices directly related to class analysis and to the act of teaching	Practices not directly related to class analysis but help the teacher to test his knowledge
Written self-assessment of the teacher	Teaching-oriented readings
Recording the class and feedback	Self-assessment tests for teachers
Questionnaire completed by students	Retraining

Teacher's Written Self-Assessment

"A kind of self-assessment requires the teacher to write down his impression of class time so as to spot then moments, vying for more attention" (Ray. H. Simpson, 1976, p. 25). To do this, he should be attentive to the students' behaviour in the class, particularly their reactions to his own strategies.

Recording the Class and Feedback

In a language class, audio or video recording of the class, allows the teacher to identify with the situations and analyze:

What he said, how much of the time he was speaking, what students said, how many students took part in the discussion, what questions students asked, ... The feedback comes when the teacher reviews his acts of teaching in the class by listening or watching the recording. This helps the teacher to spot the shortcomings of his performance, which is the first step towards his own critical assessment.

Questionnaire Completed by Students

Experiences show that assessment by students brings about positive changes in the teachers' behaviour, whereas that of the authorities (inspectors...) may lead at times to negative

changes. "Should there be only one assessment, that of the students would be the most precise" (R. B. Howman, 1960, p. 34).

Therefore, any teacher wishing to know where to start improving, can use an assessment questionnaire developed by himself, distribute them to whole class to complete.

Apart from the above-mentioned ways, which are directly related to class analysis, there are many other indirect ways but help the teacher test his knowledge and keep up-to-date.

These are:

- *Teaching-related readings*, which the teacher can keep abreast of the latest development in his field.
- *Self-assessment tests* developed for teachers by specialists. It is an interesting experience which allows teachers to get up-to-date with the developments that have taken place in different fields since they graduated. After going through the test, the teacher can interpret the results according to the established criteria.
- *Retraining* is a reassessment of a working teacher's training through a corrective self-assessment tailored to the needs of any teacher.

Case Study

Given the fact that a major share of class time is dedicated to practice, we are going to take a look at the results of a field study, which made us judge the quality of our performance in the class by having recourse to some ways of self-assessment in a French course in Rahmatian Institute where we had minimal technical conditions available.

This is an elementary course composed of 25 learners holding a scholarship from the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology. They were supposed to go to France to continue their studies in various disciplines at Ph.D. level.

So far as our task as teachers was concerned, in addition to the usual class routine, we put into practice some ways of self-assessment according to the following procedure:

- After each session, we wrote down our personal impression of all the class activities, which served as our written self-assessment.
- We tape-recorded entire sessions, in order to be able to do the feedback at home.
- Finally, we carried out a final written self-assessment taken/deduced from the two other stages, which indicated the successful and failed aspects of our act of teaching/learning. This involved using an assessment table.
- Given the circumstances, we had students to complete a questionnaire each.

The results were satisfying. They allowed us to spot some weak points in our teaching.

Self-Assessment and Adopting an Appropriate Strategy in Case of Unawareness or Lapse of Memory

A significant and interesting point is to resolve the problem that a new word poses or more generally a case of unawareness or lapse of memory.

Once, a student asked what “un petit ami” meant (boyfriend, literally a small friend) did not attract our attention to its real meaning due to its simple form. Although, we doubted a little, we explained the meaning. Some days later during feedback, we felt at this part of the recording that the explanation was not suitable. When we consulted the dictionary, we realized our error.

From this experience, we learned two lessons:

1. To pay more attention to expressions, and not disregard them because of their simple appearance.
2. To frankly declare our uncertainty and refer to a dictionary together with the students in such situations.

Self-Assessment and the Question of Time Management

One of the problems a teacher may encounter, is time management. As this problem used to arise from time to time in our class and because we did not find enough time to stick to our plan, we decided to make a more attentive observation of class time. This helped us discover the causes of the problem:

1. Dominance of two students over the time (they asked questions which had nothing to do with the lesson and even if they did, required unnecessary explanation).

2. A chain of unnecessary explanations by the teacher.

In order to correct ourselves, from then on, we refused to answer irrelevant questions (and accepted to answer only after the class). We also tried to cut our explanation short by providing the main points only and leaving the students to find the rest by triggering their curiosity with the aim of improving their creativity.

Self-Assessment and Discovering Learners' Strategies During Repetition

We had gone through half the term when we noticed one of the learners felt uncomfortable every time he was asked to repeat. This prevented him from repeating the sentence or the segment correctly. Although, we had other students repeat first and did not put too much pressure on him, the situation aggravated. This was manifest in our written self-assessment e. g. refusing to repeat under the pretext of having a sore throat. This proved to be the result of our wrong approach:

Due to the distance between the learners and us, every time we paused the tape, we used to get closer to the learner in order to hear him more clearly. That day, we happened not to move as usual. Interestingly, we noticed a change in the learner's behavior as he managed to repeat correctly. This showed that approaching the learner as he was beginning to speak had been the cause of his discomfort.

This discovery encouraged us to examine other students' reactions to this habit of ours. Our observations indicated that each learner had his own strategy for repeating or answering a question. For example, while a student evaded eye contact

with the teacher, in an attempt to concentrate, another followed the teacher with his eyes vying for his utmost attention.

At the request of the learners, we gave them an exam at the end of each unit. Papers were meticulously corrected (the correct forms and corresponding rules being provided). However, we witnessed that the learners paid little attention to our comments, which gave us the impression that the exams were useless (an assessment is valid only when it leads to a solution). Therefore, we decided to change our approach.

This time, before giving back the papers to students, we corrected only the parts containing big mistakes. We put the sentences containing error on the board and first asked the one who had produced them to find the error and correct it. If he did not manage, others would help. The outcome was excellent because we were able:

1. To carry out an effective correction and help students achieve a solid learning through the error itself.
2. To establish a good learner-learner and teacher-learner interactions.

Developing a Questionnaire

To avoid monotony in the class (noticed at times by the teacher), and to have an idea of what had to be done, of when students felt time was being wasted, we dedicated part of our class time, asking students' opinion by distributing a questionnaire:

1. Which part(s) of the units covered do you find most interesting?
2. In your opinion, have these parts been sufficiently explored?

3. What do you think the strong and weak points of the class are?

4. What are your suggestions for improving the class?

The answers indicated that the students were most fascinated by oral communication i.e. speaking which was not, according to them, sufficiently practiced. They suggested dedicating a third of class time to speaking.

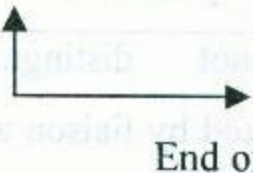
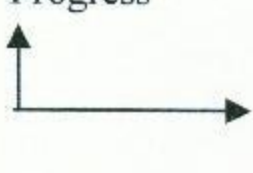
From then on, we chose a topic (usually a burning issue) and exchanged our views. This experience allowed us to kill two birds with one stone.

1. We managed to give a good class.
2. We managed to build up sense of responsibility and autonomy with the learners.

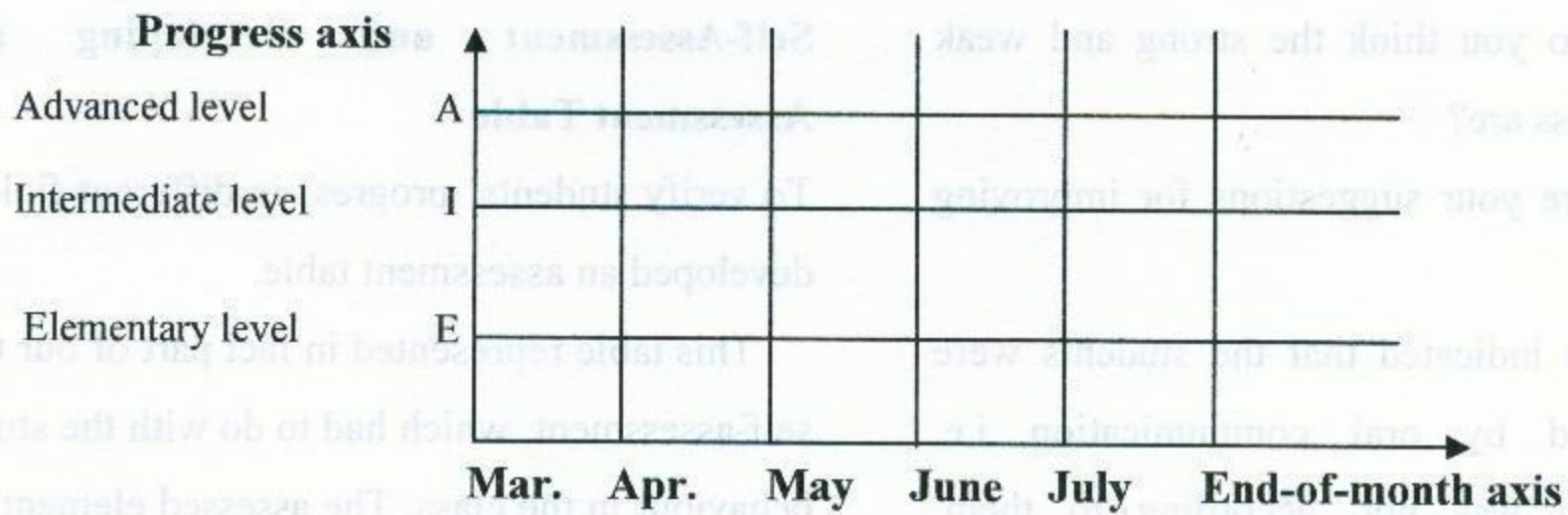
Self-Assessment and Developing an Assessment Table

To verify students' progress in different fields, we developed an assessment table.

This table represented in fact part of our task of self-assessment, which had to do with the students' behaviour in the class. The assessed elements were participation, comprehension, pronunciation, and the teacher's overall assessment of the students' linguistic behaviour. Concerning the first three elements, in order for the results to be precise and available, we highlighted them for each student on three diagrams, presented in three different colours (black for participation, green for comprehension, and red for pronunciation), on two axes of time and progress.

Assessed elements → Learners' names ↓	Participation Comprehension Pronunciation	Other behaviors of the learner	Teacher's comments
M.X	Progress  End of month	- he takes part in other courses for scholarship holders - good memorization	He has difficulty pronouncing two successive consonants e.g. très → téré
M.Y	Progress  End of month		
M.Z			

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The above table indicates changes in the students' level of participation, comprehension, and pronunciation, during the above-mentioned months and the time they have been learning. It is

worth mentioning that each of the levels (Advanced, intermediate, elementary) corresponds to the learners' particular behaviours, according to the assessed element.

	Participation	Comprehension	Pronunciation
Advanced level: A	The learner tends to answer all questions	He completely understands questions. In the listening exercise, he can repeat and answer questions.	He pronounces words correctly; observes rhythm and melody of language, even liaisons.
Intermediate level: I	He does not take part most of the time unless the teacher asks him questions.	He asks to have the (rather long) questions repeated, or to listen again to a recording to be able to answer the questions.	He pronounces well, but does not observe melody and liaisons.
Elementary level: E	He takes part only after he has been encouraged, avoids being eye to eye with the teacher, sometimes even refuses to answer questions.	He cannot distinguish words linked by liaison and provides inappropriate answers.	He has difficulty pronouncing particular sounds of the target language such as R, U, E.

Conclusion

It is highly pretentious to say that a good initial training together with years of mere practice are sufficient for a teacher to become competent in his job. Today, choosing a teaching profession involves being trained throughout one's life as well

as constantly testing one's knowledge. Therefore, during his professional career, in order to orient his training, the teacher will have to gather proof of his efficiency, autonomy (considered as a basic competence), and of his real personality (because it considerably influences both his behaviour in class

and the learners' progress). It is on this triple plan that he tries to carry out his self-assessment. To succeed on this way, there are preferred ways, recommended by professional experts, namely: written self-assessment of the teacher, recording and feedback, questionnaire completed by learners, teaching-related reading, previously developed tests, retraining,...

Thanks to these ways, we managed to shed light on the shortcomings of our performance in a French class and definitely corrected our mistakes. As far as our personality is concerned, lifetime experiences helped us overcome the fear and anxiety of committing errors, facing the unknown and fight them rather than retreat.

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