

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF PERFORMANCE THROUGH SELF-ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT
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This study was designed as a qualitative investigation and it focuses on the non-graded self-assessment adult ESL students make of their performance. It is based upon findings from previous studies of self-assessment in several settings (Glazer, 1999; Glazer et al., 1995; Optiz, 1995; Manning, 1997; Levy, 1999; Fazey, 1993; Boud, 1992; Orsmond et al., 1997; Sullivan and Hall, 1997; and Lan, 1996). The present research reports and analyzes data collected from eleven students who expressed their views concerning their performance through a checklist, two questionnaires and an interview in an ESL setting. The data collected and analyzed suggest that students are very capable of carrying out self-assessment; they are usually more demanding of themselves than their teachers are; and the process of self-assessment may help them realize ways to improve their performance.

To Silvia Alliegro

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION	1
<u>Purpose of Study</u>	1
<u>Terminology</u>	2
<u>Description of Setting</u>	3
<u>The University</u>	3
<u>The Intensive English Program</u>	4
<u>The Writing and Study Skills Course</u>	5
<u>The Teacher</u>	6
<u>The Students</u>	8
<u>Jie</u>	9
<u>Supakit</u>	9
<u>Chikako</u>	10
<u>Mohammed</u>	11
<u>Maria</u>	11
<u>Nadia</u>	12

<u>Paula</u>	13
<u>Ali</u>	13
<u>Fatima</u>	14
<u>Wen-Lo</u>	15
<u>Fumio</u>	15
<u>Chapter Summary</u>	17
Chapter 2 A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO SELF-ASSESSMENT	18
<u>Qualitative Research</u>	18
<u>Rationale for the Study</u>	20
<u>Significance of Study</u>	21
<u>Review of Literature</u>	23
<u>Research Design</u>	30
<u>Chapter Summary</u>	34
Chapter 3 DATA REPORT AND ANALYSIS	36
<u>Introduction</u>	36
<u>Observations Regarding Accuracy of Perception of Performance</u>	36
<u>Observations Regarding Perception of Learning Environment</u>	39
<u>Observations Regarding Perception of the Importance of Writing</u>	42
<u>Observations Regarding the Establishment of Learning Scenarios</u>	45

<u>Observations Regarding Perception of the Role of Self-</u>	
<u>Assessment</u>	48
<u>Discussion and Reflection</u>	52
<u>Chapter Summary</u>	57
Chapter 4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	59
<u>Summary</u>	59
<u>Limitations of Study</u>	61
<u>Further Research Questions</u>	62
<u>Conclusions</u>	64
<u>Bibliography</u>	66
Appendix A	
The Checklist	70
Appendix B	
The Questionnaires	74
Appendix C	
Course Syllabus	78

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

This study focuses on the non-graded self-assessment adult ESL students make of their performance in a way that hopes to make them more aware of their own learning process. During this study, with the collection of qualitative data, the researcher seeks to provide a perspective into self-assessment not provided by current quantitative studies that usually include self-assessment as part of the overall evaluation of the subject at hand. Until this moment, most of the research on self-assessment reviewed for this study has focused on quantitative data. Quantitative research usually begins with the collection of specific information from a sample population of subjects, determining proportions and demographic characteristics, which are then generalized to a larger population. Qualitative research, however, takes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the given subject matter, studying things in their natural setting (Jones, 1995). In the light of self-assessment in the classroom, this question emerges: What is the participants' perception of themselves as ESL students using self-assessment without the inclusion of a grade?

Terminology

When defining kinds of assessment, Harris and McCann (1994) describe self-assessment as "useful information about students' expectations and needs, their problems and worries, how they feel about their own [learning] process, their reactions to the materials and methods being used, what they think about the course in general" (p.36).

Cárdenas, (1996) defines self-assessment as ". . . the most participatory and democratic of the possibilities that formative or informal evaluation offer; it is also the most reflective one" (p.7). Similarly, Sullivan and Hall (1997) define self-evaluation as the number of self-monitoring activities that students use to reflect on their understanding and process. Sometimes during this work the words 'self-assessment' and 'self-evaluation' will be clearly interchangeable.

Another term used throughout this paper is "critical thinking", defined as: "The ability to carry out self-directed inquiry and make reasonable judgement on the results" (McMahon, 1999. p.1). Weber (2000), moreover, describes the critical thinker as possessing two kinds of thinking: one that is metaphorical, playful and ambiguous while the other is logical, analytic and serious.

Before going on to describe the qualitative approach to self-assessment used in this study, this chapter provides information about the setting and a general description of the participants in the study. The purpose of this study is to use data to give a view of the perception students have of their performance through self-assessment, presenting the participants as individuals with their own attitudes, beliefs and perspectives about their progress in this particular setting.

Description of Setting

The University

West Virginia University, founded in 1867, is located in Morgantown, West Virginia, a city of 29,000 residents near West Virginia's northern border. WVU offers 166 bachelor's, master's, doctoral and professional degree programs through 13 colleges and schools.

One of these, The Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, is divided into three disciplinary areas: humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences; all students take a liberal studies core curriculum from these areas. Recognizing the importance and value of a liberal arts education, the academic mission of the Eberly College is to

foster in students the knowledge, skills and attitudes for life-long learning.

The Department of Foreign Languages is part of the Eberly College and bases its philosophy in the globalization of today's world. The development of its students, led by their ability to communicate effectively in another language and with a person from another culture, is the main aim of the department.

The Intensive English Program

The Intensive English Program (IEP) is primarily designed to address the needs of international students who are planning to attend an institution of higher education after completion of the English language program. Besides their instruction in the language, students in the IEP are given help for all aspects of their lives in Morgantown. Services include assistance with housing, banking, academic and personal counseling, health care, and legal matters. In addition, students have access to all the services the University provides, including computer labs, sporting facilities, and health care facilities.

The IEP courses are designed to raise the proficiency of non-native speakers to a level which will enable them to undertake academic study at a North American institution of

higher education. The students also learn about different kinds of classes, methods of instruction, testing methods, study skills and library skills, through which they also have opportunities for intercultural understanding.

Full-time students in the IEP attend classes for a minimum of 21 hours per week. To ensure placement of students at the appropriate level of the program, all IEP students take two tests at the beginning of the semester: the Institutional Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Michigan Placement Test. Students are then placed according to scores of both tests. All students must take the TOEFL test again at the end of the semester, and teachers complete final report cards with recommendations for placement for continuing students.

The Writing and Study Skills Course

In the Writing and Study Skills course the students are to become familiar with and practice several types of writing, including personal, functional, creative, expository and persuasive writing. The course objectives, as expressed by the teacher, are to provide the learners with skills to understand spoken English; to develop global and cross-cultural awareness; and to make cultural adjustments.

English is used as the medium of instruction in lectures and reading material. The course also provides the learners with writing and study skills, which should be considered as a linguistic objective of the course. The Writing and Study Skills class is small and meets for 6 hours per week, overall. Here, students are to write responses to their reading activities in other courses, to develop their word processing computer skills by working in the computer lab twice weekly to develop their in-class writing projects and use the Internet for research.

The students in this course are expected to develop study skills such as notetaking, library use, time management, stress management, using campus services, test-taking skills and recognizing signal words (See Appendix C). In addition, they are required to complete one daily journal entry per week outside class. They also submit for review a study skills portfolio and notebook with examples of their work.

The Teacher

The instructor is a native speaker of English with a B.A. in Spanish and Education, an M.A in Foreign Languages, and with all the course work towards an Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction finished. She is currently working actively

on her dissertation. She has 25 years teaching experience and demonstrates an intense attitude towards her profession: "I'm a teacher, I have taught over twenty years. I couldn't be anything else even if I tried." Her favorite quote is from Laumbach, 1982 (pg 171) and she adds that "teaching is another way of loving", "it's the ultimate give and take". She says that when teaching, "we learn a lot and give a lot and help people realize themselves". When approached about this research, she was immediately enthusiastic and offered her collaboration. "Generally that group is usually people getting ready for graduate school and they are excellent students with great motivation and very focused, so it makes it a great group to work with". She is very interested in the interactions that take place in her classroom; being a researcher herself, the idea of asking her students to do self-assessment was well received. She collaborated with ideas about the student consent form and suggested that some of the students' class time in their communication skills class be used for the interviews, given that they would be speaking in English with the researcher. She also met with the researcher to talk about this study and offered her views of the students in the class. Concerning the course, she said that she liked the idea of empowering her

students: "It's a demanding group; you have to know exactly what you want from them, but they'll take the best out of it". She said that her expectations from the course depend on the students: "Even though I demand a lot from them, I try not to grade them excessively hard, my implicit contract with my students is to be flexible." She added, "I ask a lot from them and they respond by giving me their best".

The Students

The Writing and Studying Skills course included 11 students, ranging in age from 19 to 37 years old. They all had a very positive attitude toward the target language. Their reason for studying English was in many cases a requirement to be accepted as graduates or undergraduates at the university. Their interests per age or background varied and included Engineering, Dentistry, Teaching of Foreign Languages, Music, Advertising and Psychology. They needed to use all four skills in their Writing and Study Skills class (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and also used the language to communicate in the community. Some discussions of the particulars of these students follow:

Jie

Jie was born in China and seemed to be a kind of delicate enigma for some of her classmates. She did not speak much during the class, but was always ready to ask the teacher a question when she did not understand something and to submit her work when the teacher asked for it. In the same way, she seemed to have good disposition to talk about the task at hand without feeling the need to be too personal with the person to whom she was speaking. She revealed that her favorite pastimes were listening to music and dancing and that she had learned to dance in her country's traditional way. She also mentioned that she would like to study music education in the university. She seemed to have great expectations about her development as a student at the IEP and made sure to dedicate a certain amount of time every day to her study.

Supakit

Supakit is a tall Thai student who was born in Bangkok. He had already done undergraduate studies and wanted to go on and study for a master's degree, preferably in engineering. Prior to studying in the IEP, Supakit lived for some time in other parts of the United States. He was very active during the classes and his classmates seemed to look up to him due to his dynamic character. He was a kind

of class leader but at the same time was always ready to listen to his classmates. He also seemed genuinely interested in the language and would stop asking questions only when his curiosity or his desire to understand something was satiated. He seemed to successfully combine very well his seriousness toward his studies with a very amicable disposition in the classroom. According to some of his classmate's comments, he was a very good example to follow.

Chikako

Chikako was born in Japan and had been at the IEP for seven months when I interviewed her. One of the most outstanding things about this student was that there was always a smile on her face. She always seemed really interested in listening to what people were saying. She said she loved music and was preparing to enter the music program at WVU. In the class, she was often quiet but attentive and her answers were always to the point and interesting. She mentioned that she had studied English in junior and high school and spoke French very fluently. She seemed very interested in the course and said she made sure she would hand in all her work on time.

Mohammed

Mohammed came from Saudi Arabia and his first day in the classroom was the first day I observed this class. Nevertheless, he seemed to immediately understand the procedures and quickly integrated himself with the group. He had a quiet way about himself but was always active in the classroom. He also came to the United States with a previous undergraduate diploma and was ready to enter the Business and Economics school at WVU in a graduate program. He was only waiting for his scores in his English courses to become a full time student in a master's program. He mentioned that he studied English for some years before coming to the IEP, including courses in another IEP program in an American university for six months. He seemed to have traveled a lot and was very curious about his environment and the people in it.

Maria

Maria was born in Colombia, where she worked in the hotel business for several years and had also had experience in the field of tourism. She mentioned that she had previous experience with the language in her native country and that she had even started attending another university in the United States, but then decided to come to WVU. English seemed to fascinate her. She was always

full of questions and eagerly took part in all the activities the teacher suggested. She was absent from some of the classes I observed, but when she was present she was always ready to participate and seemed to enjoy helping her classmates when they requested so. She appeared to be a very gregarious and open person and was very assertive when asking questions and participating in the class.

Nadia

Nadia came from Kuwait and was a pre-dentistry student, which made her somewhat special, given that she was already a student at WVU, unlike most of the other students, who wanted to be accepted in one of the programs offered by the university. Nadia was rather quiet and almost shy during the classes but she was definitely smart, with a very good disposition towards learning English and was always ready to take notes and ask questions when she did not understand something. She appeared to possess a combination of quietness and a very sharp mind that was very noticeable in her personality. She missed a few of the classes and she mentioned later that she was attending that class to practice taking notes and improve her performance in an academic setting. She seemed rather interested in the course and was very active during the classes, making

comments and always succeeding in completing the tasks the teacher gave the students.

Paula

Paula was born in Colombia and was one of the most extroverted persons I have ever met. This was Paula's first semester at the IEP and she planned to take the GMAT test. She had a previous undergraduate diploma and was thinking about applying to WVU in a graduate program. Paula is the kind of person who can accurately be described as intense. She seemed to totally immerse herself in the task at hand, while at the same time enjoying herself and all around her immensely. Paula was very active during the classes and was very assertive when asking questions or making requests to the teacher. She always seemed very interested in completing the tasks proposed by the teacher in the way that was expected from her very dynamic personality, sometimes helping her classmates in a very energetic way.

Ali

Ali was born in Turkey and seemed to be one of the youngest in the classroom. Some of his classmates commented that they considered him as an artistic soul and it was clear to all that his passion was music. He seemed to ceaselessly listen to his portable CD player when he was not in the classroom. He mentioned that he had also already

been accepted at the university and was only waiting for the result of his TOEFL test. He missed some of the classes I observed but he talked to me several times outside the classroom and even sent me e-mails. He seemed very interested in some topics the teacher brought up in class and took part in the class discussions when he was in the classroom. Even though he missed some of the classes, he seemed up to date with what everybody was doing. Although he was not present in every one of the classes, he was able to integrate himself to the task at hand when he did attend.

Fatima

Fatima was born in Kuwait and was also selected to be a pre-dentistry student at WVU. In the classroom she was very active and seemed to take her work very seriously, while at the same time managing to appear somehow shy and demure but determined to express her thoughts. She frequently asked the teacher for clarification when she did not understand the task at hand and completed all her assignments. During the talks I had with her, she was always very attentive and asked lots of questions, mainly related to my culture and academic life at WVU. She seemed to have a very inquisitive and sharp mind. She said that

she always tries to increase her vocabulary by doing one of the things she enjoys more: reading.

Wen-Lo

Wen-Lo was born in Taiwan and had already completed an undergraduate program. The teacher mentioned that he came into the course a little late but that he had seemed to adapt to the classroom atmosphere quite easily. He mentioned during the interview that it was his first semester in the IEP and that he was interested in entering the Industrial Relations graduate program. He spoke very little during the classes and sometimes only when the teacher talked to him directly, therefore coming across as a little shy. On the other hand, he handed in very interesting works and always seemed to complete his assignment on time. He seemed to be very dedicated to his studies and came across as a very easy-going person, his quietness notwithstanding.

Fumio

Finally, I will describe Fumio. She was born in Japan and this was her third semester at the IEP and her interest in education was evident. She actually mentioned that what she had enjoyed most during her several months in the IEP was teaching Japanese to American and foreign students. Fumio also said that she enjoyed traveling a lot and that

she had visited several states in the United States, learning many things and enjoying the new culture. In the classroom, she was quiet and somewhat shy but was always ready to answer questions. She was sometimes absent from the classes and sometimes did not participate much but was very attentive in the course, taking good care to always submit her assignments on time.

Table 1

Additional characteristics of the participants.

NAME	YEAR OF BIRTH	INTENDED MAJOR/ PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND	FIRST LANGUAGE	TIME STUDYING ENGLISH (IEP)
CHIKAKO	1978	MUSIC	JAPANESE	2 TERMS
FUMIO	1978	EDUCATION	JAPANESE	3 TERMS
FATIMA	1979	DENTISTRY	ARABIC	1 TERM
NADIA	1981	DENTISTRY	ARABIC	NOT MENTIONED
WEN-LU	1971	INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS	TAIWANESE	1 TERM
ALI	1981	MARKETING	TURKISH	1 TERM
YANG	1979	NOT MENTIONED	CHINESE	NOT MENTIONED
SUPAKIT	1974	ENGINEERING	THAI	1 TERM
MOHAMMED	1979	MARKETING	ARABIC	1 TERM
PAULA	1976	ADVERTISING	SPANISH	1 TERM
MARIA	1963	EDUCATION	SPANISH	2 TERMS
JIE	1977	MUSIC EDUCATION	CHINESE	1 TERM

Chapter Summary

As we can see, the students in this group had mainly academic incentives to study at the IEP, because many wanted to pursue higher learning at West Virginia University. There were at least five different nationalities in the sample, all from middle and upper socioeconomic level in their countries of origin and all of them coming from urban environments.

After this chapter, we will take a more detailed look at what qualitative research is. Later, I will explore the significance of the study and a review of some of the existing literature, and also what concerns the methodology used in the study. Data report and analysis, discussion and reflections, summary and conclusions, will be explored in later chapters.

Chapter 2 A QUALITATIVE APPROACH TO SELF-ASSESSMENT
Qualitative Research

Qualitative research studies subjects in their natural settings, and attempts to make sense of or interpret certain phenomena in terms of the meanings that people give to them. Qualitative inquiry in education recognizes the insight the researcher has on a given project and that his/her point of view is a decisive factor in the research. Hara (1995) states that the strength of the qualitative approach in education is that it considers the researcher's and the informants' points of view during the process as well as the result of a given project, providing a wider and richer description than when using a quantitative approach. Hara also establishes that the interpersonal, social and cultural contexts are better encompassed in qualitative research and give the researcher a better representation of human behavior.

Some studies have confirmed the effectiveness of using direct observation in the classroom to gain understanding of the advantages of self-assessment. The study by Glazer et al. (1995) and the study by Optiz (1995) with elementary students give an example of what can be achieved when using qualitative self-evaluation in the classroom. They observed that by discussing the qualities of good oral reading

through "self-assessment", the students could notice how they went from not recognizing many words to being fluent and expressive. These students also discussed the challenges they faced and contributed ideas for improving oral reading.

The majority of research related to self-assessment in education has been quantitative and has been done in Pre K-8 settings (Glazer, 1999; Glazer et al., 1995; Optiz, 1995; Manning, 1997; Levy, 1999). In higher education settings, on the other hand, self-assessment has been used mainly in the sciences and medical fields (Fazey, 1993; Boud, 1992; Orsmond et al., 1997; Sullivan and Hall, 1997; and Lan, 1996). In these fields, research dealing with self-assessment also has usually been quantitative rather than qualitative and a grade has always been involved with the application of self-assessment. In the field of ESL, Oskarsson, (1978) carried out quantitative research in self-assessment with adult students. Few, if any, qualitative studies have been carried out in these kinds of settings. Also, until now, a grade was assigned to the assessment, maybe leaving aside another aspect of assessment: that of improvement through reflection. It is here where this study would fill a gap and possibly provide a new perspective.

Since the purpose of this study is to determine the perception the students have of their performance in a specific ESL setting and using self-assessment without the burden of a grade, a qualitative approach seems to be the better design. In this study, the social context of the classroom and the variety of students' cultural backgrounds would likely offer different perspectives and points of view of the students and their personal approaches to assessing their own performance in a second language.

Rationale for the Study

On the basis of research findings about the benefits of self-assessment (Oskarsson, 1978; Marineau, 1999; Brookhart, 1997 and Fazey, 1993) it appears that the use of self-assessment in an ESL setting may possibly influence in a positive way the students' view of the subject at hand. However, it is possible that due to different learning styles, the use of different learning strategies, their personalities and cultural background, the learners may benefit from self-assessment in different ways. Furthermore, factors such as time constraints, setting, teaching style and personality of the instructor may be factors that can influence the outcomes of the research.

This qualitative research design seeks to gather data related to perceived benefits and drawbacks that derive

from knowing one's strengths and weaknesses in a given situation (Ellis, 1999). It seeks to find if the inclusion of self-assessment helps students to be critical about their performance, to recognize their drawbacks and/or assets, and be able to act accordingly. Some studies have focused also on the students, but usually using self-assessment as part of the overall evaluation. In this case, the inclusion of the participants' perceptions of their performance without giving it a grade, may allow us to gain additional insight into their learning processes.

This study also becomes significant because very little or no qualitative research has been done with adult students using self-assessment in ESL settings. As can be seen in the literature reviewed in subsequent sections of this chapter, an account of adult students' perceptions of their own process in the classroom done merely for their own enrichment and not for a grade, appears to be highly appropriate.

Significance of Study

Self-assessment is useful because it has been considered that rather than giving a comprehensive diagnostic test to have a glimpse of possible problem areas for the students, it is much faster to ask students directly what problems they feel they have (Harris and

McCann, 1994). At the same time, it has been found that self-assessment provides students with a useful tool to make decisions about particular material that might be useful for them outside the classroom, and also to become more aware of their learning style, as Brookhart, (1997) suggests. Moreover, Dodd (1995) is very encouraging when suggesting that self-assessment is the best way to promote understanding and learning. She supports the belief that students who feel ownership for the class or task and believe they can make a difference, become more engaged in their own learning process.

This study explores ESL students' perceptions of performance through self-assessment. This study with IEP adult students could also be beneficial for the instructor of the course in an incidental way. By being aware of its results, she would be able to make more informal decisions in the classroom, making her course more dynamic and interesting, from the point of view of the students. In the same way, as Simmons (1994), points out, teachers should like their students to use knowledge in new and creative ways, to be able to relate to the concepts they are learning and at the same time, to understand the world around them with a more intellectual aim. This study, when it gives learners tools to self-assess their own

proficiency, becomes significant for them because it could let them know at which stage they are in their learning process. It also may enable them to use this knowledge to improve or make adjustments in their linguistic development.

Review of Literature

Over the past years self-assessment has been implemented in an increasing number of settings. In many contexts, there has been a shift from teacher-oriented systems of evaluation to a more student-centered approach. The implementation of self-assessment has also been influenced by the need to introduce reflection and reflective practices in a variety of settings, ranging from schools to colleges to the workplace.

Oskarsson (1978) suggests that teachers in general can profit from authentic language situations to carry out self-evaluation. He further reports that adult learners in an ESL setting would try to evaluate their ability in terms of using the language in natural situations, not in terms of test scores. Marineau, (1999) found that adult learners could define more clearly what they considered self-assessment to be, ranging from considering it as an internal process in which they would evaluate themselves,

to seeing themselves as another entity, almost looking over their own shoulders at the task at hand.

Brookhart, (1997) supports the view that self-assessment provides learners with information about what is important to learn. The same author also asserts that self-assessment has been found to help teachers gather information about their learners from another perspective, in this case, the learner's. Claxton, (1995) found that self-assessment is useful to provide learners with discipline to gain a better understanding of the subject matter, and that it is considered and implemented as an intuitive process, not as something that is mandatory or part of a plan of studies.

Fazey, (1993) has concluded that it is very important to offer students the opportunity to learn about personal evaluation if they are going to enter a program at the graduate or undergraduate level. In other study, McMahon, (1999) suggests that introducing students to self-assessment would be an efficient way to teach self-judgment and, in due course, encourage critical thinking.

Finally, even in their daily lives, the learners can benefit from self-assessment. Ellis, (1999) suggests that knowing one's strengths and weaknesses can make a difference in the real world. She also states that when

people carry out self-evaluation they would have a truer sense of what is good or better for them, whether in a work situation or an academic one.

There has been a growing interest in the field of self-evaluation in primary school settings both directed toward students as well as to teachers. Glazer, (1999) states that teachers sometimes come to school with a set of feelings about the way children learn, behave and interact. She says she feels uncomfortable when teachers decide that they have a difficult class or child in the classroom. She thinks that the role of the teacher is to facilitate the learning process. She also says that if children could learn easily, there would be no need for teachers. She suggests that teachers, as well as students, should undergo a process of self-assessment and look at themselves and at their perceptions of how they feel about the teaching/learning process. Some of the research done in the Pre K-8 setting has proven that self-assessment can be very effective for the students (Glazer et al, 1995; Optiz, 1995; Manning and Manning, 1997; Levy, 1999). These studies found that the process of self-assessment promotes fluent oral reading, encourages independence and understanding of writing mechanics and that students benefit from self-assessment when sharing their views of their work with

classmates and people outside the classroom. Manning and Manning, (1997) also observed that the use of checklists -- a form of self-assessment-- helped students to become more independent readers and writers. The same researchers found as well that when students are asked to carry out self-assessment on a periodic basis and receive feedback from the teacher, their writing performance dramatically improved.

Self-assessment has been tried in higher education in several settings. Fazey, (1993), carried out a pilot study at the University College of North Wales (UCNW) in Bangor, Wales in the context of an Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE). He found that when instructors offered students the opportunities for learning about personal evaluation, they seemed to acquire more awareness about their own mental processes and became more skilled and better able to monitor their performance. In another study carried out by Boud (1992) postgraduate students from a Master of Education course created a wide-ranging and critical summary of their learning in a given subject. In this study, students awarded themselves a mark together with a justification for it that was to be taken into consideration along with the instructor's assessment.

There has been research done in which the teachers' and the students' perceptions of performance criteria have been taken into account, such as the one reported by Orsmond et al. (1997). The authors described a study that implemented and evaluated a method of student self-assessment. The study concluded that when students are undertaking a self-assessment exercise, the students that have high teacher marks are more self-critical than judgmental, whereas the students producing poor work, that is, the students that got poor teacher marks, are less self-critical and more judgmental. It was found then that students can make an informed judgment of the work of others with the knowledge they have of the subject, but need greater understanding of the subject to make a better assessment of their own work.

Sullivan and Hall (1997) also introduced third year university students to self-assessment, taking into account their perceptions of their performance as well as the teacher's. The results in their research showed that there was a tendency among the students to overestimate their grade, compared to the grade the teacher assigned. The study indicated that students who overestimated their grades were less clear about the standard by which to judge their own work and looked for more specific guidance on

what the teacher wanted. The important issues in this study by Sullivan and Hall, (1997) were to narrow the gap between student and teacher ratings and to develop formative self-assessment activities that could be incorporated into courses to improve the students' judgment of their own work. Overall, the study was successful and the authors give suggestions to improve the study and some advice to other teachers who may want to implement self-evaluation in their classrooms. Both of these studies suggested that self-assessment may have been less effective and this may have happened because there was a grade involved and therefore some students felt additional pressure when evaluating their own work.

In the same way, Lan, (1996) collected information from students in a graduate-level introductory statistics course in a university in the southwestern United States during four successive semesters. The researcher also implemented self-assessment in a classroom and found that the hypothesis that self-monitoring students are more actively involved in their learning activities and have better performance than non-self-monitoring students was partially supported. It was also shown that there was no difference in the mastery-seeking behavior of self-monitoring and non-self-monitoring groups.

Nevertheless, the hypothesis that self-monitoring students would be more motivated than the non-self-monitoring students was not supported, maybe due to particular characteristics of the group. The hypothesis that self-monitoring students would develop a more accurate representation of their own performance was supported, as well as the finding of a positive effect of self-monitoring on academic performance.

In one of the few studies of self-assessment conducted in an EFL setting, Oskarsson (1978) sent a questionnaire requesting information about self-assessment to Swedish schools, institutions and organizations providing foreign language instruction for adults. Additional information was gathered through interviews. Three experiments were carried out. In the first experiment it was demonstrated that impressionistic self-assessment can be quite informative of the students' perceptions of their performance. The learners in the study had a good grasp of their actual language skills and they were able to communicate their impressions very well. In the second experiment it was found that adult learners tended to underestimate their achievement. The third experiment was different because it was not aimed towards global self-assessment of language ability; the research aimed at finding out whether self-

assessment could be considered reliable enough for further development in the context of testing in the unit/credit system, but with no conclusive results.

Research Design

Qualitative research methodology has been recommended for studies where a naturalistic approach to a subject is taken. That is, it studies the subjects in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret certain phenomena in terms of the meaning that people give to them (Jones, 1995). The majority of the studies reviewed here have been only quantitative and few have included qualitative data and the students' reflections to reach their conclusions. Most of the studies with adult learners focused on students' self-assessment of performance relying mainly on quantitative data, even though and many included journals and interviews. Also, most of the studies with adults included self-assessment as part of the overall evaluation for the course.

Consequently, the qualitative techniques adopted for this study included a) an involvement of six weeks with the setting and informants; b) researcher's observations of subjects during classes; c) ethnographic interviews; d) a checklist; e) a questionnaire; and f) ethnographic interviews with the students and the teacher.

I first met with the students in February, 2000 when their courses at the IEP had already started. I described the study to them and asked for their permission to observe the class and collect information. They also signed a consent that the teacher of the course suggested that I use, authorizing me to make use of the information I collected. All students agreed to participate.

During that first class observation, I distributed a checklist adapted from Oskarsson, (1978) (See Appendix A). The purpose of the checklist was to have an idea of the students' perception of their listening, reading, writing and speaking ability. This information was later confirmed through an interview, which provided supplementary information to aid the selection of the key respondents. This checklist was also handed out the last day of observations, to gather additional information and compare it to the first checklist and see if the students' perceptions of themselves had changed over time.

In the selection of the key respondents, gender or nationality was not taken into account. Rather, I selected them taking into account the amount of information I had about them in terms of questionnaires answered, course attendance, and willingness to participate in the project. Some of them expressed their enthusiasm about the project.

Ali for example, said that the interview "was cool and would do it any moment" and Paula said "it sounds good" the first time the project was explained to them. The purpose of this study was not to utterly generalize but rather to generate an overall description of the students' perceptions that may enable others to consider the results of this project in similar contexts and conditions.

During the inquiry, I conducted interviews with the respondents during the fifth week of the project. These interviews were mainly non-structured and informal. The interviews took place outside the classroom and the general atmosphere was relaxed. Most interviews lasted from 30 to 45 minutes per informant and tape-recording and note taking were used as ethnographic techniques. During the interviews the topics varied from personal to general information about their courses in the IEP, including the students' perception of self-assessment and their idea of the kind of students they were. I also had a similar interview with the instructor for approximately the same amount of time, using the same techniques.

In addition, data were collected from observations of all students during the Writing class to get a better idea of their language proficiency and their participation in the class. In order to gain a better understanding of their

personalities and their use of language, I observed all the classes during the five-week period through which the project lasted. These observations, as well as the interview with Ms. Shaw, the instructor, account for another point of view to the students' performance.

The respondents also filled out questionnaires (See Appendix B) adapted from Cárdenas (1995). The students filled out one of the questionnaires twice during the study and another, adapted from the same author, once. The author suggested the use of the questionnaires to increase the learners' awareness towards the self-assessment process and also to encourage critical thinking. Some of the students commented "I don't like writing too much" talking about the questionnaires, but others, who could not fill them out in the classroom, took them home and gave them back to me during the next time I went to observe the class.

In an ethnographic study, it is of the utmost importance that the perceptions of the researcher and the analysis of the data be as unbiased as possible. In most cases in qualitative research, there are several sources of data from which the investigator draws information. This is known as triangulation. Clive (1999) compares the term with navigating in which somebody can discover their position on a map by taking bearings on two landmarks, and then, where

lines will intersect to reveal the observer's position. He also supports the fact that triangulation can be used when analyzing data and thereby improve their coherence and fruitfulness. In the present case, the diversity of data collected ensured several points of view about the same topic and triangulation helped bring coherence and meaning to it.

While other categories and variables emerged during the first stages of the analysis, the data focused in the research rationale stated earlier. Consequently, I focused on the learners' opinions and perceptions of their performance. The data and subsequent analysis are reported in the following chapter.

Chapter Summary

As we have seen until now, the topic of self-assessment has been explored before in the classroom. There have been studies focusing on the K-8 and Higher Education settings but very few in ESL or EFL settings. The majority of the studies have been only quantitative and few have included qualitative data only to reach their conclusions. Most of the studies with adult learners focused on students' self-assessment of performance relying mainly on quantitative data, even though many included journals and interviews. Also, most of the studies with adults included

self-assessment as part of the overall evaluation for the course, and in all of these cases, a grade affecting final score was assigned to it.

This particular research will be centered on the students' self-assessment of their performance using qualitative data collected in interviews and class observations, as well as questionnaires, but not taking it into account as part of the overall evaluation of the course. It is aimed at finding out what the learners think of their language development without giving them the added burden of the grade. It also focuses on the students' opinion without influence of the teacher.

In the next chapter, we will look at the analysis of the data collected in this study, including a discussion and reflection of the findings. In a later chapter, I will explore the implications for the classroom and will discuss some further research questions and the conclusions to this project.

Chapter 3. DATA REPORT AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter reports and analyzes what the students wrote or said concerning their perception of their performance through self-assessment, which is the question under consideration in this study. I will use quotations when transcribing exactly what the student or the teacher said, to preserve the idea the student or teacher was trying to convey. Grammar in this case will not be corrected or the quotations re-stated unless the message is not clear for the reader. The main data were taken from class observations, an interview with the teacher, one interview with each student, the checklist, a self-assessment questionnaire and a self-evaluation questionnaire. The latter three items are included in the Appendices. I also used data from some personal communications and from informal and unplanned conversations I had with the students.

Observations Regarding Accuracy of Perception of Performance

These observations refer to the perceptions the students had of their performance through self-assessment. Many of the students contributed very engaging accounts when answering the questionnaire. They also gave very

interesting answers on the checklist. Those answers were later triangulated with data from the teacher or from the interviews. The group, as a whole came across as very dedicated and diligent.

Jie, one of the Chinese students, said: "sometimes it is difficult for me to watch [understand] some movie, they go too fast." She says "there are some complicated sentences is difficult for me, sometimes are very long. I can't understand." The teacher corroborated this perception when she said: "Jie sometimes does not get directions the first time but asks her classmates about the task at hand." Supakit commented, "I like surfing the net, looking for things, in the Internet you can learn new vocabulary." He may use his reading abilities to improve his vocabulary and syntax that, according to him are "not excellent, [they] can improve", even though his teacher says that he is "a very good reader, one of the best in the course." In the questionnaire Fatima said that she is a little insecure about her vocabulary: "it's average, not too big", but at the same time works to improve her skills. She mentioned "I read everything, [even] material not related to my courses." She said that the richest part of her vocabulary is "the vocabulary related to science subjects." She may then feel more confident speaking about academic subjects

because she thinks she needs to improve her "general subject" vocabulary. The teacher said that "her vocabulary is very good, she has improved her writing skills and is a very good storyteller." Here we can see that Fatima's perception of her vocabulary is not as restricted to technical matters as she feels. Wen-Lu said that he feels more comfortable with familiar topics "if there are too many vocabularies [sic] or some specificity [sic] topics I don't know well" but that he tries "to understand the writer's feeling." The teacher, conversely, finds him to be "a great reader."

In their perceptions of performance, only one of the students seemed to overestimate his work. Ali's perception of his work being "good [because] I had to do [sic] to get it right," made me think of something his teacher said: "He [Ali] sent me an e-mail about his grade. He said 'Are you sure that's what I deserve?' [a B+] and I thought 'How nice'" but she was surprised when she discovered that "he meant he deserved an A!" The teacher also mentioned that "his writing is better when he gets something that he likes to write about but he does not like it a whole lot. He's more of a get-by-kind-of-guy." He seems to think that he is rather good at writing. He said "I always narrow my topic choices, I like writing mainly about what interests me, I

always include the appropriate details." The teacher seemed to know this: "He works better when he likes the subject." She was also right when she said: "He does not like to work too hard." He said: "I don't like [the fact] that this research paper for the writing course has to be ten pages long." In this case, Ali may not be able to separate his efforts from his actual performance maybe due to lack of motivation, because he only seemed to write at length about his favorite topics, or maybe because that his hard work deserved a good grade.

It appears therefore that when assessing their performance, most of the students were not accurate in their perception. Also, with only one exception, they tended to underestimate their performance, as compared to the teacher's perception of it. The students came across as a little hard towards their performance and overly critical when assessing their skills.

Observations Regarding Perception of Learning

Environment

Through self-assessment some students began to reflect on the difference in their performance in their home countries, where they studied English as a foreign language and their experience in an ESL setting in this country. I found out that some students questioned the new information

they found in their course and in their everyday life in an ESL setting, and that they were thinking about alternatives on how to improve on what they had learned before.

Jie, for example, said in the interview: "Of course I'm learning many new words every day, because I read, listen to other people and my teachers and also talk to them." She sometimes feels that all her preparation in her country was not very useful when she came to the United States: "before I came here I studied English, when I came here I was frustrated, I hated it." She also mentioned "I learned the language without the right environment to practice it, [what we learned] it's different from the real use of English." Jie finds it difficult to "use the native speak [sic] to communicate, and can't find the appropriate word to express myself exactly, and the tense." Supakit said that he was increasing his vocabulary "the vocabulary [in English] used in Thailand and [the vocabulary] used in USA are different, here I look up words in the dictionary, only the words that I really want to know the exactly [sic] meaning or words that I see often but don't know the meaning exactly." He is very aware of how other people perform: "some [foreign] people have very good English," and usually compares his own performance with theirs. During the interview, he said he wanted to "be like the

student my teacher brought to the classroom," referring to an ESL student his reading teacher invited to speak to her classroom. He said: "she was very good, [she] had very good English, I couldn't believe she learned it here."

Concerning the learning environment, Paula mentioned something different from vocabulary or expressions, which seemed to concern many of the other students. She mentioned, "there are many, many rules" but that "Americans don't really use them all." This showed insight into her comparison of what she was learning and what she perceived native speakers were doing. Chikako also mentioned using her experience learning a second language to improve her performance. She mentions that her mistakes are mostly in vocabulary: "because I actually speak French too. And it is still confusing to distinguish these two kinds of language . . . Speak with native speakers and to become intimate [sic] with them. That's the problem to learn [a] foreign language. We can't speak it well because we can't have the same environment as native speakers. That's not fair! Foreign girls --boys too-- who succeeded to catch Americans as friend, can improve their English skill very quickly. That's the proof!"

Students here seemed very aware of the differences between learning a language in their own countries, and

learning it in the country where the language was spoken. They seemed aware of the fact that the criteria to measure their performance moved away from the classroom to outside the classroom, where their ability to speak the language was related to their everyday life.

Observations Regarding Perception of the
Importance of Writing

Since they were enrolled in a writing course, many of the students focused their self-assessment on their writing skills. They showed great awareness of what they considered their weaknesses, but also were conscious of their assets. It seems that the students discovered things about themselves concerning writing while gaining awareness of their other skills.

Jie said in her interview: "I need more vocabulary, structure for writing and reading." This may signal the student's interest in improving her level of proficiency in writing until she feels satisfied with it. She seems to know quite well what she does while writing: "Sometimes I narrows [sic] my topics and most of the time I develop my ideas." And she adds " I lack organization, it's my weakness, I don't organize my ideas." Supakit said in the questionnaire: "Writing helped me think about everything in other aspects that I rarely see." He may be referring to

the connections that enabled him to integrate new words into his existing vocabulary. But he also mentioned that he had a particular difficulty: "How to make the paper easy to understand by everybody, because I [am] familiar with it. When I write it, I use technical term that average people don't know, I know about the topic and interest [sic] in this topic for a few years". He says that the hardest part about getting his ideas on paper is: "I can't write as I could write in my language."

Chikako discovered that she liked writing: "I like it better than other activities, I feel less self-conscious," noting that she could take her time "and look for words in a dictionary. If it's a small essay, I like to do it."

Mohammed said: "Of course it [writing] was good for me to prepare for graduate school, you write the same papers." He added: "It was very good for me because I'm planning to take the international TOEFL", recognizing that in the TOEFL test there are timed written assignments. He said he had worked "on how to write an essay and the topic was familiar" remarking that he "had already written essays before in another institute." Regardless, he said that he still learned "the way to write research papers in the United States," and that he had difficulty with the "American ways to write the research paper."

With regard to her writing, Maria said that she now knows she can "develop the ideas in a correct way" and that she finds it difficult to write "scientific things" and "being coherent when getting my ideas on paper." She liked writing a journal because "I practiced this kind of exercise before, learning how to think fast and to write in short time [sic]." She added that she "learned how to write with short time and how to organize my ideas very quickly." Nadia said, "Now I know now that I'm able to narrow the topic and also to develop my ideas, including appropriate details," and that her writing is more "coherent." She said that what she likes best about what she writes is to "develop the ideas in a correct way" but that the hardest part is to "be coherent."

Fatima mentioned that self-assessment made her see other things in her writing course. She wrote that she found it difficult "to decide on what subject to write" and also that it was difficult for her "to know how to begin each paragraph, and how to link the paragraphs in the paper." She added that the easiest part was to look for sources and that she enjoyed learning how to "look up for sources in the library which it can help me later in my academic years and also that I fed my brain with new information." She said that she did not like the fact that

it took her a long time to write her paper: "It took me a long time to type it!" Wen-Lu said that he now knows that he narrows his topic: "When I write an essay I would think of the topic all the time", but that "sometimes I don't have many ideas and can't write a long one [essay]."

In summary, the students consistently manifested their desire to improve their writing. They seemed determined to continue working until they were satisfied with their production. They also seemed to be able to connect their writing process with other skills and find out about what they found more pleasurable or easier when writing. The students also seemed very aware of the fact that the writing course could help them not only as part of the curriculum at the IEP, but also in their tests and their future academic life.

Observations Regarding the Establishment of Learning Scenarios

When assessing their performance, most of the students seemed very focused, demanding and sometimes frustrated because they did not feel that they were learning all they could. They also came up with ways of improving what they thought was not good enough. In effect, they imposed certain "learning scenarios" upon themselves that they felt would improve their skills.

Jie, for example, wrote in one of her self-assessments that the following week she would "do more practice" and that she was aware that the "improvement will be gradually [sic]." She further explained: "Sometimes I can't tell you what happens on one week, I can't tell you what is my progress, sometimes you can't find your progress, I don't like it, it makes me disappoint [sic]. I can't see my progress, but maybe is a good way for us to have our own direction." Supakit had similar thoughts. He said that one of the things he does well when speaking is "good communication". That is his drawback, as he said in the questionnaire: "sometimes I can't find [the] word that I want to say." To become a better speaker Supakit thinks that he can "ask someone whether what I said is correct and practice at home." He apparently can reflect on what he is doing and seeks ways to better himself, so he appears to be very demanding of himself as a student.

Chikako also seems to reflect upon her own learning situation. She says that it's good to speak a lot to native speakers: "According to my experience in French, it's true, I think to guess what people are talking about with their actions and expressions, is very important when we speak second language." Maria also remarked that she is aware of what she does when speaking in another language: "Some days

I communicate better than others." Also she noted that "sometimes some people are easier to understand than others." She observed that "I have [some] grammar and pronunciation problems," and described and scenario to improve on her own by "practicing and doing a lot of exercises." She mentioned that she asks for suggestions from people because "I want to improve my speaking" and "to have good pronunciation" even though she finds it difficult "to have the correct intonation in some words." She added that to be a better speaker, she would "try to talk as a native speaker." She also wrote in the questionnaire: "This week I learned new vocabulary and idioms, something entirely new for me." She wrote that she learned "the use of some new words and how to use some new idioms during a conversation" and also that the most difficult was "try to memorize the idioms and to learn how and when to use them." To overcome this, she decided to watch a movie and see how people used idioms at the same time. She stated: "I learned some new [idioms] in this movie."

Paula wrote: "Teen magazines, The Reader's Digest, and books about advertising she found in the Internet," gave her "ways to write" or to express herself better. Ali mentioned that that week he learned "how to write a research paper in Dara's class", that the topic was

"entirely new for me and I learned how to do researches [sic] on the Internet. He wrote that his main difficulties were: "I'm not familiar with libraries and doing research." However, he found more sources and did "a hard work" in libraries and "watched TV, taking notes about the subject."

In summary, most of the students were very aware that learning a language was an ongoing process, even when they got frustrated or considered their progress was slow. Their work in the classroom seemed to motivate them to continue their learning outside the institute, using what they had learned and applying it to everyday situations. Based upon their self-assessments of performance, they prescribed for themselves a regimen of study that they felt would result in improved English skills. They also seemed to use resources they found around them to improve whatever they thought needed to be improved, and continued the cycle of self-assessment and establishment of study strategies.

Observations Regarding their Perceptions of the Role of Self-Assessment

Many of the students contributed their thoughts about what self-assessment brings to the classroom. Some of the students mentioned during the interviews or during the class. Some did not mention it at all. Here are some of their opinions:

Chikako

"I think that I need it [self-assessment] to make more effort to learn English" . . . "I [discovered I] strongly compare between English and French, which is my second language, to see my progression in English" . . . "I don't think that self-assessment should be a part of the tasks [carried out in the classroom] or the evaluation because we evaluate ourselves anyway."

Supakit

"Self-assessment helps me improve my English. By this, I know my weak point and strong point that I can improve my strong point and I can fix my weak point" . . . "[Self-assessment is] good, it find [sic] your problems and strong points that we can fix and improve." And when asked about implementing self-assessment in the classroom he said: "Yes, it helps improving yourself than [unintelligible] nothing [sic]."

Wen-Lu

"I think [that with self-assessment] I can know what [sic] started this term and know how much I studied. It made me think about my self, it made me think how many times in a week I speak, write and read in English. If I think it [sic] not enough I can

improve next week." And when asked about the idea of having self-assessment in the classroom, he said: "Yes, I think it can make student [sic] think about themselves and let the teacher realize how is [sic] to the student study outside the class and they can compare with their performance in class."

Fatima

"I think that it [self-assessment] was a good way to know what it is [sic] my weakness and strongest area of my English and overcome them . . . I would recommend it [self-assessment] because it helped me to know how I had improved."

Fumio

"If I could have gotten the questionnaire at the beginning of each week I would have been able to answer it more easily." She also wrote: "I learned that I practiced reading and writing much less than I practiced listening and speaking. I practiced listening and speaking every day." She would not like self-assessment as part of the tasks in the classroom: "I became tired of the same thing again and again." However, she would recommend it as part of the overall evaluation.

Nadia

"I think it's a new idea and it's a good way to evaluate myself . . . [I'd recommend it] as part of the overall evaluation because it is important to know that I improved in English."

Ali

"My self-assessment helps [me] to see my progression in English, I think that it's useful . . . I learned that I am not good in writing. I felt that because during [the] answering process I understood that I didn't spend much time for [sic] writing . . . I think it should be part of the regular class."

Jie

"It's a good means to find what I have learned and what need learn [sic], it will help me a lot."

Mohammed

"Well, I think it [self-assessment] is very good and if I got the results I can see me self [sic] what I am doing. And also it is very good for us as an [sic] international student to see how are you working and studying for [sic] English and if you improved your English or not . . . I think it's very helpful, and it tells me how many time [sic] I read, speak, write in a week . . . It made me think a lot to

improve my reading and writing in English and what I did before was not enough . . . It [self-assessment] will tell students different from each other [sic] and who is improving or not. It tells the teacher how are [sic] the students are doing in practice [sic] English and their performance."

In summary, the group came out as more or less homogeneous, with most students suggesting that self-assessment was useful because they became more aware of their progress. It made them think about themselves and recognize their strong and weak points. As to how often self-assessment was suitable for them, many of the students suggested that it would be good to have it as part of a course, but some said that it would be too much work to have it as part of every class.

Discussion and Reflection

When I decided to investigate the process of self-evaluation in students in a specific setting, I was interested in knowing their ideas about their performance and also in seeing what their perceptions were when given the chance to reflect on the process of self-evaluation.

During this research I was impressed by the students' insights into their own performance and also by the way some tended to underestimate their achievements. In this

respect, Jie, Supakit, Fatima and Wen-Lu who were considered by the teacher from "Very good" to "Excellent" underestimated their performance and appeared to be very demanding of themselves, usually working very hard to excel. Strangely, most of them thought that they needed to work harder than they were, but none of them could step back enough from their work to consider it in a more detached way (Marineau, 1999). Most were very conscious of their own performance and even though the teacher gave them high marks, they still were very self-critical of their own work. They also seemed to be very capable of reflecting on their own learning: some drawing from previous experiences learning a second language or from their previous experiences with English. They also were able to positively view how they could improve the subject at hand, in this case writing, by doing things they felt would improve their writing process, such as reading more, exploring the Internet or writing to their friends using the language they were learning. As stated before, only one of the students did not fit the category of not considering his work good enough, even though he did work to improve and also showed a very positive attitude towards his learning process.

Most of the students felt that they were not advancing as fast or as well in their acquisition of the language as the teacher did. Jie, for example, was of the opinion that her writing was not very good, that she needed to develop it more and that she needed to increase her vocabulary, while the teacher said Jie was a good writer with excellent vocabulary. She was critical of her own progress, but did not stop trying to improve her vocabulary, which she thought was at times quite limited. She was using her contact with the language outside the classroom to improve it. Supakit also thought that his writing could improve even when he said he had done his work the best he could. The teacher, on the other hand, reported that he could write well and easily. Nevertheless Supakit, known as "Mr. Vocabulary" by his classmates due to his knowledge of many words and countless slang expressions, still thought he wanted to be better. His self-criticism probably came from his previous experience with English. During the final data collection period, he indicated that he thought his work was good and that he had advanced quite a lot in writing.

Wen-Lu considered that he had worked decently but not hard and the teacher considered his work good, noting that it became more mature and complex over time. At the end of the research, he mentioned that he still needed to improve

his speaking skills, but that he felt he had progressed a lot in his writing. Correspondingly, Fatima, was very happy because she had learned how to write a research paper. However, she thought that she was not good at writing. The teacher, though, stated with certainty that Fatima was very good and tried very hard. She also felt that Fatima improved her writing, especially with regard to English writing conventions.

Jie, Supakit, Paula and Chikako mentioned the difference between the English they had learned in their countries and what they encountered in a country where English was spoken. They seemed very aware of the differences between EFL and ESL and were able to reflect on them. Here this research seems to depart from previous ones, where this topic has not been explored. They seemed, according to their self-assessment to be aware of the new information they were receiving and how to use it in this particular setting. Besides the information they received in the classroom, they seemed eager to explore the linguistic and cultural world around them. They were able to compare what other people --whether native speakers or speakers of English as a Second language-- whom they felt spoke English very well did with the language. They also used their mother tongue as a tool to improve their

performance, as well as using the skills they felt stronger in to improve the weaker ones. The students also mentioned that no matter what their training in the language is, exposure to the language as spoken by native speakers is the best and used their knowledge of other languages to assess their performance in the one they were learning. They seemed to choose whatever they deemed as good and use it for their personal situation when learning the language.

With regard to the students establishing a learning scenario, Jie, Chikako, Maria and Supakit seemed to be aware of the several things they could do to improve their performance through self-assessment. The students were mindful that learning a language was a maturing process, even when they got frustrated or considered their progress was somehow stunted. What they did in the classroom seemed to motivate them to continue learning outside the classroom, using what they had learned and applying it to everyday situations.

Most of the students felt that self-evaluation helped them view writing from another perspective. In this respect, this work also departs from previous research, where students were allowed to grade their work. Here the students had the opportunity to voice their opinions about the process of self-evaluation. They were able to say what

they liked about self-assessment and their opinions as to how often to carry it out and why. They mentioned that self-assessing helped them to overcome or to be more aware of what they considered to be their shortcomings and problems, sometimes for the first time. They mentioned that they also discovered that they had progressed in their writing when they compared their latest works to previous assignments. They seemed to view the subject in a more positive way and during self-assessment mentioned that they felt better in writing. The good things they had discovered through the process of writing their papers and the possible rewards of improving their writing seemed to make them very happy. I believe that this fact could help the teacher have an idea of what they do outside the classroom and what they think of themselves, therefore enabling the instructor to direct the course in the direction most appropriate for her students.

Chapter Summary

During the research, the students gave me feedback on their perceptions of their performance through self-assessment, as well as of the self-assessment process itself. The overall consensus was that they considered self-assessment beneficial and that it was a new way to look at themselves. They were able to spot their problems

and decide how to overcome them and also to have a better perception of their progress in the language they were learning from the beginning of a term to the end. Some of them asserted that it could be useful as part of the overall evaluation of the course in a regular class, and some others mentioned that it could be good as an out-of-class activity. They all agreed though, that self-assessment was a very useful tool for them and possibly for the teachers, who would gain insight into their students' perception of their performance in a given course. It seems then, that self-assessment, even when implemented only for a short period of time has good effects from the perspective of the students.

In the next chapter, I'll explore possible improvements to the study. Also, I will propose further research questions, as well as some general conclusions to the study.

Chapter 4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

This study was designed as a qualitative investigation, based upon findings from previous studies of self-assessment in several settings (Glazer, 1999; Glazer et al., 1995; Optiz, 1995; Manning, 1997; Levy, 1999; Fazey, 1993; Boud, 1992; Orsmond et al., 1997; Sullivan and Hall, 1997; and Lan, 1996). It reports and analyzes data from eleven students who expressed their views concerning their performance in an ESL setting. The data collected and analyzed suggest that students are very capable of carrying out self-assessment; they are usually more demanding of themselves than their teachers are; and the process of self-assessment may help them realize ways to improve their performance.

Contrary to previous studies, this one emphasized the role of self-assessment and the students' perception of their performance, without attaching the activity to the course grade. While previous studies had self-assessment as one of the components contributing to the determination of the students' grade, this study did not.

All the students reacted to self-assessment in different but favorable ways. Some of them found it very useful and some pointed out that they already did something

similar, but that having a guide helped them focus on one subject at a time. When the notion of a grade is removed, students seem to focus on how they improve their performance instead of on achieving a good mark on the assignments or in the course.

There were several points brought up by this study. First, there was the way the students perceived their performance, and how most of them underestimated it. Also, the way they perceived the differences between an EFL and an ESL learning environment. Other points were the establishment of a learning scenario, where they decided on what to do to improve what they considered their drawbacks; and their perception of the importance of the writing course in their overall development as students. In the same way, we looked at the perception the students had about the role of self-assessment in their learning process, and also their suggestions as to how to incorporate it to their course. All these issues are related to or stemmed from the research question posed at the beginning: What is the students' perception of their performance?

Throughout this study, the students reflected on their performance and the way they perceived themselves as learners. They also expressed their opinions of the

difference between their performance in English in settings where English was taught as a foreign language and the United States, where they were ESL students. When they talked about their personal development as students, they also turned to what they considered their performance was, in order to decide if they were being successful or not. Also, when reflecting about their performance in the writing course, the students verbalized their awareness of what they had learned and how they would use it from the point of view of what they considered they were doing well or what needed more work.

Limitations of the Study

One weakness of the study was the short period of time in which was conducted. This study covered only one course from the end of February, 2000 to April, 2000. Extending the period of time of self-evaluation to last the whole length of the course and implementing it on a weekly basis in some courses might give different results in terms of the students' performance (Manning and Manning, 1997; Lan, 1993). Another drawback was that I had not anticipated the lack of familiarity the students had with the self-assessment process, and maybe, if students are used to considering their internal processes and learn to evaluate

themselves as another entity (Marineau, 1999) the process would be easier for them.

Further Research Questions

As this research progressed, other areas that might be worthy of investigation, but were beyond the scope of this study began to emerge. Most of the students in this research reacted favorably to self-assessment, regardless of their cultural background. However, it might be significant to investigate whether the home culture of the students could be a factor in their attitudes toward self-assessment.

Whereas the research reported here focuses on how students perceive the significance of self-assessment, another question could be posed: What is the role of the teacher designing and implementing self-assessment? It is clear to me that more qualitative research should be conducted, possibly in a setting where self-assessment is part of the overall assessment process, as one student suggested. Also, some other aspects concerning teachers came into view during this research. For example: Do teachers benefit from student self-assessment and reporting? If so, how? If not, why not? Yet another project might seek to determine the difference between students'

vs. teacher's views of performance. Of course, all these questions could be answered by collecting qualitative data.

A number of practical implications can be deduced from the study. Given that this was a qualitative study, the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, some ideas have come forth that may be applicable in other classrooms. Based upon comments made by student in this study, it would appear that it would be good for self-assessment to be carried out in the classroom. I would propose self-assessment to be built into the structure of the course, so the students have a chance to regularly reflect on their ongoing performance. This would make the learners more familiar with the process of self-assessment, while at the same time giving them time to think about what they have done in the classroom without it becoming a tiring or boring task. Also, the students could profit from learning about personal evaluation in the event that they would like to enter a program at the graduate or undergraduate levels and become more skilled and better able to monitor their performance in a given course (Fazey, 1993). Likewise, the students might assume more responsibility as learners and possibly create habits associated with excellence (Levy, 1999).

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen here, self-assessment for this group could be considered as a good experience. The students became more involved in the process and more aware of their strong and weak points. Also, it helped them to realize how good their work was and to learn to use introspection to assess all of their courses. Given the positive nature of the experience that these students have had, it may be wise to incorporate a self-assessment component as a regular feature of this course, allowing time for students to do self-assessment without a grade. Students should feel free to say anything they want about their performance without effect on their final grade.

The students in this research had self-set goals that focused on their performance, serving as day-to-day intermediate steps between the broader goals they set for themselves and the course's goals set by the teacher. They became self-directed learners, knowing what they wanted to do and acting accordingly. Self-assessment and reflection created a context in which these students felt encouraged to become more self-directed. Many instructors may think of self-assessment as a tool that could be undermined by the students' subjectivity; but as this study suggests, it is likely that the teacher would not be as hard on the

students as they already are on themselves. Also, when administered throughout a course, it can become a valuable instrument, both for the students and for the instructor. Self-assessment may not be the answer to all the questions that emerge every day in the classroom, but it is a very valuable instrument that lets teachers look into the world of the students, a world usually unsuspected and overlooked. When considering the students' perceptions, teachers may gain insight into their learning process and at the same time, be more aware of ways to make the learning experience a more enjoyable and easy one for the students. We all have to remember that students are one of the most important reasons why teaching is worth doing.

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APPENDIX A

Appendix 3: Self-assessment form (Type C)

(Descriptive rating scales)

Instruction: Put a cross in the boxes corresponding to your level in each of the four skills (LISTENING, SPEAKING, READING, WRITING). Only one cross for each skill!

LISTENING	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand the language as well as a well-educated native.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand most of what is said in the language, even when said by native speakers, but have difficulty in understanding extreme dialect and slang. It is also difficult for me to understand speech in unfavourable conditions, for example through bad loudspeakers outdoors.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can follow and understand the essential points concerning everyday and general things when spoken normally and clearly, but do not understand native speakers if they speak very quickly or use some slang or dialect.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can follow and understand the essential points concerning everyday and general things when spoken slowly and clearly, but in the course of conversation I often have to ask for things to be repeated or made clearer. I only understand occasional words and phrases of statements made in unfavourable conditions, for example through loudspeakers outdoors.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand the meaning of simple requests, statements and questions if they are spoken slowly and clearly and if I have a chance of asking for them to be repeated. I only understand common words and phrases.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not understand the language at all.

SPEAKING	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I speak the language as well as a well-educated native.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I speak the language fluently and for the most part correctly. I have a large vocabulary so I seldom have to hesitate or search for words. On the other hand I am not completely fluent in situations in which I have had no practice with the language.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can make myself understood in most everyday situations, but my language is not without mistakes and sometimes I cannot find the words for what I want to say. It is difficult for me to express myself in situations in which I have had no opportunity to practise the language. I can give a short summary of general information that I have received in my native language.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can make myself understood in simple everyday situations, for example asking and giving simple directions, asking and telling the time, asking and talking about simpler aspects of work and interests. My vocabulary is rather limited, so it is only by a great deal of effort that I can use the language in new and unexpected situations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can just about express very simple things concerning my own situation and my nearest surroundings, for example asking and answering very simple questions about the time, food, housing and directions. I only have a command of very simple words and phrases.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I do not speak the language at all.

WRITING	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I write the language as well as a well-educated native.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I write the language rather easily and for the most part correctly. I only make occasional grammatical mistakes and spelling mistakes. When writing about subjects in which I have had no opportunity to practise the language I need to use a dictionary.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can formulate written messages or give a coherent account of things connected with my own life, my interests, needs and wishes, but I make mistakes in both grammar and spelling. I often cannot find the words for what I want to express. I can write down from dictation a normal prose text about a familiar subject. I may make spelling mistakes and mistakes due to a lack of words.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can formulate simple written messages connected with my own life and my needs, but there are often grammatical and spelling mistakes and a wrong choice of words. I can write down from dictation a simple text about everyday subjects. There are often spelling mistakes and mistakes due to a lack of words.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can formulate very simple messages connected with my own life. I only have a command of very simple words and phrases.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I cannot write the language at all.

READING	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I read and understand the language as well as a well-educated native.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand everything or nearly everything written in the language within non-specialized fields. There may be words I do not understand in difficult texts.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand most of what I read in simple texts dealing with familiar subjects such as leisure interests, current affairs and living conditions. I understand most of a normal private letter dealing with everyday things such as the family and their activities. I understand the main contents of a normal newspaper article about a plane crash or the opening of a new underground line, for example, but not all the details
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand the meaning of simple written instructions about the way, time, place and similar things, and also understand the essential things in simple texts dealing with familiar subjects such as common leisure interests, current affairs and living conditions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I understand the main points of a simple text and simple written directions for familiar things.
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I cannot read the language at all.

APPENDIX B

Name _____

Course _____

Week _____

Please complete the following information as detailed as you can:

OUT OF CLASS PRACTICE:

1. How much time outside the class have you spent:

	Approximate number of hours (a day)
SPEAKING ENGLISH	
LISTENING TO ENGLISH	
READING ENGLISH	
WRITING ENGLISH	

2. Who have you spoken to this week in English? (not including your teacher)

e.g. other course members _____

member of the public _____

other _____

Do you feel your conversations were generally successful? Why?

3. What films/TV programs/radio programs have you seen/listened to this week?

What did you think of them?

Did this activity helped you with your English? Why?

4. What did you read in English this week?

What did you think of it?

Did it help you with your English? Why?

5. Have you written anything in English this week?

6. What progress did you feel you have made in English this week?
(CHECK •)

	QUITE A LOT	A LOT	A LITTLE	NOT AT ALL
SPEAKING				
LISTENING				
READING				
WRITING				

7. Now rate your overall progress in your work on your own personal scale:

VERY GOOD	
GOOD	
AVERAGE	
NOT SO GOOD	
POOR	

Why?

Thanks a lot!



Self-Assessment

Date _____

Name _____

1. This week we studied/practiced/learned:

2. The topic was:

a) Entirely new for me _____

b) Somehow familiar _____

c) Very familiar for me _____

Explain the type of familiarity with the topic

3. By studying and practicing this, I learned:

4. The difficulties I had were:

5. What I did to overcome them was:

6. The aspects of this work that were easy for me were:

7. What I enjoyed about this work was:

8. What I disliked about it was:

9. My main contribution to the group/ to my own work was:

10. I consulted these books to do my work:

11. I asked for support from my teacher/ my classmates for:

12. In an evaluation about this material, I think my results will be:

- Very good _____
- Good _____
- Average _____
- Not so good _____
- Poor _____

Because _____

13. I think I did this work

- The best I could _____
- Decently but I did not try hard _____
- Not too well, although I tried hard _____
- Not too well because I did not make much effort _____
- I did not hand in my work _____

COMMENTS _____

APPENDIX C

Writing and Study Skills
IEP Group 3D
Syllabus
Spring 2000

Teacher: Dara Shaw
Office: 116 Eiesland

Texts: Writer's INC.
Strategies for Academic Communication

Objectives:

1) Through a writing process approach students will become familiar with and practice the following types of writing:

- Personal writing such as journaling, writing personal narratives and free writing.
- Functional writing such as resumes, statements of purpose, and business letters
- Creative writing such as stories, poems, plays and letters
- Expository writing such as essays, research papers, news stories and interviews
- Persuasive writing such as letters to the editor, advertisements, and slogans

2) Students will write responses to their readings in their Reading and Vocabulary classes.

3) Students will develop their computer skills by working in the computer lab two times per week to develop their in-class writing projects. They will use the internet for research and word processing programs for their assignments.

4) Students will develop the following writing skills:

- self-correction
- techniques for organizing information and ideas
- revision of texts,
- giving and seeking constructive feedback,
- proofreading and editing,
- formulation of thesis statements,
- logical development of ideas,
- use of cohesive devices,
- summarizing,
- paraphrasing
- MLA or APA citation systems

5) Students will develop the following study skills:
 notetaking, library skills, time management, stress management,
 using campus services, test taking skills, recognizing signal words

Requirements:

Writing requirements:

1. Five daily journal entries will be completed outside class and placed in pocket folders to be handed in every Wednesday. They are to be as follows: (30%)

- 2 reader response (may be a response to any readings from your classes, or other readings)
- 1 intercultural reflection
- 2 free choice

2. One fully developed research paper 10%

3. In class writing projects 40%

Study Skills Requirements:

1. Study skills portfolio and notebook - 20% All study skills exercises will be kept in an organized notebook with examples of the work.

Attendance and tardiness: Please be on time for class, and remember that your attendance will make a big difference in your grade. (See your folder for the IEP attendance policies.)

VITA

Javier Coronado-Aliegro has lived most of his life in Medellín, Colombia. In 1991 he obtained his MA as Professional in Languages from the Universidad de Antioquia. From 1992 to 1998 he worked at the University of Antioquia, in the foreign languages department, and in the Extension program this university offered to adults. He combined his teaching at the University of Antioquia with teaching at the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, where he was also part of the team coordinating English courses aimed at primary school teachers with no qualification in the area. During his teaching in these institutions he decided to pursue one-year graduate studies in the field of methodology. During that year, he felt very drawn to do research in the field of learning strategies, and wrote his final dissertation about that topic. He graduated in 1998. The next logical step unfolded as residence in an English speaking country, and from 1998 to 2000, he had the invaluable experience of pursuing an M.A. in TESOL at West Virginia University. Here, he shared his native culture and language with the receptive and encouraging students at WVU and had the opportunity to be a co- presenter at the Northeast Conference in a Spanish Language Immersion Workshop.