Self-assessment of ESP oral performance: A tool for learning and fostering learner awareness

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Abstract

Aim. Research to date acknowledges the learning, instructional and assessment advantages of self-assessment used in different fields of study in higher education contexts, yet little known research has focused on its use for learning and raising learner awareness while studying English for Specific Purposes (ESP). To this end, the present small-scale study examines the use of self-assessment of philology students' ESP oral performance at a university in Lithuania.

Method. The data for this research was collected from undergraduate students' written reports on their project presentations on the chosen ESP topics. To analyse the data, qualitative methodology of inductive content analysis was used.

Results. The study resulted in the identification of five major dimensions covering problem areas in the students' ESP oral performance. The findings indicate that self-assessment enabled the students not only to identify some gaps and difficulties in their ESP oral performance that call for action but also to establish the reasons which caused them, foresee how the gaps can be closed or the difficulties coped with. Furthermore, it allowed the students to make decisions that reached far beyond the self-assessment task. The results also demonstrate that self-assessment raised the students' awareness of themselves as learners by giving them direction on how to perform better in the future.

Conclusion. Self-assessment, as used in the present research, proves to be a valuable tool both for the students of ESP and their teachers as it reveals areas in the students' performance that call for improvement, which enables ESP teachers to support their students to achieve better results in the future.

Key words: self-assessment, ESP oral performance, gaps and difficulties in ESP oral performance, learner awareness, higher education

Introduction

Self-assessment has been defined in different ways. It has been referred to as the identification of standards and/or criteria for judging the quality of one's own work and the judgement regarding the extent to which the standards and/or criteria have been reached (Boud, 1995, as cited in Mok et al., 2006); as a form of students' involvement in making judgements about their learning via fostering reflection on their learning processes and learning outcomes (Boud & Falchikov, 1989; Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999); as a cyclical process in which students gradually become able to self-monitor, judge and react towards their achievements or gaps in learning; or as a source of formative assessment used by both teachers and students to manage and adjust their teaching and learning practices (Micán & Medina, 2017). In the present small-scale study, students' self-assessment refers to their engagement in an activity which requires them to reflect on and understand their own performance. More specifically, self-assessment is seen as a tool and a pedagogical approach to support students in examining and judging their English for Specific Purposes (ESP) oral performance, establishing gaps in it and /or identifying difficulties that they face, making decisions on how the gaps can be closed; hence, it is a tool to support students in developing their ability of self-assessment and raising their awareness of themselves as learners (Boud & Falchikov, 1989; Tan, 2004; Bourke, 2018).

In higher education (HE) contexts, self-assessment has been extensively investigated using different theoretical perspectives and pedagogical approaches in different fields of study, including science education, teacher training, psychology, and foreign language studies (Boud & Falchikov, 1989; Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999; Tan, 2004; Mok et al., 2006; Ryan et al., 2007; Kavaliauskienė, Kaminskienė, & Anusienė, 2007; Matsuno, 2009; Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Taras, 2010; Nulty, 2011; Micán & Medina, 2017; Huang, 2016; Ünaldi, 2016; Bourke, 2018). The research has revealed multiple benefits of its use both for learners and teachers as well as highlighted potential difficulties caused by its application. It is reported that self-assessment enhances learning and achievement in HE environments in which all the components of the teaching systems (i.e. curricula objectives, teaching/learning activities and assessment tasks) are constructively aligned, where students are engaged in learning and where teaching aims to develop student responsibility for their achievements and progress as well as to support active monitoring and reflecting on own learning experience (Boud & Falchikov, 1989; McDonald & Boud, 2003; Micán & Medina, 2017; Tan, 2004). In this context, self-assessment stands out as a tool which plays a pivotal role in empowering students to judge how to improve achievement in the future and as one of the most necessary sustainable skills that students have to acquire in HE since it is relevant for their future professional development and lifelong learning (Boud, 1989, as cited in Taras, 2010).

The importance of self-assessment for teaching and learning English in HE has been recognised by a number of researchers, however, self-assessment used within academia for teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes

has not yet been studied in depth. (McNamara & Deane, 1995; Kavaliauskienė, Kaminskienė, & Anusienė, 2007; Burkšaitienė & Tereseviciene, 2008; Micán & Medina, 2017; Huang, 2016; Ünaldi, 2016). To contribute to the research literature, a small-scale study into the undergraduate students' self-assessment of learning ESP was conducted at a university in Lithuania. It explored the second-year students' self-assessment of their ESP project work, which included self-assessment of (1) the process of project preparation (searching information, selecting information, drafting a project, and preparing a project presentation), (2) student collaboration/teamwork during project work, and (3) self-assessment of ESP oral performance (project presentations on ESP topics).

The present paper reports only on the results of students' self-assessment of their ESP oral performance by addressing the following research questions: (1) does self-assessment disclose gaps or difficulties in students' oral performance?, (2) what kind of gaps or difficulties does self-assessment disclose?, and (3) do students foresee how the gaps can be closed and the difficulties coped with? The study begins by introducing an overview of research on students' self-assessment of learning in HE. There then follows a description of the research methodology. The research findings are then presented, and the conclusions drawn. To carry out the research, qualitative method of inductive content analysis was used.

Literature overview

During the last three decades, self-assessment has been the subject of research conducted in HE using diverse theoretical perspectives in different fields of study, including science studies, psychology, teacher education, and foreign language studies. To illustrate, David Boud and Nancy Falchikov (1989, as cited in Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999) reviewed research conducted between 1961 and 1989, which explored students' ability to self-assess their learning and compared student-generated ratings with the ratings produced by their teachers. Harrington (1995) studied the use of different instruments of self-assessment of students' learning, while Longhurst and Norton (1997) analysed students' accuracy in self-assessment of their assignments (as cited in Dochy, Segers, & Sluijsmans, 1999).

The most recent research has been focused on the analysis of self-assessment used in HE both for summative and formative purposes, i.e. as a tool for developing students' ability to grade their learning and as a tool for inciting learning, foster learners' motivation and autonomy, as well as metacognitive and ontological awareness. For example, Kelvin H. K. Tan (2004) examined the notions of epistemological, sovereign and disciplinary powers which underlie students' self-assessment and how they enhance or undermine students' empowerment in assessment. The findings suggested that to enhance student empowerment, the power exercised over them in self-assessment practices should be used for the benefit of students and that self-assessment should be

judged in terms of learning. It was concluded that student empowerment can be realised only if students understand how such power is exercised and if teachers themselves self-assess their own motives (Tan, 2004).

In another example, Maddalena Taras (2010) investigated the impact of different self-assessment models (including the model of self-marking, the standard model, the learning contract design and the sound standard model) on students' involvement in grading and sharing power with their tutors in the assessment process. Basing on the theories of formative assessment, the researcher explored the levels of access to power and decision-making shared with learners in grading their learning in each model. The findings revealed that all the models share some common assumptions. These include the assumptions that assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process and that each participant (including the teachers) has an equal responsibility for engagement in the learning process and commitment to the study programme. On the other hand, the results also demonstrated that the degree of learners' involvement in assessment and the level of access to decision-making vary considerably across the models. As a result, weaker, median, stronger and the strongest models of self-assessment were identified, and their advantages and shortcomings discussed (Taras, 2010).

A metacognitive approach towards self-assessment was adopted by Magdalena M. C. Mok, Ching L. Lung, Doris P. W. Cheng, Rebecca H. P. Cheung and Mei L. Ng (2006). To foster future teachers' understanding of themselves as learners, the researchers employed the method of Know-Want-Learn (KWL) as a self-assessment tool in five teacher training programmes. The findings indicated that the students found this approach supportive both of their learning and self-assessment as it generated feedback which fostered an understanding of their 'learning self', promoted deep learning, enhanced their motivation to learn and acted as an effective strategy to sustain their self-efficacy and achievement (Mok et al., 2006). The authors also concluded that within academia the KWL method is a valuable self-assessment tool not only for students but also for teachers as it allows them to understand the level of students' knowledge and to align teaching in line with it.

In her longitudinal research, Bourke (2018) employed the cultural historical activity theory to analyse the role of self-assessment in a postgraduate professional programme and its impact on the interns' ontological awareness, professional identity and learning. To support students to promote their critical reflective thinking, to develop their ontological knowledge and to help them become professional psychologists, future-driven self-assessment tasks were designed and introduced in internship courses. The tasks (e.g. to develop one's own quality criteria, to search for challenges created in prior assessment, etc.) required the interns to make links between their learning and their emerging identity and professional practice and to use knowledge in authentic contexts. The author concluded that the designed self-assessment tasks facilitated learning, enhanced students' identity as learners and their ability to self-regulate their learning, and developed their ability to self-assess beyond the course (Bourke, 2018).

The literature in the field of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in HE has strongly indicated that self-assessment of both receptive and productive language skills empowers learners to improve their foreign language proficiency, increases student motivation and raises learner autonomy (McNamara, & Deane, 1995; Kavaliauskienė, Kaminskienė, & Anusienė, 2007; Burkšaitienė & Teresevičienė, 2008; Micán & Medina, 2017; Huang, 2016; Ünaldi, 2016). To examine the role of self-assessment in these contexts, different self-assessment techniques have been used. These include preparing a portfolio, journal writing, field notes, artefact analysis, as well as self-assessment and self-feedback tasks designed by EFL or ESP teachers. For example, Ihsan Ünaldi (2016) investigated the potential of self-assessment of EFL receptive skills in determining proficiency levels of Turkish learners at the university. The data was collected through a skill-based proficiency test and a criterion-referenced self-assessment checklist. The author studied the extent to which EFL students' self-assessment scores and their teachers' scores predict students' proficiency levels as well as analysed the level of students' self-assessment accuracy. The findings showed that even though student-generated and teacher-generated scores correlated significantly, the teachers' scores were much stronger predictors of the students' actual proficiency levels than the students' scores. The results also demonstrated that the students with a low proficiency level tended to overestimate their EFL skills, whereas those with a higher proficiency level tended to underestimate them. The latter results are similar to the findings reported by Sumie Matsuno (2009), who investigated Japanese university students' self- and peer-assessments of EFL productive (writing) skills and compared them to their teachers' assessments. It was established that many self-raters assessed own writing lower than predicted and that this was particularly true for high-achieving students.

Students' self-assessment of EFL productive (oral) skills was explored by Shu-Chen Huang (2016). The author used the theoretical model of feedback developed by Hattie and Timperley (2007) to investigate the impact which self-assessment had on students' oral performance. The students analysed own speaking tests from previous final oral examination and completed a self-assessment task which included feed-up, feed-back and feed-forward questions. The findings showed that self-assessment/self-feedback was valuable as the students' answers to the questions went far beyond most teachers' feedback capacities and provided much information both for the students and their teachers. On the other hand, it was also established that even though the students identified discrepancies between the learning goals and their performance, it was not clear if the established feedback could actually support the learners in improving their performance (Huang, 2016).

The impact of Columbian students' self-assessment on their productive (oral) skills was also explored by Adriana D. Micán and Liliana C. Medina (2017) in a technical university. To promote students' oral fluency, the researchers introduced students' self-assessment of vocabulary as an alterna-

tive (formative) source of assessment. Using the grounded theory perspective, students' self-assessment was examined by exploring their learning logs, field notes and artefacts (audio recordings). The findings showed that such self-assessment practice helped students identify their strengths and weaknesses and enabled them to use proper vocabulary learning strategies. The researchers concluded that goal-setting played a prominent role in self-assessment as it allowed students to set or adjust their learning objectives and direct them towards the main learning goal, which resulted in boosting their vocabulary and improving oral fluency.

The related literature demonstrates that even though the role of self-assessment in HE contexts of teaching and learning EFL has been extensively investigated (McNamara & Deane, 1995; Matsuno, 2009; Micán & Medina, 2017; Huang, 2016; Ünaldi, 2016), self-assessment in the field of teaching and learning ESP within academia has not been investigated in depth yet (Kavaliauskienė, Kaminskienė, & Anusienė, 2007; Burkšaitienė & Tereseviečienė, 2008; Nedzinskaitė et al., 2006). Thus, the present small-scale study aims to contribute to the research literature by exploring self-assessment as a tool for learning ESP and fostering students' awareness of themselves as learners at an undergraduate level of HE: to support university students to examine and judge their ESP oral performance, establish performance gaps or difficulties that they faced, and make decisions on how to improve in the future.

Methodology

The present small-scale study is part of a larger investigation which focused on undergraduate students' self-assessment of their ESP project work and aimed to analyse how they self-assessed the process of project preparation, collaboration with peers/teamwork throughout the project, as well as their ESP oral performance. The present study reports only on the results of the latter. To carry out the research, qualitative methodology of inductive content analysis was used.

Theoretical background

The present small-scale study is based on the constructivist theory of attribution and the theoretical assumptions of formative assessment. The constructivist theory of attribution is relevant for this study as it puts the learner at the centre of the learning process and stresses "(...) a person's will to understand the causes and implications of the events he witnesses and experiences" (de Minzi, 2004, as cited in Birjandi & Tamjid, 2012, p. 515). According to this theory, "(...) a person's affective and cognitive reactions to success or failure on an achievement task are a function of the causal attributions that are used to explain why a particular outcome occurred" (Whitley & Frieze, 1985, as cited in Birjandi & Tamjid, 2012, p. 515).

The theoretical assumptions of formative assessment (which includes self-, peer- and co-assessment) emphasise that when used as a tool for learning, it

plays a significant role as it reflects new thinking about the role of assessment. In HE, formative assessment helps students understand how their learning is assessed, which enables them to become realistic self-assessors. D. Boud (2000) stresses that HE should prepare learners to be able to assess whether they have met standards for any future tasks. In this way, the purpose of self-assessment goes beyond the course, i.e. it plays an important role not only for certification but also for sustainable assessment, hence "(...) assessment that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs" (Boud, 2000, p. 152).

In the context of this study, self-assessment was used as a tool of formative assessment employed by the students in written reports on their ESP oral performance (project presentations on ESP topics). Self-assessment was used to support students in identifying performance gaps or difficulties that they faced and understanding what causes them, as well as raising their awareness of what they need to learn for better achievement.

Participants

The study was conducted with the participation of 22 undergraduate philology students (19 females, 3 students males) at the end of the 3rd semester of their studies at a university in Lithuania. The participants' age ranged from 21 to 29, and none of them had studied ESP before. After their project presentations, all the students wrote project reports in which they were asked to self-assess their ESP oral performance according to the criteria that were based on the 'can do' descriptors for the self-assessment of spoken production and on the qualitative aspects of spoken language presented in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CERFL, 2001). The 'can do' descriptors included students' ability to present clear, detailed descriptions of a complex topic integrating sub-topics, to develop particular points within a definite time frame and to round off with an appropriate conclusion; whereas qualitative aspects of students' presentations covered the command of a broad range of ESP vocabulary, accuracy, fluency, interaction and coherence. All the students self-assessed their ESP oral performance in line with these criteria; some of them gave more than one explanation, all of which are presented in the Results section below.

Implementation of project work

Project work was an integrated part of a compulsory course of Modern English. The length of the course was 16 weeks (4 academic hours per week); according to the syllabus, project work lasted for six weeks and covered three pre-planned stages: project preparation, project presentation and project reports. During the first stage, the students were informed about this academic assignment, including the requirements for project planning, outlining, project presentation, project reports, and project assessment criteria. Besides, they analysed samples of projects prepared by other teams. Next, they were also asked to form project groups (4-5 students per group) and choose project topics. As project work was aimed at developing students' knowledge of and skills in English for Specific Purposes, the main requirement regarding project work was to cover a topic related to ESP. During the period of project preparation,

the students were regularly guided by their teacher regarding their project structure, outlines and length, the use of ESP terminology, presentation language and methods, self-assessment reports, etc.

During the second stage, project teams presented their projects in class in front of the audience (peers) with each team member making his/her own contribution. After project presentations, the teams answered their peers' questions. Finally, each team wrote project reports (that included individual reports of each team member), in which they self-assessed their overall project work, including the process of project preparation, collaboration with peers who were their project team members, as well as ESP oral performance (project presentations on ESP topics).

Data analysis

To explore students' self-assessment of their ESP oral performance, a qualitative methodology was used. The data for analysis was collected from the written reports and analysed in two stages. First, raw data themes were identified (primary units of analysis) via content analyses (Hanrahan, & Isaacs, 2001). Hierarchical inductive analysis was then conducted. The raw data themes were grouped into higher order themes and assigned to general dimensions. The research findings are discussed in the next section.

RESULTS

The results of the inductive content analysis of students' self-assessment reports revealed five general dimensions covering gaps and difficulties in their ESP oral performance: (1) language, (2) time management, (3) higher order thinking skills, (4) presentation skills, and (5) psychological difficulties. Some dimensions are complex and include constituent higher order themes. Analyses of general dimensions, higher order themes and the samples are presented in the sub-sections below.

General dimension: language

General dimension *Language* includes two higher order themes that cover the gap related to the use of English for Specific Purposes (examples 1-4) and grammar and pronunciation accuracy (examples 5-8). The first higher order theme is illustrated by four cases in which ESP-related gap was assessed either as a gap in one's own ESP oral performance or both in one's own and/or project team ESP oral performance (examples 1-4):

(1) Medical terms were not clearly explained, too.

(2) Some of us, me including, used colloquial language with few ESP terms (…).

(3) I didn't explain some medical terms, so they [the peers] didn't understand them.

(4) It was difficult to talk about it fluently as we didn't know much about this ESP field.

Example 1 above illustrates a depersonalised manner of acknowledging the gap (as suggested by the use of the passive voice "were not […] explained"), which shows that even though the student identified this gap, s/he did not clearly state in whose oral performance it occurred. Thus, it can only be assumed that the gap is attributed to the performance of the whole team, however, it is not clear if the self-assessor was one of those who did not explain the terms during the presentation. Example 2, on the other hand, demonstrates that the gap (using General English rather than ESP terms) occurred in the performance of both some team members (as suggested by the use of the indefinite pronoun *some*) and the self-assessor himself/herself (as demonstrated by the phrase *me including*). Also, both Example 1 and 2 illustrate that these self-assessors did not discuss what caused the gap nor its impact on the audience or the overall quality of the presentation. Example 3 differs from the two previous cases. It shows that the self-assessor not only identified the gap in his/her oral performance (did not explain the meaning of medical terms to the audience) but also acknowledged the negative impact it produced on the audience (it could not understand the terms). Similarly, example 4 illustrates that this student identified both the gap (difficulty to talk fluently on the chosen ESP topic) and the underlying reason (lack of knowledge of the ESP field caused by its novelty). Besides, the use of the plural form of the personal pronoun *we* in example 4 allows to assume that the ESP field was new to the whole project team, self-assessor included, which caused a fluency gap in their oral presentation.

The second higher order theme under General dimension *Language* covers the linguistic gap related to grammar and pronunciation accuracy (examples 5-8). Example 5 indicates that the student self-assessed not only his/her linguistic accuracy, but also that of his/her team members:

(5) While listening to my team members and giving a presentation myself, I realised how many pronunciation and grammar mistakes we made.

On the other hand, this student did not discuss the reasons why such mistakes were made and did not analyse their effect on the overall quality of their project presentation.

Example 6, in contrast, shows that the student not only identified the gap (grammar and pronunciation mistakes) in his/her oral performance but also acknowledged that extra work before the presentation could have helped to avoid it and made a decision regarding future improvement:

(6) I have to work on my grammar and pronunciation as I still make a lot of mistakes. If I had worked on them, I think my presentation would have been much better. I'll pay more attention to this in the future.

Similarly, examples 7-8 prove that these students not only identified the gap (grammar mistakes) in their oral performance on a chosen ESP topic but also its cause (improper time management):

(7) Our intention to finish on time also increased the number of grammar mistakes because we tried to shorten the script while speaking.

(8) I finished everything the very last night before the presentation. As always, it turned out not to be the best idea because there were still a lot of

small things to do and details that needed some polishing. I think this was the main reason why I made so many mistakes.

Interestingly, these examples illustrate that the students assessed this gap from a different perspective. Example 7 shows that even though this student did not state directly that she/he personally made some grammar mistakes during his/her project presentation, the use of the possessive plural form of the personal pronoun *our* and the personal pronoun *we* allow us to assume that this could have been the case. Example 8, on the other hand, indicates that bad time management was self-assessed as one's own performance gap, which caused a large number of grammar mistakes. It should be mentioned that examples 7-8 can be attributed not only to General dimension *Language*, but also to that of *Time management* (described below) as in both cases the linguistic accuracy-related gap in the students' oral performance was caused by their underdeveloped skill of time management.

These results indicate that self-assessment enabled the students to assess not only their ESP oral performance but also that of their project team. Besides, ESP oral performance was scrutinised both from the perspective of ESP and General English, some reasons which caused the gap were established, as well as some evaluative decisions regarding direction for future performance were made.

General dimension: time management

General dimension *Time management* covers seven cases in which inadequate/bad time management was assessed as a performance gap (examples 9-15). The findings show that in four cases (examples 9-12) the students judged this gap as the most serious gap in the performance of their team (as suggested by the use of the plural form of the personal pronoun *we*):

(9) The biggest mistake we made was that we didn't manage our time very well. We were forced to leave out some information during the presentation, but it didn't help – we didn't have time for the final discussion which we had planned.

(10) We wanted to show that there's no way to understand a culture if you can't feel the impact of its history on yourself, but we couldn't complete our idea in a discussion as we had planned because of bad time management.

(11) The crucial problem was that we didn't manage the presentation time and had to cut out the discussion part, which was a huge loss.

(12) We should have tried to go through our presentation together at least once so to know how much time each of us has and how much time is left for the questions and the discussion. The latter example also illustrates that the team did not follow the teacher's recommendation to rehearse their oral presentation before making it in class.

It is worth mentioning that in these four cases the students not only identified the gap but also its consequences, i.e. that due to improper time management, their teams had no time for a final discussion and/or questions, which was a prescribed requirement for oral project presentations on a chosen ESP topic. Example 13 differs from the previous cases in that it illustrates a deperso-

nalised manner of acknowledging the fact that inadequate time management was a performance gap, thus it can only be assumed that it affected both the self-assessor and his/her team members' performance (as suggested by the use of the construction *there were* and the indefinite pronoun *one*):

(13) There were some time issues which made me realise that while determining the time limit, one should always consider the fact that the real presentation might be longer, so one has to have some time to finish and make a strong conclusion.

By contrast, examples 14-15 demonstrate that the students not only identified that bad time management was the most serious gap in their team oral performance (as suggested by the use of the plural form of the personal pronoun *we* in both examples), but also that they became aware that this performance gap should be considered in the future (example 15):

(14) If I could change some things about the project, it would be time distribution. We didn't pay enough attention to this aspect, as a result, it turned out to be one of the most crucial mistakes.

(15) There were some faults on our side as we rushed in some parts. In sum, time management and the speed of presenting [the project] were the main issues we all [the group] should work on when preparing our next ESP presentation.

These findings suggest that self-assessment raised the study participants' awareness of the importance of time management for oral performance and enabled them to realise that their time management skills do not meet the benchmark, therefore, call for attention.

General dimension: higher order thinking skills

General dimension *Higher order thinking skills* comprises two major higher order themes that cover the gap: underdeveloped skills of generalising information (example 16-17) and concluding ESP oral presentation (examples 18-22). Regarding the former theme, two students not only acknowledged that they did not generalise information but also mentioned the negative impact it made on their peers (the latter received too much information):

(16) (…) it was not easy to put everything briefly; the mass of our information was too big for the students to grasp.

(17) We should have been more concise and put a stronger emphasis on the most important issues so that the audience wasn't overwhelmed by facts.

It should be also mentioned that the use of the possessive plural form of the personal pronoun *our* in example 16 and the personal pronoun *we* in example 17 imply that the gap was attributed to the performance of the whole team, the self-assessor included.

The second higher order theme covers five cases in which the students acknowledged that they did not conclude their oral presentations properly (examples 18-22). Three from five self-assessors (examples 18-20) stated the fact of not having made conclusions but did not analyse the reasons why it happened nor the impact it had on the audience:

(18) (…) we didn't provide a conclusion (…).

(19) Unfortunately, we didn't draw conclusions.

(20) Also, somehow none in the group thought about the conclusion.

The use of the plural form of the personal pronoun *we* in examples 18-19 implies that this gap is attributed to the team performance, the self-assessor included. On the other hand, the use of the indefinite pronoun *none* in example 20 signifies that both the self-assessor and his/her team members did not meet the requirement of finishing one's presentation by making a conclusion.

Example 21 is similar to examples 18-19 in that it also demonstrates that the student assessed this gap as a gap in his/her team performance (as suggested by the use of the plural form of the personal pronoun *we*):

(21) We failed to provide a clear conclusion on what we wanted to explain, which weakened our performance strongly.

On the other hand, it differs from the previous examples as this student identified the negative impact which the gap had on the overall quality of his/her group performance (*weakened it strongly*), which was not the case in examples 18-19.

Example 22 demonstrates that this student assessed not only his/her oral performance but also that of his/her team. The use of the indefinite pronoun *everybody* clearly demonstrates that all the team members, the self-assessor included, did not finish their oral presentation with a strong conclusion:

(22) The most visible failure was the lack of a strong final message after everybody's presentation [in the group]. In the future, I think, I'll pay more attention to the overall structure of the project, identification of the goals and objectives and conclusions that are the most important part of teamwork.

Besides, this example shows that the self-assessor identified some other areas that call for attention and made a personal decision regarding them in the future.

Thus, it can be stated that self-assessment enabled the students to establish two underdeveloped higher order thinking skills — generalising information and drawing conclusions, as well as raised their awareness of the areas in their ESP oral performance that call for improvement.

General dimension: presentation skills

General dimension *Presentation skills* comprises two higher order themes that cover the following gaps: technical problems (examples 23-25) and the improper mode of presentation (examples 26-29).

The first higher order theme includes three cases. In all of them, the self-assessors not only acknowledged that they faced some technical problems but also described their impact both on the overall quality of the presentation (example 23) and on the presenters themselves (examples 24-25). Example 23 suggests that the technical problem, which arose during the self-assessor's presentation, was due to the fact that before the presentation she/he had not checked if all the necessary information was on the slides:

(23) If I could change something, I would check all the information, the pictures, and content on all slides again. On some slides, some important information was missing.

This is similar to example 24 where the reason behind the technical problem was the same (not checking the slides before the presentation):

(24) (…) we didn't check our presentation slides on the class computer, and some important pictures were gone, which was frustrating.

However, example 24 differs from example 23 in that in this case the use of the plural form of the personal pronoun *we* suggests that the student attributed this technical problem to the performance of the team and that it is not clear if it affected his/her own presentation. Besides, this self-assessor not only stated the reason which caused the technical problem but also its effect (the problem caused frustration). Similarly, example 25 shows that the student identified the performance gap, its cause and effect:

(25) We didn't save our final draft, thus we had to present our ESP project with mistakes on the slides, which was stressful (…).

In the latter case, the use of the plural form of the personal pronoun *we* suggests that this technical problem was judged as a team problem, but it is not clear how much it affected the self-assessor's performance. Also, the student not only identified the reason which caused the technical problem but also its impact (it caused stress).

The second higher order theme under this dimension covers the improper mode of making presentations (examples 26-29). The findings revealed that three students acknowledged that they were reading while making their presentations (examples 26-28). Interestingly, the way the students analysed this performance gap differed. Example 26 demonstrates that the student self--assessed reading as a gap in one's own performance, however, she/he did not analyse its reason and did not make any decision regarding some action for better performance in the future:

(26) I read too much from both my slides and my notes.

In contrast, example 27 indicates that this student not only stated that reading during the presentation was a gap in his/her own performance, but also the reason (nervousness) which caused it:

(27) Some of my objectives weren't reached, e.g. I wanted to present everything without reading, unfortunately, I failed because of my nervousness.

This is similar to example 28 where the self-assessor identified the reason for reading during the presentation (the team did not memorise the information they wanted to present):

(28) We didn't remember our texts, thus we relied too much on our phones; we should not use them so much next time.

On the other hand, this example differs from the previous two in that the student, in this case, attributed this performance gap to his/her project team (the use of the plural form of the personal pronoun *we* implies that s/he was also reading from his/her phone during the presentation). Another difference is that, unlike in the two previous cases, this student made a decision not to do so in the future.

Example 29 differs from other cases that fall under this higher order theme as it illustrates a different aspect of an improper mode of making presentations, i.e. lack of contact with the audience:

(29) (…) our colleagues were not paying attention to our project and only a few of them participated in the activity (…). It would have been better to make individual tasks for each student so that they could be involved.

The use of the possessive form of the personal pronoun *our* (as used in the noun phrase *our project*) in this case suggests that even though this performance gap was acknowledged by only one student, it was a problem which the whole project team must have faced. Besides, this example indicates that the student not only stated that she/he made no contact with the audience but also assessed the impact this made on it (the audience was not involved) and made an evaluative conclusion of what could have been done to catch the audience's attention.

These findings prove that self-assessment not only enabled the students to identify this gap in their ESP oral performance and scrutinise its causes but also strengthened their awareness of what should be done to perform better in the future.

General dimension: psychological problems

General dimension *Psychological problems* covers four cases in which the students acknowledged that during their oral presentation they were nervous and worried, experienced the fear of public speaking and social anxiety (examples 30-33). As these psychological conditions were assessed by the students as intertwined, separate higher order themes were not distinguished.

Example 30 indicates that nervousness and the state of being worried caused the student's difficulty in public speaking:

(30) It was difficult to talk in front of our class because I was very nervous and worried.

Example 31 suggests that the student has a problem of social anxiety, which was triggered by nervousness related to public speaking and which finally resulted in a fast speech during the presentation:

(31) I'm a fast-speaker in general and when I get nervous, which always happens in front of people because of my social anxiety, I start to talk even faster.

Examples 32-33 provide proof that the students not only acknowledged that they were nervous while making their presentations, but also that the audience significantly affected their psychological state. Thus, example 32 illustrates that supportive audience made a positive impact on it:

(32) I was quite nervous as the presentation started but got comfortable with the atmosphere as I saw the approval of the class.

In contrast, example 33 demonstrates that non-responsive audience increased the student's nervousness:

(33) I was very nervous because it is difficult for me to speak in front of people. But at the same time, I understand that it is useful and each time I have to do it, I improve my skills. But I became even more nervous when I noticed that our colleagues were not paying attention. Then I realised that it is not easy to capture listeners' attention and now I learnt that I'll always

listen to the speaker and try to participate in activities to support and respect his or her work.

Most importantly, the latter example also shows that self-assessment enabled the student to draw a conclusion that reaches far beyond the self-assessment task as it regards human behaviour and important value of respecting other people and their work.

These results demonstrate that self-assessment allowed the students to realise how psychological aspects may add to or hinder the success of one's ESP oral performance and how important one's peers' support is. It is also useful for teachers who can use this information to manage the psychological climate in class.

Discussion and conclusions

In this small-scale study, the purpose of using students' self-assessment of their ESP oral performance was twofold. It was used as a tool for learning and fostering students' awareness of themselves as learners: to support them in identifying gaps or difficulties in their ESP oral performance, understanding the causes and making decisions as to how to close the gaps or cope with the difficulties to perform better in the future.

The general conclusion of the present research is that students' self-assessment of their ESP oral performance as used in this study was effective: the findings demonstrate that the students analysed and assessed not only their own ESP oral performance but also that of their project team. The research findings also show that ESP oral performance was self-assessed not only from the linguistic perspective but also from the cognitive and psychological perspectives. This is important as it deepens our understanding of not only how the students assess their performance and what they need to perform better in the future, but also reveals how they feel when they perform.

More specifically, the study resulted in the identification and description of five general dimensions covering gaps and difficulties in the study participants' ESP oral performance, which includes the students' linguistic competence in English for Specific Purposes and General English, their ability of time management, higher order thinking skills, presentation skills, and psychological problems. The research findings are valuable as they enable the students to better understand what they need to do to close the performance gaps and cope with the difficulties that they encounter. This is in accord with the data of S. Huang (2016), who established that EFL students' self-assessment of their oral performance goes far beyond most teachers' feedback capacities. The findings are also relevant to the teachers as they reveal the areas in the students' performance that call for attention. Thus, they reaffirm the data of M. M. C. Mok et al. (2006) that self-assessment is a valuable tool not only for students but also for teachers as it allows them to understand the level of students' knowledge and to align teaching in line with it.

The results of this study allow us to conclude that self-assessment fostered students' awareness of themselves as learners. It enabled the study participants to think about their own ESP oral performance and /or about the performance of their team, to identify some gaps in it, to analyse the reasons which caused them and to assess the impact the gaps or difficulties had on the audience, the overall quality of their presentations or themselves. This is in accord with the findings of M. M. C. Mok et al. (2006) that self-assessment is supportive of students' deep learning as it generates feedback which fosters an understanding of their learning self.

The findings that self-assessment, as used in this study, allowed the students not only to identify gaps and difficulties in their ESP oral performance but also to make personal decisions to improve it in the future are in accord with the results by A. D. Micán and L. C. Medina (2017), who established that goal setting helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses in their oral performance, which can enable them to look for proper learning strategies that can result in better achievement.

An important result of this study is that self-assessment enabled some students not only to scrutinise their ESP oral performance but also to make conclusions that reach far beyond the self-assessment task as they regard human behaviour and important value of respecting other people and their work. This is consistent with D. Boud's (2000) idea that in HE assessment should be extended and go beyond the course as it plays an important role not only for certification but also for the sustainable assessment (Boud, 2000).

This study is innovative as it is one of the first studies conducted in the university context of learning and teaching ESP in Lithuania in which self-assessment was used as a tool for learning ESP and fostering students' awareness of themselves as learners. Even though the study was conducted on a small scale, its findings are valuable as they deepen our understanding of the significance of self-assessment in learning ESP by giving direction to the students on how to perform better in the future and to the teachers on how to support them to achieve this in the future.

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