

Self-assessment of Achievement: Some Theoretical Considerations

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ABSTRACT

We find Self-assessment occupying increasingly greater place in the process of assessment and accreditation of the educational institutions at national level as well as in the context of individual performance appraisal at the institutional level. The domain of student learning and scholastic achievement, however, remain outside the purview of the practice of self-assessment. Consequently, the students lack opportunities to learn the nuances of the self-assessment technique and reap its potential benefits for enhancing their learning. The present paper tries to clarify in brief the concepts associated with the practice of self-assessment, its nature, types and accuracy of self assessment and factors affecting it.

Keywords: Alternative assessment, self-assessment, types of self-assessment, accuracy of self-assessment, bias in self-assessment

'Know thyself' is an age old saying. The crowd of participants queuing up at auditions of programs like Indian Idol or Voice of India however, suggests that the prescription is least seriously followed. Similarly, lakhs of students every year do aspire for about ten thousand odd IIT seats, perhaps fully ignorant of the fact they do not stand even an outside chance of success. There is an increase in the number of students committing suicide due to serious mismatch between high expectations and poor results. An honest and accurate self-assessment seems to be the key to many personal and social ills.

From time immemorial, students' achievement and behavior have been assessed externally by administering different types of tests. Currently students' Self-Assessment of their achievement is also being advocated not only by the teachers but also by the students themselves. Self-Assessment is considered helpful in learning and developing self-confidence and responsibility in a student. This

also motivates him for a better performance. Some questions arise in respect of self-assessment, a few of the important ones are:

- (i) Why some of the students happen to be at ease with making their own appraisals, while others avoid indulging in such activities?
- (ii) Which personality characteristics are associated with making accurate self-assessments?
- (iii) Does discussion among students or with teacher have any impact on accuracy of self-assessment? In other words, do better informed students make accurate self-assessments?
- (iv) Would some students make inaccurate self-assessment in spite of knowing the correct answers i.e. does feedback interact with personality factors to have significant effect on accuracy of self-assessment?

- (v) Do intelligent ones make better self-assessments?
- (vi) Does accuracy of self-assessment depend upon the test performance itself?
- (vii) Do accurate self-assessments help in achieving success in exams?

EVALUATION

Evaluation, the highest level in Bloom's taxonomy, means generating, holding and applying a set of internal and external criteria. It is the systematic determination of merit, worth and significance of something or someone. In the context of a school, evaluation is the process of data collection and their interpretation in relation to behavioral changes of students on course of school (Quallen and Hanna, 1986).

The purpose of evaluation is to make judgments about the quality or worth of something – an educational program, worker performance or proficiency or student attainments. That is what we attempt to do when we evaluate students judgments i.e. achievements, employees productivity, or prospective practitioner competencies. In each case the goal is not simply to describe what the students, employees or other personnel can do. Instead we seek answers to such questions as: How good is the performance? Have they learnt enough? Is their work good enough?

Evaluation thus requires information (Signifying assessment) and making practical or technical judgments in accordance with some definite criteria.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment does not mean a system of grading or ranking students. Rather assessment involves processes of:

- ♦ Identifying what the students know and don't know
- ♦ Gathering and analyzing specific information as part of an evaluation
- ♦ Finding and describing conditions that exist at a particular time
- ♦ Determining progress student have made toward educational goals.

The aim of the assessment is to improve student performance and not merely to audit it. Assessment

should be learner centered and focused on student achievement in relation to the goals of a course, rather than, being separate from learning. Assessment plays a central role in the instructional process.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

In the field of education, there is some degree of disagreement in the distinctions often made between the terms 'evaluation' and 'assessment'. Some practitioners would consider these terms to be interchangeable, while others contend that evaluation is broader than assessment and involve making judgments. When such a distinction is made, 'assessment' is said to primarily involve characterizations- objective descriptions, while 'evaluation' is said to involve characterizations and appraisals- determination of merit and/or worth.

TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT

Traditional assessment is value free and neutral (Anderson, 1998) and focuses on assessing "surface learning" which includes rote memorization, recitation of facts and extrinsic motivation. Its relationship to learning is hierarchical (Bowel, 1990), whereas Alternative Assessment is collaborative. It is based on the assumption that the student is an active learner and consistent with constructivist practitioners, students are partners with teachers in making judgments about their own learning.

According to Dochy and McDowell (1997) Alternative Assessment encourages students to engage continuously and foster a deep approach to learning. Key elements of self-assessment are reflection, feedback and integration of learning and assessment. This alternative assessment has many forms, including self, peer and co-assessment; observation, portfolios and project or product assessments (Boud, 1990; Dochy and McDowell, 1997; Anderson, 1998).

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-assessment is one form of Alternative Assessment that allows students to make judgments on their own learning as well as reflect upon that learning. Boud (1995) defines Self-Assessment as "The involvement of students in identifying

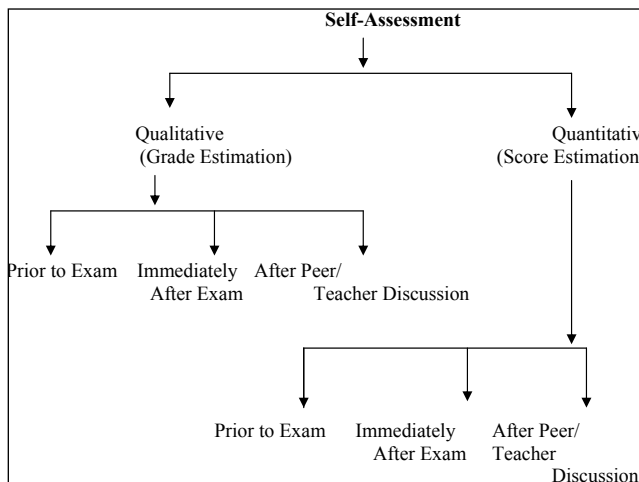
standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgments about the extent to which they have met these criteria and students.” For Boud, Self-assessment involves two clear stages: The identification (and learner understanding) of standards and criteria and making of one’s own judgments against these criteria.

This two-part process necessarily involves students reflecting on their own learning. Self-Assessment is used as both a process as well as an activity. It is a practice in which to engage as well as a goal to which to aspire. It is important to make a distinction because Self-Assessment is a goal of higher education which may be pursued through course design which does not involve Self-Assessment exercises as such.

PURPOSE OF SELF-ASSESSMENT

Assessment plays an important and essential role in defining students’ attitudes towards their work, specifically, in their sense of ownership and control, their learning styles and strategies and their confidence and self esteem. All of these have impact on the quality of learning achieved. Many business courses in higher education now incorporate to varying degrees, continuous assessments. These are often carried out via tutorials, assignments and examinations. The purpose of implementing Self-Assessment in the course is to increase awareness of Self-Assessment as a tool for learning and reflection.

TYPES OF SELF-ASSESSMENT



The above flow diagram explains the two kinds of Self-Assessments, i.e., qualitative and quantitative. In case the test outcomes are in the form of grades,

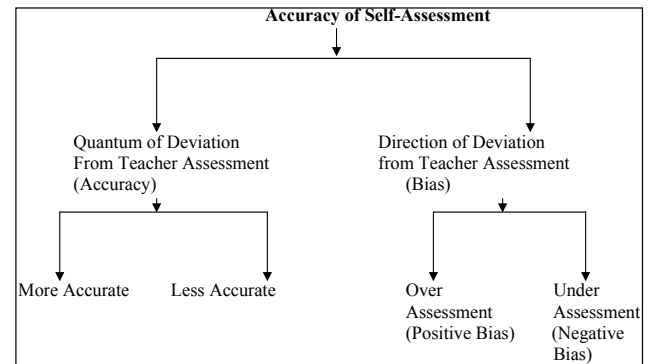
the Self-Assessment too, is in terms of grade estimations. Similarly, if the scoring of the test is done numerically, the students are asked to estimate their raw scores rather than grades.

Self-Assessment is of three kinds in terms of the time of making Self-Assessment. Self-Assessment can be made before entering into the examination hall, immediately after handing over the answer sheet to the investigator and after a time interval allowing students to discuss the test among themselves or with the teacher.

ACCURACY OF SELF-ASSESSMENT

Accuracy of Self-Assessment can be studied in terms of quantum of deviation from teacher assessment and the direction of deviation from the teacher assessment i.e. Bias. Bias in Self-Assessment is further divided into two types- positive Bias or Over Assessment and Negative Bias or Under Assessment. In case the estimated scores/grades are less than the expected scores/grades, the Bias is said to be Negative or Under Assessment. If the reverse is the case there is a Positive Bias or Over Assessment.

Following flow diagram explains it more vividly:



FACTORS AFFECTING SELF-ASSESSMENT

Accuracy of Self-Assessment is affected by several variables mainly related to:

- (i) The Assessor
- (ii) The Task Nature
- (iii) Aid in Self-Assessment
- (iv) The nature of Assessment

Accuracy of Self-Assessment is first of all affected by the assessor related variables, i.e. the cognitive variables like General Intelligence, Specific

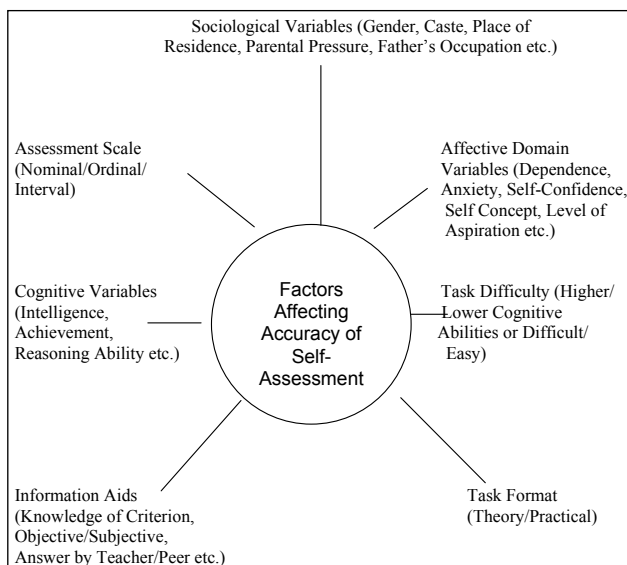
Achievement, Reasoning Ability and the Affective Domain variables such as Self-Confidence, Anxiety, Self Concept and Dependency. Sociological factors like Gender, Caste, Place of Residence, Family Occupation, Education of Parents may also have influence upon the Accuracy of Self-Assessment.

There are many Task Related Issues having close impact on the Accuracy of Self-Assessment, such as the Task Format i.e. objective/subjective, oral/written, theory/practical. Next are variables related to difficulty of the task such as Higher or Lower Cognitive Abilities, difficulty of Test items or tasks presented.

Accuracy of Self-Assessment is likely to be influenced by the fact whether the act of Self-Assessment has been aided with some kind of information about the performance of the student. For instance, assessment made in anticipation of the test are less likely to be accurate than assessment made after the test has been undertaken. Likewise the Self-Assessment made independently by the students have a chance of being inaccurate than Self-Assessment aided by information from the teacher or peers about the criterion responses.

Accuracy of Self-Assessment may also depend on the kind of Assessment and the scale of measurement used in the Assessment. For example Assessment in terms of Grades may turn out to be more accurate than the Assessments made on continuous scale.

A Pictorial Illustration of the factors affecting the Self-Assessment is given below:



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