Learners' changes in the self-assessment of Mongolian language ability

Onon Tsulbaatar, Professor,
National University of Mongolia, Mongolia
tsul_onon@num.edu.mn

Abstract

In this paper, we used the CEFR self-assessment checklist to investigate whether there was any change in the student's self-assessment of Mongolian proficiency within a period of about three months, from the start to the end of the course. Participants included 37 international students of the Mongolian language course at the National University of Mongolia. The results of the survey found that the average value of student self-assessment was significantly higher before the end of the course than after the start of the course, at both the elementary and intermediate levels. In addition, the average value of self-assessment was significantly higher before the end of the course in all areas of each level.

Keywords: L2 Mongolian, self-assessment, CEFR, Can-do statements, international students

1. Introduction

Self-assessment used to assess second language proficiency (Suzuki, 2015) and learners' self-assessment based on Can-do statements has been attracting attention in foreign language education since 1990 (Blanche & Merino, 1989; de Saint Léger, 2009; Luoma, 2012; Oscarson, 2013; Ross, 1998). Can-do statements, in foreign language education, describe what a learner can do within the target language; they comprise items of varying difficulty levels, including those with high difficulty, and cover a wide range of areas, such as "writing" and "reading."

According to previous research, self-assessment offers learners the opportunity to focus on their learning, monitor their progress, and find ways to change, adapt, or improve (Kavaliauskienė, 2004). Some of the objectives of engaging students in self-assessment include: to enhance their learning and realization, to aid their academic self-regulation, and to monitor and manage their own learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2004).

The Mongolian language course at the National University of Mongolia (NUM) consists of three levels, elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Each class has 16 weeks per semester, with three 90-minute classes per week, and learners who pass the class are allowed to take a higher-level class in the next semester. Whether or not a learner has acquired the proficiency to advance to the next level in a semester is assessed using an in-class test. However, the question of the learner's self-assessment of improvement in their own Mongolian language proficiency is not clear.

2. Self-assessment Checklist

Recently, many standards have been established by institutions and opened to the public, but the most well-known foreign language learning Can-do statements are those drafted by the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). The CEFR was created in 2001 based on the language education policy of the Council of Europe, and is widely used in foreign language education in the continent.

The CEFR aims to provide a general foundation for improving European language education. In the CEFR, the learner's level is divided into six stages from A1 to C2. At each level, a proficiency statement clarifying the learner's proficiency level is illustrated, and through this, it is possible to understand which level is being referred to.

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) is an educational tool that fulfills the objectives of the CEFR. The Swiss version of the ELP contains a self-assessment checklist from Schneider & North (2000), comprising six levels, A1 to C2, and each level has a sheet to assess the learner's capability. The checklist consists of seven areas: Listening, Reading, Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production, Strategies, Language Quality, and Writing. Table 1 shows the items in each area of each level.

Table 1. The Swiss version self-assessment checklist items

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Listening	4	6	6	6	6	1
Reading	8	8	8	8	8	6
Spoken interaction	8	12	7	7	4	1
Spoken Production	2	6	6	6	4	2
Strategies	3	3	3	3	3	1
Language Quality	0	4	4	4	4	4
Writing	5	8	8	8	8	8
Total	30	47	42	42	37	23

3. Method

The survey aims to explore whether international students in NUM's Mongolian language course felt a change in their proficiency in Mongolian during a three-month period. Specifically, we seek to answer the following questions:

1. Do students feel a change in their Mongolian language proficiency in the three months from the start to the end of the course?

2. In which language area will the change appear?

The aforementioned self-assessment checklist (Schneider & North, 2000) was used for the survey. This checklist assesses what the learner can do, and if the percentage of assessed items is above 80%, the learner is considered to have reached that particular level. The

questionnaire is available in English and Mongolian. The English version used Schneider & North (2000), and the Mongolian version was drafted based on the same. The Mongolian version was proofread and confirmed by another English teacher.

The survey was conducted in 2019; the same questionnaire was distributed twice, about a month after the start of the semester and about three months after the end of the semester, and answered by the survey subjects.

The subjects of the survey included 37 foreign students enrolled in the NUM Mongolian language course who participated in the survey both after the start and before the end of the semester. The course is divided into 3 levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. But only students from the elementary and intermediate courses were able to participate in the survey: 20 elementary students were given A1 and A2 questionnaires on the CEFR checklist, and 17 intermediate students were given A2 and B1 questionnaires.

Table 2. Participants

Country	Elementary Intermediate	
	Number	Number
Laos	11	6
China	3	4
Russia	2	2
Japan	2	2
Korea	2	1
USA	-	1
France	-	1
Total	20	17

4. Result

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Tables 3 and 4 show the descriptive statistics for the elementary and intermediate levels after the start of the course and before the end of the course. From the table, it can be observed that the values are higher before the end of the course than after the start of the course. In addition, when the difference between the average values after the start of the course and before the end of the course was computed for each item, the values for the latter were higher than those after the start of the semester for all items.

Table 3. Elementary level descriptive statistics

	After the start of the course		Before the end of the course	
	M	SD	M	SD
Listening	3.15	0.56	3.75	0.97
Reading	3.1	0.7	3.45	0.80
Spoken interaction	3.25	0.53	3.6	0.8
Spoken Production	3.1	0.43	3.65	0.92
Strategies	3.35	0.48	3.59	0.76
Language Quality	3.05	0.5	3.48	0.83
Writing	2.95	0.48	3.35	0.90
Total	3.13	0.53	3.55	0.85

Table 4. Intermediate level descriptive statistics

	After the start of the course		Before the end of the course	
	M	SD	M	SD
Listening	3.30	0.52	3.8	0.68
Reading	3.38	0.53	3.77	0.64
Spoken interaction	3.55	0.48	3.98	0.61
Spoken Production	3.41	0.41	3.95	0.57
Strategies	3.47	0.35	3.99	0.53
Language Quality	3.51	0.30	3.89	0.55
Writing	3.36	0.31	3.80	0.60
Total	3.43	0.41	3.88	0.60

4.2 Reliability and correlation

Table 5 shows the reliability (α coefficient) of the answers after the start of the semester and before the end of the semester for each of the elementary and intermediate levels. The α coefficient was very high in all cases, therefore, the reliability of this questionnaire was evidently high.

Table 5. Reliability by level

Level	After the start of the course	Before the end of the course
Elementary	0.95	0.95
Intermediate	0.96	0.96

The results of the correlation coefficient determination for investigating the arieas' relation to each other at each level are presented in tables 6 to 9. The correlation between the whole and each individual area is very high, and there are many cases where the correlation between areas is also high. However, the result suggested that the correlation between Spoken Interaction and Strategies was low for reading before the end of the semester, at the elementary level.

Table 6. Correlation for each area at the elementary level (After the start of the course)

	Listening	Reading	Spoken Interaction	Spoken Production	Strategies	Language Quality	Writing	Total
Listening	---	.635	.835	.655	.703	.625	.585	.803
Reading		---	.643	.359	.569	.430	.678	.789
Spoken Interaction			---	.833	.885	.595	.699	.897
Spoken Production				---	.799	.599	.613	.801
Strategies					---	.549	.651	.863
Language Quality						---	.825	.733
Writing							---	.875

Table 7. Correlation for each area at the elementary level (Before the end of the course)

	Listening	Reading	Spoken Interaction	Spoken Production	Strategies	Language Quality	Writing	Total
Listening	---	.655	.681	.751	0501	.569	.719	.885
Reading		---	.193	.395	.251	.397	.703	.733
Spoken Interaction			---	.719	.870	.633	.453	.790
Spoken Production				---	.529	.675	.659	.799
Strategies					---	.539	.515	.735
Language Quality						---	.720	.756
Writing							---	.893

Table 8. Correlation for each area at the intermediate level (After the start of the course)

	Listening	Reading	Spoken Interaction	Spoken Production	Strategies	Language Quality	Writing	Total
Listening	---	.723	.759	.750	.609	.682	.730	.863
Reading		---	.615	.699	.473	.563	.789	.825
Spoken Interaction			---	.892	.835	.801	.690	.891
Spoken Production				---	.791	.819	.785	.929
Strategies					---	.838	.650	.817
Language Quality						---	.698	.865
Writing							---	.875

Table 9. Correlation for each area at the intermediate level (Before the end of the course)

	Listening	Reading	Spoken Interaction	Spoken Production	Strategies	Language Quality	Writing	Total
Listening	---	.839	.738	.733	.735	.738	.769	.879
Reading		---	.673	.651	.689	.681	.795	.851
Spoken Interaction			---	.859	.863	.850	.750	.930
Spoken Production				---	.891	.823	.733	.899
Strategies					---	.875	.725	.885
Language Quality						---	.731	.879
Writing							---	.891

4.3 Changes after the start and before the end of the course

We analyzed whether there was a change between the start and the end of the course at both the elementary and intermediate levels using the paired t-test. The results were as follow: (t 19) = 3.45, p <0.0001, r = 0.60 at the elementary level, and (t 16) = 5.39, p <0.0001, r = 0.65 at the intermediate level, and significant differences were observed in both cases. In other words, there was a change in the learner's self-assessment after the start and before the end of the course.

At each level, we analyzed whether there was a change in each area using the paired t-test (tables 10 to 11). At both levels, significant differences appeared in all areas, and the results indicated that the effect was large.

Table 10. Difference between the average values (Elementary level)

	t	df	p	r
Listening	3.99	19	0.0001	0.61
Reading	3.27	19	0.0001	0.61
Spoken Interaction	4.36	19	0.0001	0.69
Spoken Production	3.51	19	0.0001	0.63
Strategies	2.68	19	0.0001	0.52
Language Quality	2.62	19	0.0001	0.51
Writing	3.70	19	0.0001	0.65

Table 11. Difference between the average values (Intermediate level)

	t	df	p	r
Listening	6.35	16	0.0001	0.70
Reading	5.11	16	0.0001	0.62
Spoken Interaction	4.93	16	0.0001	0.59
Spoken Production	5.06	16	0.0001	0.65

Strategies	5.52	16	0.0001	0.71
Language Quality	5.01	16	0.0001	0.61
Writing	5.83	16	0.0001	0.69

5. Discussion

In this paper, we used the CEFR self-assessment checklist to investigate whether there was any change in the student's self-assessment of Mongolian proficiency within a period of about three months from the start to the end of the course. The result of the survey found that the average value of student self-assessment was significantly higher before the end of the course than after the start of the course at both the elementary and intermediate levels. In addition, the average value of self-assessment was significantly higher before the end of the course, in all areas of each level, than at the start.

The results indicate that in the period from the beginning to the end of the semester, learners felt that there was room for improvement in their Mongolian proficiency and began to evaluate their Mongolian proficiency more positively. Even in the short period of 3 months, by taking Mongolian lessons and living in Mongolia, improvement in one's Mongolian proficiency can be observed. Teachers measure students' Mongolian proficiency by observing students in class, assignments, and exams, but there are cases where the growth is not noticeable during the 16-week period of a semester. Especially in intermediate classes and above, many teachers have difficulty gauging students' growth compared to elementary classes because they have already achieved a certain level of proficiency in Mongolian. This indicates that the learners themselves can observe the growth, even if it is not overtly observable from the outside. We th believe it would be useful for teachers to be aware of such situations in class. In addition, the increase in the learner's self-assessment value is also a positive influential factor for the learner to advance from the current class to the next semester level.

It is also interesting to note that the average self-assessment of all items was higher before the end than at the start at both the elementary and intermediate levels, and there was a significant difference in the change in self-assessmentin all areas.It is impossible to do all the items on the checklist in class. So, it can be said that learners can do more without studying in class.

This result supports that the learners are ready to go to the next level not only in the in-class evaluation but also in the evaluation from the learner in the NUM Mongolian language course. This could be one piece of data showing that the current NUM Mongolian language course is properly conducted at each level and that the entire course is managed without problems.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we used the Swiss version of the CEFR self-assessment checklist to investigate changes in Mongolian language proficiency between the start and end of the course for international students taking the Mongolian language course at NUM.

As a future task, we would like to first scrutinize each item. The Swiss CEFR self-assessment checklist used in this survey was designed for European languages, and some items may not apply to Mongolian. In the future, it is necessary to analyze each item and consider the appropriateness of the same. Second, we would like to increase the data on students and analyze by class, not by level. Although some previous studies have questioned the validity of Can-do statements as a means of measuring language proficiency, the examination does not measure all of the learner's language ability. Language ability that cannot be measured by the test may be revealed by self-assessment. This survey revealed that learners are sure to capture the growth in their Mongolian proficiency, as Can-do statements are an indicator of their awareness of their own language abilities.

References

Blanche, P., & Merino, B. J. (1989). Self-assessment of foreign-language skills: Implications for teachers and researchers. *Language Learning*, *39*(3), 313–338. doi:10.1111/j.1467– 1770.1989.tb00595.x

de Saint Léger, D. (2009). Self Assessment of Speaking Skills and Participation in a Foreign Language Class. *Foreign Language Annals*, *42*(1), 158–178.

Kavaliauskiene, G. (2004). Quality Assessment in Teaching English for Specific Purposes. *English for Specific Purposes World* 3, 8-17.

Luoma, S. (2012). Self-assessment. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguis-tics* (pp. 5169–5174). New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Oscarson, M. (2013). Self-assessment in the classroom. In A. Kunnan (Ed.), *The companion to language assessment vol. II: Approaches and development* (part 6: Assessment and learning, 712–729). New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Ross, S. (1998). Self-assessment in second language testing: A meta-analysis and analysis of expe-riential factors. *Language Testing*, *15*(1), 1–20.

Schneider, G., & North, B. (2000). Fremdsprachen können-was heisst das? Zürich: Rüegger.

Suzuki, Y. (2015). Self-assessment of Japanese as a second language: The role of experiences in the naturalistic acquisition. *Language testing,* 32(1), 63–81.

Zimmerman, B., & Schunk, D. (2004). Self-Regulating Intellectual Processes and Outcomes: A Social Cognitive Perspective. In: D. Dai, & R. Sternberg (Eds.) *Motivation, Emotion, and Cognition: Integrative Perspectives on Intellectual Functioning and Development*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 323-349.