

Advanced learners' changes in the self-assessment of Mongolian language ability

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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 13 international students of 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. In addition, the average value of self-assessment was significantly higher before the end of the course in all areas of each level.

Keywords

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 50 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 in the first

semester, 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. In the second semester, students from the advanced courses were able to participate in the survey: 13 advanced students were given B1 and B2 questionnaires on the CEFR checklist. In this paper, we introduce the result of the advanced level's survey.

Table 2. Participants

Country	Number
China	5
Russia	3
Japan	2
Korea	1
USA	1
France	1
Total	13

4. Result

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 3 show the descriptive statistics for the advanced level 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. 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

4.2 Reliability and correlation

Table 4 shows the reliability (α coefficient) of the answers after the start of the semester and before the end of the semester. The α coefficient was very high in all cases, therefore, the reliability of this questionnaire was evidently high.

Table 4. Reliability by level

After the start of the course	Before the end of the course
0.95	0.95

The results of the correlation coefficient determination for investigating the areas' relation to each other are presented in tables 5 to 6. 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.

Table 5. Correlation for each area (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 6. Correlation for each area (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 the advanced level using the paired t-test. The results were as follow: $(t_{16}) = 5.39, p < 0.0001, r = 0.65$, and significant differences were observed. In other words, there was a change in the learner’s self-assessment after the start and before the end of the course.

Also we analyzed whether there was a change in each area using the paired t-test (table 7). At the advanced level, significant differences appeared in all areas, and the results indicated that the effect was large.

Table 7. Difference between the average values

	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
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. In addition, the average value of self-assessment was significantly higher before the end of the course, in all areas 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.

It is also interesting to note that the average self-assessment of all items was higher before the end than at the start at the advanced level, and there was a significant difference in the change in self-assessment in 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.

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. 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.

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