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# Self-Assessment on Communicative Competence of Students of Higher Education in Indonesia

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## Abstract

The objectives of this study are firstly to explore students' self-assessment on four language competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competences, secondly to find out whether there is any significant influence of students' length of language learning toward their self-assessment of communicative competences. The research was undertaken at undergraduate program at the university of Lampung. The results showed that communicative competence assessed by students has positive relationship to the score of their performance assessed by teachers. The current research succeeded in modifying students' self-assessment according to the communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Self-Assessment, Communicative Competence, Higher Education, Indonesia

## 1. Introduction

Learners' communicative competence is defined as learners' ability to efficiently express their intentions in the target language and to successfully achieve communications in real-life situations (Larsari, 2011). This includes examination of syntax, semantics, and phonology. Communicative competence means not only in comprehending the surface grammar structure but also deep level of sentence structure.

The term communicative competence has been discussed in several studies (Swain and Canale, 1983; Savignon, 1992; Larsari, 2011). Other researchers use the term to represent an overall framework from which to study aspects of communicative behavior across various communities (Bates, 1979). Michael Canale and Merrill Swain (1986) identified four components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Learners should be able to make themselves understood, using their current proficiency to the fullest regarding to the four components of communicative competence and the practical steps of communicative competence as the goal of learning language, They should try to avoid confusion in the message, to avoid offending communication

partners due to socially inappropriate style, and to use strategies for recognizing and managing communication breakdowns.

In Indonesian context, students or teachers might not be familiar to do self-assessment, a way the students appraise their work individually. The action which requires higher-level thinking and opportunities for feedback and revision during the task, for example by responding to discrepancies between students' judgment and teacher judgment.

Many language testers have been inspired to investigate whether students are able to make a meaningful contribution to their own evaluation (Bachman, 2000; Calfee & Hiebert, 1991; Hamayan, 1995). The current trends in learner-centered language teaching approaches, and a growing interest in authenticity and interactivity (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) have led to a greater interest in expanding the use of second language self-assessment. Mahmoodi & Shahreabaki (2014) note that students self-assessment can play a crucial role in helping learners become more dedicated and motivated.

Another notable example of the use of self-assessment is the experiment conducted in new students in undergraduate second language programs (Ito, Kawaguchi, and Ohta 2005). They were asked to rate their receptive skills in their target language using a self-assessment questionnaire prior to taking standardized proficiency tests. High correlations were obtained between the two kinds of measurement after modifying the questionnaire content so it was relevant to the students' experience.

The current study attempts to answer whether students' self-assessment of communicative competence significantly correlate with their actual performance, and to find out whether there is any significant influence of students' length of language learning toward their self-assessment of communicative competences

### **Frame of Theories**

Fitzpark, 2006 stated that student self-assessment is a form of authentic assessment in which each student reflects his/her strengths and weaknesses in order to identify learning needs and reinforce weaknesses with the aim of improving achievement and/or performance. Another definition of self-assessment was proposed by Boud (1986) who stated that self-assessment is the involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgments about the extent to which they met these criteria and standards.

Self-assessment can be used for a variety of purposes, including appropriate placement, diagnosis and feedback to the learner, program evaluation, assessment of attitudes and socio psychological differences, determination of course grade, and so forth (Henning, 1987). Because of the inherent intricacy in providing a comprehensive definition of self-assessment, some researchers (Bachman, 2000; Haughton & Dickinson, 1988; Oscarson, 1989) have attempted to define the term by identifying two types of self-assessment according to their purpose: (1) performance-oriented self-assessment, and (2) development-oriented self-assessment. A major distinction between performance-oriented self-assessment and development-oriented self-assessment is that the former typically samples the test takers' performance at one particular point in time, whereas the latter assesses the participants for an extended period of time in order to detect changes and patterns of development over time.

### **Performance-oriented self-assessment**

Performance-oriented assessment measures the outcomes related to selection, certification, placement, achievement, diagnosis, etc. For instance, if self-assessment is used as a placement exam in a university ESL program, it will be administered to the students only once prior to program entrance. In this case, students are asked to evaluate their language ability on whatever being assessed.

Many researchers have investigated whether self-assessment instruments accurately sample the learners' language ability at one particular point of time. Although there remain serious concerns about learners' objectivity and capacity to view their achievements, the use of self-assessment for the purpose of the performance-oriented self-

assessment has various advantages. First, it eliminates concerns with cheating and security issues (LeBlanc & Painchaud, 1985). Second, it is cost and time efficient (Strong-Klause, 2000). These advantages are often attractive enough to induce test administrators to implement self-assessment into their language programs.

However, self-reporting is affected by many factors including the wording of the questions, the assessed language skills, the proficiency level of the students, the cultural backgrounds of the students, and so forth (Strong-Klause, 2000). Most importantly, self-assessment is severely influenced when there is a perceived advantage to a higher rating. Many test administrators are hesitant to use it in situations where the consequences of the self-assessment seriously affect the test takers' present circumstances. Because the students' self-ratings are greatly affected by subjective errors, the results must be interpreted with caution when used for the purpose of placement, certification, diagnosis, and admission.

### **Development-oriented self-assessment**

Development-oriented assessment measures the process of learning (usually in a classroom environment) in which self-managed activities are incorporated. It is used as an observation of "the participants for an extended period in order to detect changes and patterns of development over time" (Dornyei, 2001, p. 194). This type of assessment began to receive attention as the result of an increasing interest in the learner-centered approach.

In a learner-centered curriculum, learners are encouraged not only be test takers, but also be active participants in the assessment process (Bachman, 2000; Dickinson, 1987). By incorporating self-assessment into classroom learning, students as well as teachers acknowledge assessment as a mutual responsibility, and not as the sole responsibility of the teacher (Oscarson, 1989).

A number of empirical studies indicated the presence of increased productivity and autonomy, higher motivation, less frustration, and higher retention rates among learners when development-oriented self-assessment is utilized (Dickinson, 1987; Rivers, 2001). Although the findings of these studies make their implementation of self-assessment sound plausible, issues regarding the validity and reliability of the assessment need to be addressed. For example, when self-assessment is implemented in a portfolio project, the students engage in multiple assessments, a cycle of self-assessment and feedback, throughout the semester. Because the final product is influenced by feedback from a teacher, a peer, or even a parent, the completed portfolio might not be an accurate measure of the students' language ability. In other words, if the purpose is to measure the students' language ability, the validity of the portfolio is severely affected by a confounding variable such as feedback. Furthermore, the complexity involved in grading a portfolio exacerbates the reliability of the assessment.

Although the issues of reliability and validity remain the primary concern for development-oriented self-assessment, many studies have focused on how the implementation of self-assessment in classroom enhances the students' language learning. This approach not only promotes autonomy in student learning, it also helps the teachers to measure the students' progress in the course. Development-oriented self-assessment may best serve as a complementary instrument to traditional assessment. However, it may become a more viable part of the assessment process when more research has been conducted to investigate its validity and reliability.

### **Actual Performance**

The term "performance" has two senses: (1) a technique used in phonetics whereby aspiring practitioners of the subject are trained to control the use of their vocal organs; and (2) a term used in the linguistic theory of transformational generative grammar, to refer to language seen as a set of specific utterances produced by native speakers, as encountered in a corpus. Another definition of performance was proposed by Noam Chomsky who described performance as the actual use of language in concrete situations. The performance is defined in opposition to competence. The distinction between performance and competence in the transformational generative grammar, however, has been severely criticized as being not that clear-cut and there are problems, often in deciding whether a particular speech feature, such as intonation or discourse, is a matter of competence or performance (Crystal, 1985: 59).

## 2. Methodology

The data of this study are in the form of:

- 1) Students' self-assessment of communicative competence in the form of questionnaire result
- 2) Performance test scores

The performance tests in the research were role play, writing argumentative essay, structure and vocabulary, and pronunciation test.

### Data Collecting procedures

In conducting this study, some procedures were implemented to make the research run in a well-organized way. The first was organizing the instruments. The instruments were the questionnaire of self-assessment and several performance tests. The next step is administering the self-assessment questionnaire to the sample of the study. The result of the questionnaire would show the ability of the students when they appraise their self of the level of communicative competence they perceive.

The second is administering several performance tests. The tests are actual performance tests regarding to communicative competence. The first test was speaking test in the form of role play and writing argumentative essay. The second test was structure and vocabulary and pronunciation test. The test scores were correlated to the result of questionnaire which is intended to find out whether there was significant correlation between both of them.

### Speaking Performance Test

Speaking performance in this study is in the form of role play. The use of role play makes the learning activity more enjoyable and interesting because role play helps shy students by providing a mask (Susanti, 2007). In the current research, the role play was given to the students by pairing two students in given situation. There were two kinds of situations then the students were given a chance to create conversation related to the situations. (See appendix).

Writing Argumentative Essay was assigned in the three general topics. The argumentative essay helps students to develop critical thinking and research skills, as well as the ability to develop and logically defend a position. The students were given a chance to write their argument or idea whether agree or disagree to the topics given.

Structure and vocabulary tests employed in this study consisted of 20 items which were adapted from many sources of TOEFL preparation book. In this research, there were no multiple choices items employed. Each items of structure and vocabulary performance was false sentences then the students had to make it correct. The objective structure and vocabulary test was used in this research (see appendix)

### Pronunciation Test

Pronunciation test used in this study includes three components of important contrastive sounds; intonation, vowels, and intonation. The tests were in the form of objective tests which make the scoring easier. The tests have four parts, each part had 25 points in which when the students gave all correct pronunciation for each, and the score is 100.

### The results

The questionnaires were distributed into three different classes of students' years of study. They were allowed to ask questions if needed along this activity. They had an opportunity to do this activity approximately 15 to 20 minutes to fill the questionnaire. The following table is descriptive statistics of students' self-assessment of communicative competence.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Self-Assessment of Four Communicative Competences

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic
Lingcom	72	15.00	88.00	61.8403	2.02745	17.20345
Socioling	72	16.00	91.00	64.6347	2.14725	18.21999
Discom	72	11.00	89.50	60.5333	2.31105	19.60989
Strgycom	72	10.00	87.00	60.2694	2.36175	20.04010
Valid N (listwise)	72					

Table 1 above shows that the mean of students' self-assessment of linguistic competence is 61.84. The maximum score of linguistic competence is 88 and the minimum score of students' self-assessment is 15. The Mean of students' self-appraisal of sociolinguistic competence is 63.56. This score is the highest mean of all. The maximum score of sociolinguistic competence is 91 and the minimum score is 16. The mean of students' self-assessment of discourse competence is 60.53. The maximum score of discourse competence is 89.50 and the minimum score is 11. The mean of students' self-appraisal of strategic competence is 60.27.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Students' Self-Assessment of Communicative Competence based the Years of Study.

Descriptives				
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lingcom	1.00	16	40.6688	17.01046
	3.00	31	65.1484	10.51101
	5.00	25	71.2880	12.27434
	Total	72	61.8403	17.20345
Soslingcom	1.00	16	42.0938	19.70660
	3.00	31	67.1419	11.37749
	5.00	25	72.8520	18.09777
	Total	72	63.5583	19.67999
Discom	1.00	16	35.6688	17.92100
	3.00	31	65.9774	11.21786
	5.00	25	69.6960	15.54650
	Total	72	60.5333	19.60989
Strategycom	1.00	16	32.5875	18.75284
	3.00	31	65.2484	11.69204
	5.00	25	71.8120	10.75861
	Total	72	60.2694	20.04010

The table shows the ability of students' communicative competence, according to students' assessment, from three difference years. The students from the first years (16) have 40.67 for the mean of linguistic competence; 42.09 for the mean of sociolinguistic competence; 35.67 for the mean of discourse competence; and 32.59 for the mean of strategy competence. This result shows that the students from the first years have the lowest mean score of all. The students' score from the second years (31) have 65.15 for the mean of linguistic competence; 67.14 for the mean of sociolinguistic competence; 65.98 for the mean of discourse competence; and 65.25 for the mean of

strategy competence. This result shows that the students from the second years have relatively moderate mean score of all.

The students' score from the third year (25) have 71.29 for the mean of linguistic competence; 72.85 for the mean of sociolinguistic competence; 69.70 for the mean of discourse competence; and 71.81 for the mean of strategy competence. This result shows that the students from the third years have the highest mean score of all. Moreover, in investigating the influence of students' length of language learning toward their appraisal, data from questionnaire were statistically described using one way ANOVA in SPSS 23.0 program. The following table is the result of each competence that was statistically described using one way ANOVA.

Table 3: The Influence of Students' Length of Language Learning Toward Their Self-Assessment

**ANOVA**

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Lingcom	Between Groups	9742.475	2	4871.238	29.822	.000
	Within Groups	11270.598	69	163.342		
	Total	21013.073	71			
Sociolingcom	Between Groups	11526.416	2	5763.208	33.019	.000
	Within Groups	12043.307	69	174.541		
	Total	23569.723	71			
Discom	Between Groups	12909.602	2	6454.801	30.944	.000
	Within Groups	14393.298	69	208.599		
	Total	27302.900	71			
Strgycom	Between Groups	16359.891	2	8179.946	46.438	.000
	Within Groups	12154.101	69	176.146		
	Total	28513.993	71			

Table 3 above showed, the mean square between groups of each competence like linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence had significant difference regarding to students' different years of language learning. Since the value of variable sig (2-tailed) was 0.00 which means  $< 0.05$ . Thus, it can be revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected and there is significant effect of the students' length of language learning toward the result of their self-assessment.

### The Result of the Actual Performance Tests

To cover the third research question in this research, the actual performance tests were constructed with regard to four communicative competences. Since the tests were performance tests, they deal with productive skills. The tests used in this research were speaking in the form of role play, writing an argumentative essay, structure and vocabulary, and pronunciation tests. Those tests aim at testing the students' level of performance achievement in the target language and actual use of language in terms of the length of study in higher education. Since the subjects were grouped into three, the scores of the performance tests were analyzed by comparing means among groups and using one way ANOVA to find whether there is significant difference among groups

Table 4: The Difference among the Groups in terms of Length of Language Learning

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Writing	Between Groups	2097.861	2	1048.930	31.882	.000
	Within Groups	2270.139	69	32.901		
	Total	4368.000	71			
Structure	Between Groups	9572.190	2	4786.095	24.373	.000
	Within Groups	13549.685	69	196.372		
	Total	23121.875	71			
pronountest	Between Groups	541.885	2	270.943	34.264	.000
	Within Groups	545.615	69	7.907		
	Total	1087.500	71			
Speaking	Between Groups	144.144	2	72.072	10.830	.000
	Within Groups	459.175	69	6.655		
	Total	603.319	71			

The table above shows the mean square between groups of each performance had significant difference regarding to students' different years of language learning. Since the value of variable sig (2-tailed) was 0.00 which means  $< 0.05$ . Thus, it can be revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected and there is significant difference in students' performance among the three groups in the terms of the length of language learning.

## Discussion

This first research question here tested the hypothesis that students' self-appraisal of communicative competence significantly correlated with students' actual performance. The participants are 72 EFL of University Students. They fulfill 40 items of self-appraisal questionnaire then they are tested such performance tests with respect to communicative competence.

The answer of the first research question in findings section is that mostly there is significant correlation between the students' self-appraisal questionnaire of communicative competence and their performance. However, some competences still have low correlation for instance linguistic competence toward speaking, and discourse competence toward speaking and structure performance.

In linguistic competence, there was a positively moderate significant correlation between students' self-appraisal of linguistic competence and writing, structure and vocabulary, and pronunciation test. However, the size of correlation between students' self-appraisal of linguistic competence and speaking (0.256) was low. Thus, it can be said that there was positive correlation even it was not significant correlation between students' self-appraisal of linguistic and students' speaking performance because the correlation is weak. This was, however, not overly for surprising for the following reasons.

According to Yule (1996), there are some difficulties in getting the brain and speech production to work together. In fact that people who make occasional "slips of tongue" in everyday conversation does not mean that they do not know their language or do not have fluency in it. The performance errors trait to a variety of performance factors like tiredness, boredom, drugs, external distraction and so forth (Radford, 1981; Gleason and Ratner, 1993). Another reason is due to the differences between teachers' judgment and students' self-assessment. The teacher's judgment can be not equivalent with the students' judgment because the teachers have greater experience in judging oral presentations (Bolivar-Cruz et al, 2013). Moreover, the speaking performance in this research is in the form of role play, this makes that there is not sufficient accuracy when students acted as peers. Therefore, it

can be stated that students' judgment of their ability in linguistic competence was not as good as the result of their speaking performance.

This finding is also related to the study of Langen et al (2008) who conducted the study of the relationship between students, peers, and tutor evaluations of oral presentation. The students are fairly advanced students at the end of their second-year undergraduates. The student' numbers varied between courses ( $n_{2002} = 41$ ,  $n_{2003} = 19$ ). At the end of the course they delivered five minute presentation summarizing their research projects which were assessed by tutors, a subset of peers and themselves. The result of their study indicates that students' self-assessment was not strongly associated with tutor grades unlike peer grades. For self-assessment, there was strong effect of gender (female students undervalued their performance compared with tutor grades).

However, overall, the findings of the present research about the correlation between the competence and performance proved the Chomskyians who believed that the study of competence cannot be separated from performance (Taha & Reishan, 2008). Specifically, it can be stated that the ability of university students to assess their selves has correlation to their performance assessment marked by tutor or teacher. The finding is also in line with the previous research (e.g. Stefani, 1994; Falchikov & Boud, 1989; and Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000 cited in Langen 2008) who have found strong associations between self- and tutor assessments. Falchikov & Goldfinch (2000) noted that self-assessment involves little knowledge of the work of students' performance.

In particular, self-assessment was a challenge to many students, reflected in part by the high variability in self-assessment marks and their lack of congruence with tutor and peers. Understanding the process of self and peer assessment requires an appreciation of students' perceptions of themselves and others. In the current research, during self-assessment of communicative competence, students have evaluated themselves in a broad range of marks; linguistic competence (15 – 88), sociolinguistic competence (16 – 91), discourse competence (11 – 89.5), strategy competence (10 – 87). This is an indication that the students have lack of confidence or ability to discriminate high or low their achievement. High self-assessment marks may reflect high levels of confidence or poor understanding of academic level in relation to the requirements of the assessment.

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judging oral presentations (De Grez et al, 2012 cited in Bolivar-Cruz et al, 2013). Moreover, the speaking performance in this research is in the form of role play, this makes that there is not sufficient accuracy when students acted as peers. Therefore, it can be stated that students' judgment of their ability in linguistic competence was not as good as the result of their speaking performance.

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In particular, self-assessment was a challenge to many students, reflected in part by the high variability in self-assessment marks and their lack of congruence with tutor and peers. Understanding the process of self and peer assessment requires an appreciation of students' perceptions of themselves and others. In the current research, during self-assessment of communicative competence, students have evaluated themselves in a broad range of marks; linguistic competence (15 – 88), sociolinguistic competence (16 – 91), discourse competence (11 – 89.5), strategy competence (10 – 87). This is an indication that the students have lack of confidence or ability to discriminate high or low their achievement. High self-assessment marks may reflect high levels of confidence or poor understanding of academic level in relation to the requirements of the assessment.

### **The Influence of Students' Length of Language Learning toward Their Self-Assessment**

The second goal of the research is to investigate the effect of students' length of language learning toward their appraisal. Since the participants are university students which means they are in the criteria of older learners, the present study differentiate the students into their length of study in university (years). Each year was grouped into pre-intermediate, intermediate, and advanced learners. Older learners are more effective at the process of using self-appraisal (McDonald, 2004).

The result shows that there is significant influence of students' length of language learning toward their self-assessment. Students' self-assessment of communicative competence had significant difference regarding to students' group of language learning. The value of variable significant is 0.00 which means it was lower than significant level ( $p < 0.05$ ). This result shows that the ability to use self-assessment is significantly different used by different group and it was equivalent to all competences like linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategy competence. The finding is in line with Renzulli (1997) who found that learners become more advanced; they are more committed to the tasks assigned to them.

Moreover, the reason of the findings was stated by the result of Andretta (2008) research which indicated that advanced learners are more successful to find their way through information in new unfamiliar situations. As learners become more advanced, they come to the terms with many new experiences which they need more progress than what they have faced at their lower level. They need at least some creative experiences so that they can experiment, invent, and apply what they have learned. Seeing as self-assessment requires being involved in different intricate cognitive, sociological, and psychological processes, which are influenced by many

uncontrollable factors, there still remains lack of consensus about the effective use of self-assessment in EFL contexts.

The result of the current study is also supported by Butter and Li (2005) who investigated the effectiveness of self-assessment among university students and found some positive effects of self-assessment on the students' English performance as well as their confidence in learning English. Thus, in comparison with pre-intermediate, intermediate or advanced learners; advanced learners have a lot benefit from the use of self-assessment while beginner language learners are more dependent to the teachers. In current research, the lowest level is pre-intermediate, higher than beginner. It is assumed that there is opportunity to the students if they will to get benefit of the use of self-assessment and improve their ability to assess themselves by training students (as suggested in Langen, 2005).

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### Conclusions

Based on the research questions, there are two conclusions which can be drawn; the research firstly explores the correlation between students' self-assessment of communicative competence and their performance. The result showed that communicative competence assessed by students has positive relationship to the score of their performance assessed by teachers. However, it was also found some competences are not significantly correlated to the students' speaking performance. In other words, it indicates that even the study of competence cannot be separated from the performance. It remains differences between what students know in their mind with what students act as their performance or due to discrepancies between students and teachers' experience in giving judgement.

The current research succeeded in modifying a questionnaire of 40 items students' self-assessment according to the communicative competence. The study compares three groups of subjects when they assess their ability to the communicative competence in the form of questionnaire. It was not surprisingly when the result shows that there is significant difference among the groups toward their appraisal.

### Suggestions

In the light of the findings of the research, there are some suggestions proposed for practitioners or teachers and for further study. Here are some suggestions for practitioners or teachers;

1. It is recommended to increase the number of students' self-assessment experiences in order to facilitate students' capacity to evaluate them.
2. It is recommended that freshmen university to have more students' self-assessment training to develop their ability toward their capacity to evaluate them.
3. Make more possibilities to have the use of self-assessment during the students self-assessment training then practice the language performance particularly in oral performances such as debates, group discussion, public speaking, etc.

Furthermore, some suggestions are proposed in this research:

1. It is recommended to explore more about the impact of self-assessment of communicative competence on productive skills.
2. Subject for further research is about the differential factors affecting students in making judgment like gender and personality type.
3. It is suggested not only for student but also the willingness of language teachers for self-assessing their own performance.
4. It is suggested to explore more about receptive skill and productive skill performance with respect to sub competence of communicative competences.

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