Feedback in Education: A Focus on Self-Assessment Tools

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Abstract: *Feedback has been documented as a powerful variable in hundreds of educational studies. The problem is that in a typical instructional setting, most feedback that students receive comes from teachers, and in contexts where the number of students is large, providing high-quality feedback can be an unsurmountable task. This urges to involve students in effective self-assessment, so high-quality self-feedback can carry positive effects for all involved (Nicol, 2021). Of self-assessment tools, rubrics and exemplars have been imperially proven to enhance students' writing performance and also foster a sense of ownership over their learning outcomes (Lipnevich et al., 2014). In this paper, I would highlight the importance of feedback in education and then discuss the use of rubrics and exemplars as a self-feedback tool in ESL/EFL writing classes.*

Keywords: *Self-Assessment Tools, ESL/EFL writing classes, Banking Academy of Vietnam*

Feedback in education

Feedback in education is a powerful tool that greatly influences learning outcomes and overall student development. It is the cornerstone of the teaching-learning process, offering valuable insights to both educators and learners. Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of feedback in enhancing academic achievement and fostering continuous improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lipnevich & Smith, 2018).

Formative assessment and feedback have a transformative effect on student learning as shown by Black and Wiliam (1998). They demonstrated how timely and constructive feedback can help students bridge the gap between their current performance levels and their desired goals, leading to substantial improvements in academic attainment. Similarly, Hattie and Timperley (2007) underscored the importance of feedback in their meta-analysis, showing its crucial role in clarifying learning intentions, identifying gaps in understanding, and providing strategies for improvement.

Moreover, Lipnevich and Smith's research (2018) explored the multifaceted nature of feedback, investigating its various forms and effects on student motivation and engagement. They emphasized the necessity of personalized, targeted feedback that is tailored to the individual needs and learning styles of students.

Despite a widespread agreement on the significance of feedback in education, there are still challenges in implementing it effectively. This is particularly true in larger class sizes and time-constrained environments where most of the feedback students receive is from their teachers (Broadbent et al., 2018). This highlights the importance of diversifying and innovating approaches to feedback delivery, such as peer assessment and self-assessment. By leveraging these diverse modalities, educators can empower learners to take ownership of their learning journey and strive for continuous improvement.

Nicol (2021) discussed the benefits of involving students in self-assessment practices, highlighting how self-generated feedback can enhance students' metacognitive skills and deepen their learning. Similarly, Panadero et al. (2019) emphasized the positive outcomes associated with students' participation in self-assessment activities, which include increased self-awareness and ownership of learning. Among the various self-assessment tools available, scholars have advocated for the use of rubrics and exemplars as scaffolding tools (Lipnevich et al., 2014). These resources are excellent aids for fostering students' self-assessment as they clarify expectations, guide self-assessment, and promote consistency in feedback delivery. In essence, rubrics and exemplars serve as natural comparators to which students compare their performances and generate feedback, thus enabling them to self-reflect, make appropriate choices, and take action.

Rubrics and Exemplars as Self-Assessment Tools in Education

Rubrics are widely recognized as effective instruments for assessing student work in various educational contexts. A rubric delineates the criteria and standards against which student work

is evaluated, providing clear guidelines for what is expected. When students use rubrics to assess their work, they gain insights into their strengths and weaknesses, and develop essential metacognitive skills, fostering deeper learning and autonomy (Nicol, 2021).

Exemplars, on the other hand, illustrate what successful or unsuccessful performance looks like and are valuable resources in education for guiding students' understanding of assessment criteria and standards. Research has consistently highlighted the effectiveness of exemplars in enhancing students' self-assessment skills. By analyzing exemplars, students gain a concrete understanding of what constitutes exemplary work in a given context. This process enables them to compare their work against established standards, identify areas for improvement and set realistic goals for growth (Brookhart & Chen, 2015). Exemplars can also serve as tangible examples of success, inspiring students to strive for excellence in their work.

Both rubrics and exemplars facilitate metacognitive processes by prompting students to reflect critically on their work and the criteria used to evaluate it. When students engage in self-assessment activities with rubrics, exemplars, or both, they develop a deeper understanding of assessment standards and criteria, enhancing their evaluative judgment and decision-making skills (Lipnevich et al., 2014). This reflective process fosters a sense of ownership over learning outcomes and promotes self-directed learning. These self-assessment tools also promote transparency and consistency in assessment. When students are involved in the development of rubrics and/or exemplars, or provided with these self-feedback tools, they gain a deeper understanding of assessment standards and are better equipped to self-assess accurately (Lipnevich et al., 2014).

Empirical research on rubrics and exemplars in self-assessment

There have been several studies conducted to empirically investigate the applications of rubrics and exemplars in students' self-assessment activities. Lipnevich et al. (2014) conducted a study examining the effectiveness of rubrics and exemplars as tools for self-assessment among undergraduate students. In their research, students were randomly assigned to three conditions: rubric, exemplar, and combined. Results showed that while all three groups demonstrated improvement in their writing

skills, the rubric group exhibited the most significant enhancement. Moreover, participants indicated that rubrics promoted deeper engagement compared to exemplars, which led to shallow processing. This study highlights the efficacy of rubrics in enhancing students' self-assessment capabilities.

Building upon this, Brookhart and Chen (2015) emphasized the importance of descriptive rubrics in facilitating self-assessment among students, particularly in writing tasks. These rubrics, when well-designed, provide clear criteria and standards that enable students to assess their writing effectively, leading to enhanced understanding of expectations and increased self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses.

Further expanding on this research, Lipnevich et al. (2023) investigated the effects of instructional rubrics, exemplars, and their combination on student performance in writing tasks. The study involved 206 9th- and 10th-grade students and revealed that students in the rubrics group showed the greatest improvement, followed by those in the exemplars group and the combined group. Notably, students in the exemplars group exhibited significant enhancement in tool utilization after receiving training. These findings suggest that educators can leverage rubrics and exemplars to foster self-assessment and enhance student performance, thus reducing their workload.

Conclusion

The existing literature indicates that descriptive rubrics play a vital role in facilitating students' self-assessment in writing tasks. Both rubrics and exemplars serve as effective tools for enhancing self-assessment capabilities, with rubrics showing greater efficacy in promoting deeper engagement and improving performance. By utilizing these tools, educators can empower students to assess their work, thereby fostering a culture of self-directed learning and continual improvement.

References

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