STUDENT SELF-GRADING AT FIRST YEAR LEVEL IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Assessment plays a pivotal role in education as it is mostly through assessment methods that students are allowed to progress from one level to the next. While assessment practices have been the subject of debate for a number of years, the consensus among researchers is a move towards learner-centred assessment practices. Self-assessment, a practice whereby students make judgements about their own work, is a learner-centred practice that has the potential to help develop students into independent and lifelong learners, and as practitioners who would be able to reflect critically on their own professions and practices once they exit University. Self-assessment may be formative or summative. While the use of self-assessment as a summative process, which involves students grading their own work, is a very contentious issue, it continues to remain fundamental in education and therefore students should be taught how to grade themselves.

This paper reports on a study in which students self-graded an assessment task with the aid of an assessment rubric. Students also responded to a question on how they felt about grading their own work. On comparing student self-grades with those of the tutor it was found that majority (72.6%) of the students failed to demonstrate good self-assessment skills with student grades ranging from an overestimation of 36% above the tutor grade to 25% less than the tutor grade. Consistent with other research studies the results further show that weaker students graded themselves higher than the better performing students. However, there was a noticeable tendency for male students to grade themselves higher than female students. Analysis of the qualitative data reveals that students’ feelings about self-grading may play a role in the grades they assign themselves. The author, therefore, recommends that affective factors need to be considered and addressed prior to the self-grading task. Furthermore, it is evident that rubrics alone may not necessarily improve self-grading and that internalisation of the rubric criteria and standards, as well as practice, is essential. The author concludes by arguing that in order to produce graduates who are able to appraise their own performance, self-assessment should be embedded early in the students’ degree programmes and be sustained throughout the degree.

Keywords: Grading, self-assessment, learner-centred assessment, higher education, assessment rubric.