

Classroom Participation Self-Assessment

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Background:

Active classroom participation is a valued skill in American university classrooms. However, many international students come from cultures with different classroom behavior expectations. Therefore, many students are not prepared to succeed in the American classroom culture. Most existing studies concerning international student participation in the classroom have been quantitative in nature, simply looking at particular student behaviors and their frequency of occurrence (Tatar, 1995). One aspect that has not been examined is the link between self-evaluation and student participation. Self-monitoring has been emphasized in instruction as part of learners' taking responsibility for their own learning and it provides students with the opportunities and the strategies to continue their learning beyond the classroom (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992). This investigation examines the effect of teacher-guided student self-evaluation of attitudes and perceptions of participation.

Research Questions:

The following were our research questions:

1. Does self-assessment increase student participation over time?
2. Does self-assessment heighten awareness of participation enough to cause attitudes towards participation to improve and, if so, how do these attitudes change?

Methods:

In the fall semester of 2012, students in Level 4 and 5 at the Program in Intensive English were asked to reflect on their ideas of participation at the beginning and the end of the semester. This was achieved by having students fill out two surveys at the beginning of the semester and then again at the end of the semester. Students did not see their earlier responses when they were asked to complete the end-of-semester surveys. The first survey, the *Attitude Survey* asked students to rate their attitude towards active

participation. The second survey asked them to rate their perceived participation frequency in their classes in general- the Frequency Survey. The researchers collected surveys from the beginning of the semester and the data was recorded in order to compare them to the responses collected at the end of the semester. Both the students and the instruments were consistent throughout the semester.

In addition, student participants were asked to reflect on their own active participation frequency on a weekly basis using a self-reflection Likert scale questionnaire. Students rated their perceived participation for each week at the end of the week- taking about 10 minutes a week of class time to fill in the form. Teachers reported that this activity created a time for students and teachers to discuss and focus on participation as a class. In addition, reflection questions about participation were completed at the midpoint and end of the semester. These questions were part of the Weekly Self-reflection Questionnaire. Though the data collected weekly from this questionnaire instrument was not analyzed specifically, it was the only treatment used throughout the semester for this research project. The researchers did examine the reflection questions at the end of the semester qualitatively.

Data collected through the Attitude and Frequency Survey instruments were analyzed using SPSS software. We compared the means of each item on the survey individually for significance in the change in participation frequency from the beginning to the end of the semester. Further, data for both surveys were recoded into scales. The attitude survey was divided into Punctuality, Question Asking, Interaction with Peers, Group Work, Note-taking, and Seat Selection. For the Frequency Survey, the following scales were created: Punctuality, Question Asking, Interaction with Peers, Group Work, Note-taking, Seat Selection, and Preparedness. In addition, surveys about attitudes were analyzed qualitatively to see if and how attitudes towards participation changed over the course of the treatment.

Results:

Mean comparisons between beginning and end of the semester of both surveys showed significance in many of the scales. However, after further investigation, the

change in mean from beginning to end of the semester was negative. Students rated items on the Frequency Survey lower at the end of the semester than at the beginning. The scales from the Frequency Survey that had a significant negative change were Question Asking, Group Work, Note-taking and Preparedness. The other scales did not have significant change in mean from the beginning to the end of the semester. In addition, two *Attitude Survey* scales mean comparisons were also significant- Punctuality and Note-taking. Again, these means dropped from the beginning to the end of the semester.

All comments from the reflection questions at the end of the semester showed that students felt that the weekly questionnaire was beneficial. Students expressed that they felt that the questionnaire helped them focus on their participation, see what aspects they needed to attend to, and overall they felt it helped them improve their participation.

Relevance to PIE:

Though most of the significant changes in students' self-assessment showed that students rated their participation frequency lower at the end of the semester than at the beginning, we believe that the use of this survey (or a modified one depending on students' language ability) helped to make students aware of the level of participation required in the American classroom. One possible explanation for the negative means is that the questionnaires raised students' awareness of their active participation, and made students hyper-aware of participation expectations causing a negative drop in their perceived participation. This may have caused students to rate themselves more harshly at the end of the semester, even though the open-ended reflection questions indicated that they felt that their awareness of and frequency of their participation had increased.

As previously stated, students need to be aware of the potential differences in expectations for participation between cultures. We believe that the Weekly Self-reflection Questionnaire is one method that can be used to help students succeed in their academic career.