Self-assessment of the oral presentation competence: Effects of gender and student's performance

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ABSTRACT

Oral presentation competence is critical to graduates' employability. Improving this competence involves developing self-assessment skills that help students to analyze their own performance. However, more research is needed on the factors affecting self-assessment of the oral presentation competence, such as the speaker's confidence and the summative use of self-assessment that can act as a sort of incentive for students. A study with 201 students was carried out, focusing on a segmentation analysis and differentiating by gender and level of performance on the assessed competence.

Results show that: (1) the existence of incentives is the only variable that significantly influences men's self-assessment, whereas women's self-assessment is basically conditioned by their confidence as speakers; and (2) the self-assessment of the worst speakers, rated by teachers, is influenced only by the existence of incentives, whereas the best speakers give themselves higher scores when they feel confident about speaking in public.

1. Introduction

The current job market rewards people who are capable of communicating clearly and effectively (Ortiz, Region-Sebest, & MacDermott, 2016). Oral presentation skills are important in the academic context (Bodie, 2010) and in the business world (Campbell, Mothersbaugh, Brammer, & Taylor, 2001; Morreale, Valenzano, & Bauer, 2016). Thus, recruiters actively look for professionals with the ability to adequately present the results of a project, the advantages of a product, or the implementation of a decision in a company to an audience. Therefore, communicating properly is a necessity rather than a luxury.

Improving communication skills requires developing a spirit of self-criticism, for example, through assignments involving self-assessment. However, as Schunk and Pajares (2004) point out, it seems logical that people who have erroneous opinions about their own performance on a certain task would base their future decisions on these interpretations, which can compromise their learning and even their professional development.

Although self-assessment has been studied for many years, few studies (e.g., De Grez, Valcke, & Roozen, 2012; Langan et al., 2008) have focused on aspects influencing the self-assessment of the oral presentation competence, such as the speaker's confidence or fear. In fact, more in-depth insights into the underlying processes are

recommended in order to optimize self-assessment in higher education environments (Van Ginkel, Gulikers, Biemans, & Mulder, 2015). Differences among evaluators must be taken into account by reviewing the influence of variables such as the speaker's gender or performance on the oral presentation competence. Likewise, no studies have been found that analyze the influence of the summative purpose of self-assessment (i.e, if the student's self-assessment affects the final grade) specifically on the self-assessment of the oral presentation competence. Linking self-assessment to final grade can act as a sort of incentive for students. This is because students could feel they have a stronger influence in their final grade, and consequently, in their academic success. In order to address these gaps, this study aims to examine the effect of a set of variables on the speaker's self-assessment, more specifically the influence of the speaker's confidence and the summative nature of the self-assessment on the speaker's self-assessment.

This paper tries to respond the following research questions:

- Does the speaker's confidence affect his/her self-assessment?
- Do the associated incentives (i.e., summative evaluation) affect self-assessment?
- Given the gender difference, how do the speaker's confidence and the incentives influence his/her self-assessment?
- Considering the differences in speakers' performance, how do the speaker's confidence and the incentives influence his/her self-

assessment?

To answer these questions, the following section presents the theoretical foundations of self-assessment in oral presentations and the variables affecting it. Next, the methodological design used is described. Then, the data and results of the research are shown and discussed. Finally, a number of limitations and future lines of research are described.

2. Self-assessment in oral presentations

In educational settings, self-assessment refers to students' ability to judge their own learning, especially their performance and results (Boud & Falchikov, 1989). In the words of Klenowski (1995), it is an assessment or judgment one makes of oneself, identifying strengths and weaknesses in order to improve the learning results. Self-assessment is considered one of the most important skills the student needs for effective and continuous learning throughout life and future professional development (Boud, 1989). Monitoring their own performance gives students the opportunity to gain confidence in their own learning (Boud, Lawson, & Thompson, 2015). In addition, it allows them to take more responsibility for themselves, which is valuable in developing greater autonomy (Pereira, Flores, Simão, & Barros, 2016).

Regarding the benefits of self-assessment, De Grez et al. (2012) point out that it is 'critical to develop self-observation skills that help to compare the information gathered via self-observation with a performance goal'. In the context of oral presentations skills, the literature shows that self-assessment of these skills improves their acquisition process (Bourhis & Allen, 1998; De Grez et al., 2012; Falchikov, 2005). Thus, Falchikov (2005) states that involving students in the assessment of presentations is extremely beneficial for developing self-regulation skills. On the other hand, literature shows a low self-assessment accuracy (e.g., De Grez et al., 2012; Langan et al., 2008; Lew, Alwis, & Schmidt, 2010) when students self-assess their oral presentations and these scores are compared to other raters' scores (i.e., teachers and peers). Anyway, above-mentioned self-assessment benefits exceed this weakness (Boud, 2007, Boud, Lawson, & Thompson, 2013; De Grez et al., 2012).

2.1. Public speaking confidence and self-assessment

Public speaking is one of the aspects related to communication that most worry university students and the population in general (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; Richmond, Wrench, & McCroskey, 2013). It is the social situation that is most feared by the population (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; Hofmann & Dibartolo, 2000; Richmond et al., 2013; Smith & Sodano, 2011). When the person has to express him/herself verbally in front of an audience, a series of difficulties arise, regardless of the size of the audience. In the university context, many students show fear when speaking in public, which causes them to avoid these situations (Housley Gaffney & Kercsmar, 2016; McCroskey & Andersen, 1976; Nash, Crimmins, & Oprescu, 2016). Particularly, women have historically reported higher levels of public speaking fear than men (Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; McCroskey, Simpson, & Richmond, 1982).

Furthermore, students experiencing public speaking fear could choose, for example, careers that require fewer oral presentation activities. Moreover, this fear can impact the individual's professional choices, as it is negatively related to adaptability and the choice of leadership related tasks (Blume, Baldwin, & Ryan, 2013; Richmond et al., 2013). Specifically in the case of women, McCroskey et al. (1982) concluded that 'although the variance attributable to the biological sex variable, 2–4%, is not large, it may represent somewhat of a barrier to advancement of women within our society generally'. Therefore, reducing this fear may be even more relevant for female students.

However, experiencing fear of public speaking is not synonymous with being a bad speaker. In fact, individuals with less confidence as

speakers may feel the need to prepare themselves better. This could contribute to better performance on oral presentation assignments. Therefore, managing public speaking fear requires rigorous self-assessment (Blume et al., 2013). It is easy to imagine that individuals with less fear of public speaking, or greater confidence in their ability as speakers, would rate themselves higher on this skill. Because, as mentioned above, the literature shows differences between men and women in their perceptions of fear of public speaking, analyzing gender differences in assessment becomes relevant (Woodfield, Earl-Novell, & Solomon, 2005).

2.2. Incentives and self-assessment

In the classroom context, the consequences of self-assessment for students can influence their ratings of their own performance. If the student's self-assessment affects the final grade, that is, if it is a summative self-assessment, the student may be tempted to overestimate his/her results in order to get a better grade. In contexts different from oral presentation self-assessment, studies like those by Dunning, Heath, and Suls (2004), Kelemen, Winningham, and Weaver (2007), or Miller and Geraci (2011) show a tendency to over-rate. However, studies like the one by Tejeiro et al. (2012) show that summative self-assessment leads students to overrate and underrate their performance. Therefore, there are no clear results supporting the idea that summative self-assessment leads students to give themselves better marks.

2.3. Speakers' differences in self-assessment: gender and performance

The literature suggests that self-assessments can vary based on evaluator/student differences. For example, it is possible that men and women do not evaluate themselves in the same way. However, results in the literature about the influence of gender on self-assessment are scarce (Torres-Guijarro & Bengoechea, 2017) and inconsistent (Tucker, 2014), and so it is necessary to further examine this question (Tejeiro et al., 2012; Torres-Guijarro & Bengoechea, 2017). Coinciding with what Boud and Falchikov (1989) pointed out about the possible existence of differences in self-assessment, studies such as the ones by Lind et al. (2002), Rees (2003), McDonald (2004), Tejeiro et al. (2012) and Torres-Guijarro and Bengoechea (2017) detect that women give themselves lower ratings than men. However, studies such as the one by Sasmaz-Oren (2012) detect the opposite situation, whereas other studies find no significant differences (e.g., Mattheos, Nattestad, Christersson, Jansson, & Attstrom, 2004) in men's and women's ability to assess themselves. Moreover, if this question is analyzed in relation to oral presentations, which traditionally have been considered more 'male-oriented' (Falchikov & Magin, 1997; Lakhal, Sévigny, & Frenette, 2013), the results are not conclusive either. For example, Langan et al. (2008) found a significant effect based on the gender of the evaluator, so that men gave themselves higher ratings than women, whereas Sellnow and Treinen (2004) did not find this effect. Meanwhile, based on their results, De Grez et al. (2012) concluded that the evaluator's gender does not seem to influence the rating. Faced with these contradictory results, this study proposes to identify differences in the influence of the studied variables on the self-assessment, depending on the speaker's gender.

Likewise, there may be differences in the variables that determine the self-assessment of a student with good performance and those that influence a student with lower performance. This could be explained in terms of the Dunning-Kruger Effect (i.e., ignorance of one's own ignorance), as low-performing people do not understand how badly they did, which reflects a lack of meta-cognitive skills (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Confirming this effect, authors such as Boud et al. (2015), De Grez et al. (2012), Landrum (1999), Karnilowicz (2012), Kun (2016), Lew et al. (2010) or Ritchie (2016) show that people with low performance tend to overestimate themselves, whereas more successful people tend to underestimate themselves. However, in the context of