eSelf-assessment:

A case study in English language learning (Hong Kong) for enhancing Writing and Oral Presentation Skills

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Abstract — **eSelf-assessment is an online learning model to enhance students' ability to think and analyze their own writing and oral presentation, and to deepen their understanding of how to improve their work by using their class teachers' feedback on both their assignments and self-assessments in their own studying pace. It is an introduction of self-directed learning [1]. Little's findings have shown the value of the development of learners' ability of self-assessment [2]. It evolves to be a norm - the reflections of ePortfolio during the past few years adopted by the English Language Centre, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University based on the teaching and learning strategy defined by the university [3].**

The purpose of this paper is to share the experience of an application on an English learning programme for engineering students at the university, which features eSelf-assessment on an open-source e-learning platform. This paper demonstrates the implementation of eSelf-assessment to show the flow of students' tasks, the first and second repetitive processes for students in different level of learning ability. A survey was conducted to collect students' satisfaction and effectiveness of independent online learning through this learning model by the end of the semester. The results show that the model is more effective to the segment of students who keep revising their work after the process of eSelf-assessment.

Keywords: Online learning models; eSelf-assessment; ePortfolio; self-directed learning; independent learning; e-learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

eSelf-assessment was applied to a 2-semester subject run in the 06-07 academic year. In the subject, students were required to complete the writing and/or oral presentation activities with task descriptions and notes on Levels of Competence (Level of Competence are in three successive areas: the criteria of students' work, the rating of their competence and the advice to students with different levels of competence) given online for them to download. Students had to finish their writing and/or recording in accordance with the topics and the criteria given in the notes. The introduction of eSelf-assessment was based on two hypotheses of students' learning behavior and self-learning ability. 1) Students might complete their written or recording task without referring to the criteria in the notes and 2) students might not understand the criteria without the help of teachers. Boud proposes self-assessment as the involvement of students in identifying standards/criteria to apply to their work and making judgments about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards [4]. Students ignore or do not understand the criteria in the notes that violate the original intention of the use of the notes on Levels of Competence.

II. IMPLEMENTATION

In order to make eSelf-assessment a compulsory component of students' tasks, the process was equipped before the process of 'Online submission' (Fig. 1). The criteria on the eSelf-assessment form were the same as those in the notes on Levels of Competence. Therefore, the criteria would be read by students at least once before their submissions via these sequential online processes. Students could revise their work after the process of eSelf-assessment but before online submission. It forms a loop (Fig. 2) as a systematic approach for students to enhance their writing and oral presentations independently based on the criteria given in the form [5]. Not only was the students' work marked by their class teachers but also their self-assessments were commented on.

Some students had higher ability to improve their writing or oral presentation in this self-regulated learning process. Only students with a lower ability to improve their work by themselves were required to re-submit their work with the help of their class teachers' comments. Thus another loop (Fig. 3) appeared with customized diagnosis advice from teachers.

III. PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS OF EVALUATION

The English learning programme was completed in May. A study on the effectiveness of the use of eSelf-assessment to improve engineering students' writing and oral presentation skills was conducted through an electronic questionnaire and follow-up interviews by phone.

There were 662 engineering students of 36 groups in the programme and about 250 of them joined this non-compulsory learning mode with eSelf-assessment setting up. There were 15 written and 5 oral activities for students to choose from. Students were only required to complete 10 out of these 20 activities.

Students were invited to participate in the study via email by filling in an electronic questionnaire which was built into our e-learning platform at the end of this English programme. There were 7 emails undeliverable due to invalid email addresses. The final sample consisted of 156 students. The response rate was 62.4% (156 out of 250 students).

The data extracted from the above survey was analyzed from two different angles. The aggregate data was for overall study on students' learning behaviors and the effectiveness of eSelf-assessment; the individual data of each student was used to investigate the problem discovered during the analysis of the aggregate data.

One-tenth of the student respondents were randomly selected to join the follow-up phone interviews for clarification of some issues identified in the questionnaire survey.

IV. FINDINGS

1) Students' habit: Reading the notes on Levels of Competence after downloading the description of the activities.

Less than half of the students read completely the notes on Levels of Competence. Half of them only skimmed them. A few students simply ignored them and directly started their work. It turns out 94.88% of the students had read or skimmed the notes.

2) Understanding of the criteria in the notes on Levels of Competence of the students who had read or skimmed the notes.

The result is encouraging. The students who had read or skimmed the notes in which three quarters of them claimed that they understood the criteria in the notes. Only one quarter felt that the notes were beyond their comprehension.

3) Students' habit: Referring to the notes on Levels of Competence while writing or recording of the students who had read or skimmed the notes.

Although three quarters of the students claimed that they understood the criteria for evaluating their work, more than half of them referred to the notes two to three times or even more while writing or recording. Two-fifths read it at least once either at the beginning or after the completion of their work, and about 2% made no reference to them while doing the task.

4) Helpfulness of the criteria in the notes on Levels of Competence to the students who had read or skimmed the notes.

About three quarters of the students expressed that the criteria in the notes were 'helpful'. A quarter thought they were 'Not very helpful'. Only 2.7% of students thought they were 'Not helpful'.

5) Students' habit: Revising their work after eSelf-assessment process.

Only one-fifth of the students often or very often revised their work after going through the process of eSelf-assessment. About two-fifths only did so sometimes. Another two-fifths rarely or even did not revise their work. Therefore, about three-fifths of the students were affected by the process of eSelf-assessment for revising their work.

6) Helpfulness of the eSelf-assessment process for revisions of students' work.

Half of the students rated eSelf-assessment as 'helpful' on their work for revisions. More than two-thirds of these students referred to the criteria several times while writing or recording. This portion of students had fully utilized both the online and offline tools of self-assessments. Although the number of students rating eSelf-assessment as 'helpful' (46.79%) was 10% higher than those rating 'not very helpful' (37.82%), the rating for 'not helpful' was considerably high (12%). About two-thirds of these students only read the criteria once. This portion of students did not know or underestimate the purpose of self-assessment.

7) Students' habit: Reading teachers' comments on their self-assessments.

About half of the students read all or most of the teachers' comments on their self-assessments. A quarter only read some. It is interesting that a substantially high proportion of students (a quarter) did not read or just read a few of the

comments. It turns out 85.25% of the student who had read the teachers' comments on their self-assessments.

8) Helpfulness of teachers' comments on students' self-assessments for the students who had read the comments.

In the portion of the students who had read the teachers' comments, more than four-fifths of them thought the teacher's comments were helpful. Two-thirds of them claimed that they learnt something by comparing their self-assessments with the teachers' comments.

9) Helpfulness of teachers' comments on students' self-assessments for improving the second submission of students' work.

Less than one-fifth of the students (16.67%) were required to submit a second time. Three quarters of them thought eSelf-assessment and the teachers' feedback comments helped to improve their work for the second submission.

10) Effectiveness of the overall activities in improving students' writing and oral presentations.

About one-fifth of the students gained great/satisfactory improvement of their writing and oral presentations. Three-fifths and more than two-fifths thought that they had a certain level of improvement in writing and oral presentations respectively.

Statistically, this learning model was more effective for improving students' writing than that for oral presentation. This can be explained by the fact that the task for a student to submit a recording is more complicated than that for writing. The ratio of submission in writing to recording was 7:2. Some students expressed that they skipped the part of oral presentation because of the complexity of the recording process and the lack of essential equipment. Thus, this portion of students had no improvement at all on their oral presentation skills. On the other hand, very positive comments came from some students who had attempted both writing and speaking parts. They found that the activities of this learning mode gave them a chance to practice writing and oral presentations, and especially to increase their confidence in speaking English.

V. DISCUSSION POINTS

By the end of the study, it was found that the two hypotheses put forward in the introduction section were established. 1) Only half of the students had a usual practice of referring to the criteria in the notes on Levels of Competence and 2) there were still about one-fifth of the students required to re-submit their work with the help of

teachers' comments on their self-assessments. Students paid much attention to and had sufficient understanding of the criteria for evaluating their work in that most of them were not required to submit a second time. This portion of students could be defined as having higher ability of independent learning. The role of eSelf-assessment seems to play a part in another half of the students who had not referred to the criteria in the notes in the early stage.

The students (83.33%) needed not to re-submit their work with the help of teachers' comments had two different approaches to learning independently. For the first group of students who kept referring to the criteria in the notes while writing or recording, we can say their self-learning process started early in the stage before the process of completion of the first draft of their work (the process of 'Completion of writing or recording' in Fig. 2); the second group of students who paid less attention to the criteria at the beginning and/or did not fully understand the requirements of their work, tended to revise their work after eSelf-assessment (the first repetitive loop of assessment-revision process in Fig. 2). About 60% of these independent students, who adopted the second approach, developed their personal development as a result of enhancing their work via the process. 40% of these students submitted their final work after once eSelf-assessment. They might have either sufficient confidence to do so or insufficient confidence to revise their work and, or no more time for refining them. Therefore, the process was relatively less helpful to these students in this stage.

A common circumstance was found in the second level of analysis: two-thirds of the students had already read the criteria several times (offline referencing), but still revised their work after eSelf-assessment. Those students adopted both approaches for enhancing their writing or recording and also thought the process of eSelf-assessment was helpful for them. The survey shows students learning attitude seems to be the predominant factor for learning independently. The motivation to adopt a deep (fully understand) or surface (just remember the words) approach to learning depends on pressures of time or assessment expectations [6]. Conversely, the students who were required to re-submit their work can generally be defined as those at a lower level of language competence. Compared with the independent students, the dependent students who, would fall into the second repetitive process (Fig. 3), tended to find teachers' comments on their self-assessment more helpful. The helpfulness of eSelf-assessment to this portion of students is relatively higher from this angle.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The research was limited to measure the level of satisfaction and impression from students of using eSelf-assessment as a

tool for improving their skill of self-assessment in writing and speaking. The findings show the positive influence on most of the students in terms of the awareness of assessment's requirements and the cognition of gap between teachers' assessments and their self-assessments. Boud mentions that students' self-assessments appeared early in the 1930s and until the late 1960s research was concerned with comparisons between the grades generated by students and those generated by their teachers [7]. Therefore, the significance of self-assessment is affirmative. Only the way of implementation will be changed from time to time. eSelf-assessment is a potential tool for students to learn independently via the repetitive self-assessment process or dependently on their class teachers' feedback comments on their self-assessments. To prevent a culture in which technology is introduced for technology's sake, the criteria of adopting online elements, 1) maximization of the value-added to student learning environment and 2) minimization of the disruptions during the change, are suggested [8]. It is also the concern for the adoption of eSelf-assessment for enhancing students' self-assessment skills.

For improvement of this learning model, 1) the understanding of the criteria is the prerequisite for students' self-assessment of their work. Definition of each criterion should be put online for students as a reference for student-content interaction [9] when they have difficulty in understanding the criteria while processing eSelf-assessment. 2) To apply peer assessment as one of the assessment components for students. Peer assessment has been recommended by researchers for encouraging student involvement, active participation and the provision of learning opportunities. It also benefits teachers by reducing their daily workload [10]. ePortfolio enhances and glorifies the rationale of eSelf-assessment. It is being developed to foster students' authorship for learning out of classroom teaching by the concept of peer assessment [11].

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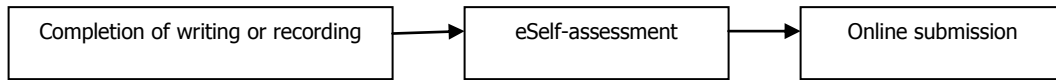
FIGURES

| Completion of writing or recording | → | eSelf-assessment | → | Online submission |

Figure 1) The flow diagram of students' tasks.

| Completion of writing or recording | → | eSelf-assessment | → | Online submission |

Revision
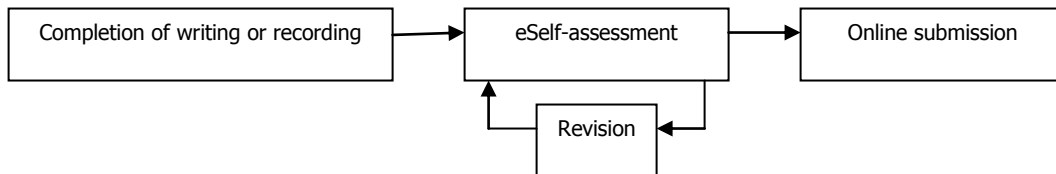
Figure 2) The first repetitive process for students who have higher ability of independent learning.

Student's submission

Marking on student's work

Comments on student's self-assessment

Re-submission?
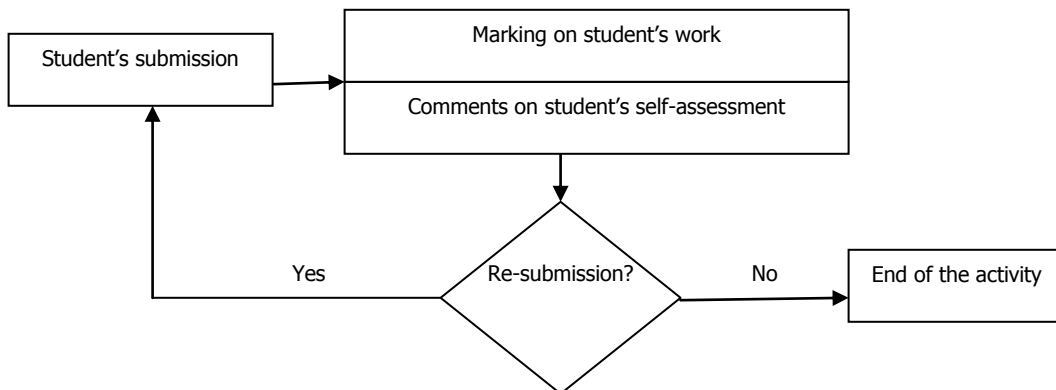
Yes

No

End of the activity

Figure 3) The second repetitive process for students who need help from class teachers.