
The Impact of Assessment and Self-assessment Methods of Learning Achievements and Progress on Adolescent Self-esteem Building

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Abstract. Assessment is meaningful when it motivates to learn and is perceived as the progress made by student in the process of learning, which strengthens students' self-esteem. The school insufficiently focuses on individual learning needs of students and allocates the most significant attention to testing. Such system of assessment fails to address the set goals of education and does not comply with contemporary methods of teaching/learning. The purpose of study is to reveal teachers' attitude towards formal and non-formal ways of assessing learners' achievements that boost or impair their self-esteem. The teachers emphasised the necessity to concentrate on assessment providing learners with efficient feedback, which indicates guidelines for improvement and enhances their self-esteem. Assessment should be treated as support to a learner, which enables him or her to adequately evaluate own abilities and opportunities, motivates to seek progress.

Keywords: *assessment, self-assessment, self-esteem, academic achievements.*

Introduction

Adolescent learning progress is closely connected with self-assessment, confidence in own potential and belief in own abilities. Adolescents tend to sensitively react to teachers' evaluation and their motivation for learning as well as self-esteem is highly vulnerable.

Pollard and Filer (1999), who conducted research on building of learners' identity, revealed that teachers' evaluation based on classifying learner into certain categories as good and bad, gifted and slow learners, achievers and behind-hand" students shapes school learners' self-opinion. Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot (2005) emphasise that learning outcomes are closely related to learner's self-esteem and learning motivation, whereas assessment strategies may perform a significant role supporting these factors that empower learning. According to Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot, recurrent failures and continuously received negative marks facilitate formation of the so-called "learned helplessness", i.e., the attitude of learners, when they ignore the learning activities to be able to explain the encountered failure by lack of engagement rather than by their limited abilities.

The learning paradigm allocates a growing attention to development on learner's ability to self-assess. Attempts are made to enable a school student self-dependently or with teacher's help not only to adequately self-assess and to identify areas to be improved but also to feel responsible for own learning outcomes. Self-assessment is relevant because it empowers a learner to manage and control the process of learning. Brookhart (2012) describes self-control as a process, which is used by school learners to observe and control learning, to seek feedback, to accept and use it. Brookhart states that gifted learners create internal principles, which help to feel that more comprehensive information and teacher advice are needed. However, less gifted learners, according to Brookhart, are more dependent on external factors, such as teachers' feedback, comments, etc. Brookhart refers to self-confidence as to a belief in personal competency, when school learners are interested in feedback and analyse it. The author emphasises that "feedback on self-control is efficient only when it encourages belief in personal competency" (Brookhart, 2012, 28). Having felt the ability to control own learning activity, adolescents gain trust in personal competency, which is an important prerequisite for enhancing learning motivation and self-esteem. Discussing forms of presentation of feedback, it recommended for a teacher to formulate such statements that "show respect for a learner as a personality and allow him or her to feel a relevant player" in the learning process. The research conducted by Brookhart revealed that "most frequently teachers tend to discuss only with good learners because they are active and self-dependent", whereas weaker students receive only instructions what to do. This is a flawed practice, which devalues the learner, weakens his or her motivation and does not facilitate learners' self-confidence. Obtaining skills of self-directed learning as well as those of self-assessment of achievements and progress, adolescents learn to foresee directions for own self-development and personal improvement and to set adequate goals that correspond to their capacities.

Assessment and self-assessment are not inseparable from educational goals or intended learning outcomes and they vary when the latter shift. The National Concept of Good School (2013) emphasises that school students' achievements are assessed not only targeting at programme-oriented educational goals but also at individual characteristics of each learner. It is obvious that learners engage in the process of learning much easier,

when they know what they aim at, what they have to do and what assessment criteria are used. It is particularly important for a teacher to present as clear as possible picture of achievements, which embraces various results of learners' achievements and their expectations and, thus, enhances their learning motivation and self-confidence. Following Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot (2005), a motivated and self-confident learner more actively engages in the process of teaching/learning and varies significantly from a learner, who doubts himself or herself, is afraid to make mistakes and tends to ignore learning activities. Assessment and self-assessment may be considered meaningful, when it motivates directly or indirectly, helps school students learn and is understood as progress that occurs in the process of each school learner, which enhances student's self-confidence and self-esteem building.

Petty (2006) defines feedback as a response or "assessment for learning". Following the works by Hattie, Petty argues that response embraces information to students on what they have done well (positive reinforcement) and what has to be done to improve their results. Petty emphasises the importance of quality of feedback provided to a learner, pointing out that "a big number of school learners suffer from "incorrect efforts" because they misunderstand assignments or assessment criteria, "they fail to complete tasks well because they do not know what is good" (Petty, 2006, 126). Thus, seeking to avoid feelings of self-disappointment, encouraging targeted learning efforts of school students, it is particularly important to present assessment criteria in an understandable way and on time. According to Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot (2005), assessment criteria embrace what is expected from learners and information on what "a well completed task" implies. Moreover, according to the authors, it is appropriate to involve learners into the process of assessment criteria formulation because the time invested in analysing criteria with learners, example analysis how to comply with those criteria, will improve efficiency of their work, will provide a clearer view what is expected from a specific assignment.

Clarification of assessment criteria is important both for learner's self-assessment and for assessment of peers' learning activities. One of the advantages of peer assessment is that it promotes learner's ability to express own assessment in a respectful and well-reasoned way, to be objective and impartial. According to Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot, learners realise that if they want a constructive feedback about themselves, they have to think twice what and how they give feedback on other learners' work. According to Brookhart (2012), conducting peer assessment, school students gain general understanding about learning goals. Moreover, it also creates conditions for environment, where feedback and constructive criticism are welcome. School learners' self-assessment and their involvement in peer assessment are relevant because it enables them to adequately evaluate themselves and their abilities.

The Lithuanian Conception of Assessment of School Learners' Achievements and Progress (2004) states that it is important to apply various self-assessment methods, different groupings of learners, forms and most appropriate techniques that could contribute to

better self-assessment of learners' own learning outcomes. The teachers are recommended to allow school learners to write marks for their completed tasks. Later (or if evaluation does not reflect the reality) teachers have to announce and justify their assessment.

According to Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot (2005), in cases, when learner's self-assessment is not an organic part of learning, there is a risk that it may turn into meaningless routine and may lose its effect if school learners feel that assessment is conducted for the sake of a teacher rather than for their own benefit. Teachers should help their learner "envisage" the meaning of self-assessment to their further activities. Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot point out that some school students have a very strict opinion about teacher's activity and their own duties, which demonstrates that some learners depend on the teacher in all learning aspects: school children are sure that only teachers have to tell them if they have completed the work well or badly, such learners lack self-assurance, confidence in own solutions, which have to be approved by teachers. Frequently school students lack knowledge and clarity of assessment criteria according to which they have to self-assess their completed assignments, they do not always understand, what is expected of them. Petty (2006) suggests facilitating school students' self-assessment presenting guiding self-assessment questions, sample answers or solutions, putting school students in teacher's role.

Lithuanian general education schools apply formal and non-formal assessment. Formal assessment is used for evaluation of knowledge, skills, subject-specific and generic abilities seeking to establish progress. The assignments completed by school learners are assessed following the assessment criteria set in advance. Such assessment has a clearly structured and formalised nature: assessed assignments (essays, tests and homework, projects) are of certain format and completed over the assigned duration and in the assigned place. According to a big number of educational researchers, formal assessment creates conditions for fear, anxiety, mutual distrust, senses of blame and shame. Undoubtedly, these feelings have influence on diminishing of self-esteem and formation of inferiority. Under such assessment, learners build the mentality of "hunt for marks". McLaughlin (1997) states that "it is not possible to develop critical self-dependent assessment of learners, if a teacher encourages only learning by heart or unconditional compliance to own authority" (McLaughlin, 1997, 18).

Taking into account the shortcomings of formal assessment, non-formal assessment gains relevance in the process of teaching/learning. Non-formal assessment consists of evaluation of learners' skills, abilities and efforts using comments, reviews, remarks, approval or disapproval, reinforcement or incentives. The relevance of non-formal assessment lies in the fact that, being unable to write a mark for learner's efforts and progress, s/he can evaluate it using written or oral comments. It is of utmost importance to a learner, who received a low mark but invested considerable efforts in learning, as it allows to retain learning motivation and self-confidence. Comments, which indicate specific mistakes to a learner and advice how to avoid them are much more efficient than

just evaluations “good“ or “bad“. Feedback to school students is valuable in allowing to foresee further actions, to understand how to bridge the gap between the achieved outcomes and the established learning goals. On the other hand, teacher’s attention and individually expressed evaluation may be particularly suggestible to a learner because teacher’s opinion is highly important to school students. Learner’s self-confidence is a significant factor of efficient learning and the way of feedback provision as well as its form have an impact on learner’s self-esteem building. Assessing learner’s progress and achievements, it is essential to consider the fact that self-esteem is injured by public discussion of mistakes and failures, derogation of personality in the presence of classmates. On the contrary, positive publicly expressed assessment of positive qualities, abilities and progress significantly contribute to enhancement of self-esteem. If a teacher does not notice and comment on learner’s progress and only highlights shortcomings, a student may lose motivation, start devalue himself or herself and stop putting in efforts. Learning becomes an interactive link, if an interaction between the teacher and learner turns into a positive communication, which is meaningful to the student. The school students, having acquired skills of personal goal identification and self-assessment and having obtained appropriate feedback, learn to plan own learning activities seeking to attain higher learning outcomes. All this facilitates the process of learner’s becoming more self-dependent and responsible for own learning.

Though the documents regulating education emphasise the necessity to focus on individual learning needs of school students, the practice shows that schools still attract considerable attention to checking of knowledge and ranking of achievements. The control and ranking of learner’s achievements are related to teachers’ intentions to compare learners’ academic achievements, offend and demotivate learners with lower abilities. Thus, the efforts of teachers allocated to assessment of learners’ works most frequently do not become a valuable help to a learner and do not provide possibility for personal improvement. According to P. Black and D. Wiliam (1998), to enable a learner to believe in own internal powers, it is necessary to establish achievable goals and to pursue progress employing appropriate learning methods and techniques from the very start.

On the basis of their research, Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot (2005) stated that assessment has a negative impact on learners, when they are compared with each other because in such cases the learners get focused on competition rather than on personal improvement. Comparing learners’ outcomes, the school students with lower grades think that they lack abilities, learning skills, they feel inferior, which negatively affects their learning motivation and self-esteem building.

The research problem of the article may be expressed as the question: what kind of assessment of adolescent achievements and progress enhances his/her self-esteem building?

The aim of the article is to identify teachers’ attitude towards assessment of adolescent achievements as enhancing or diminishing their self-esteem.

Methodology

The qualitative research aimed to disclose the attitude of the teachers towards assessment methods of learning achievements and progress that enhance or diminish building of adolescent self-esteem. The questions of semi-structured questionnaire targeted at revelation of interpretative explanation of a specific teacher deriving from the analysis of the situation grounded on personal experience. Seeking to identify the teachers' attitude towards the assessment methods of learning achievements and progress that enhance or diminish building of adolescent self-esteem applied by themselves, they were requested to answer the following questions: "On the basis of your experience, indicate the assessment methods applied by you, which, in your opinion, enhance learner self-esteem building?" and "What assessment methods of learning achievements and progress may contribute to diminishing of learner self-esteem building?". The research sample included 86 teachers from Lithuanian general education schools. The answers of the respondents to open questions were analysed employing the method of content analysis.

Results

The responses of the respondents-teachers regarding assessment of adolescent achievement that strengthens their self-esteem were divided into two categories: non-formal assessment of achievements that enhances adolescent self-esteem and formal assessment of achievements that strengthens adolescent self-esteem. The subcategories and statements that illustrate them are provided in Table 1.

The teachers emphasised such techniques of non-formal assessment of learners such as praise, encouragement and incentive. The teachers mentioned that adolescent self-esteem is enhanced by "praise for good learning", "praise indicating positive qualities of a learner". In their responses some teachers emphasised the necessity to praise an adolescent for specific actions and real merits ("praising for specific actions and behaviour"). The answers of the teachers confirmed the statements that general praising does not promote learning progress and positive self-assessment and it has to be related to a specific assignment, specific learning outcomes, behaviour and personal achievements. The teachers also noticed that "praises and acknowledgements to learner's parents", "oral or written acknowledgements to parents" also strengthen adolescent self-esteem.

Referring to formal assessment techniques of adolescent achievements, the teachers stated that learner's self-esteem is strengthened by "public assessment and commenting of learner's outcomes" or when "learner's progress and his/her learning outcomes are presented as an example to follow for the class".

Table 1. Subcategories that reveal teacher's attitude towards assessment of adolescent learning achievements as enhancing self-esteem building

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Non-formal assessment of achievements that enhances adolescent self-esteem	Praise	<i>"Praising of a learner for achievements and progress"; "praising for specific actions and behaviour"</i>
	Encouragement	<i>"Encouragement providing a learner with self-confidence"</i>
	Incentive	<i>"Incentive"; "continuous reinforcement"</i>
	Assessment of learners' efforts and progress	<i>"It is important to notice and evaluate even the slightest progress of a learner"; "public word, praise are most efficient, individual progress assessment and discussion are of utmost importance"</i>
	Acknowledgements to learner's parents	<i>"Praise and acknowledgements to parents"; "oral or written acknowledgements to parents"</i>
	Acknowledgement to a learner	<i>"Public acknowledgement to a learner"; "oral or written acknowledgements to a learner"</i>
Formal assessment of achievements that enhances adolescent self-esteem	Public positive assessment of learning outcomes	<i>"Publicising of learner's good learning outcomes"; "learner's progress and his/her learning outcomes presented as an example to follow for the class"</i>
	Objective assessment of teacher	<i>"Assessment by mark according to clear and well-known criteria set in advance"; "clear indication of their learning problems as well as pointing out ways, how to cope with them"; "a student is provided with a possibility of being in teacher's shoes: allowed to set assessment criteria and to check assignments"</i>
	Learner's self-assessment	<i>"Encouragement of a learner to self-asses and to critically analyse own work"; "self-assessment at the end of each lesson enables a learner to feel self-dependent and responsible for own learning outcomes"</i>

From teachers' point of view, objective assessment of learner's achievements, clear and understandable criteria enhance self-esteem of adolescents. The teachers substantiated this attitude by the following statements: "assessment by mark according to clear and well-known criteria set in advance" and when "learners receive clear feedback on their learning problems and are provided with ways how to cope with them". Feedback that indicates specific mistakes as well as advice how to avoid them are more efficient compared to general evaluation "good" or "bad". Some teachers pointed out that they provide

their learners with a possibility of “being in teacher’s shoes: to set assessment criteria and to check assignments”. This is an obvious example of equal and partnership-based collaboration.

The teachers indicated that asking adolescents “reference questions regarding self-assessment” encourage them “to critically analyse own work”, to self-assess “at the end of each lesson, which enables a learner to feel self-dependent and responsible for own learning outcomes”. These statements of teachers meet the opinion expressed by Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot (2005) that efficient learning is closely related to learner’s self-esteem and motivation, whereas self-assessment strategies may play a significant role supporting these forces that empower learning.

The answers of the teachers regarding assessment of adolescent achievement that diminishes their self-esteem were divided into two categories: non-formal assessment of achievements that diminishes adolescent self-esteem and formal assessment of achievements that diminishes adolescent self-esteem. The subcategories and statements that illustrate them are provided in Table 2.

Answering the question “Which assessment methods, in their opinion, may diminish adolescent self-esteem?”, the teachers indicated the following non-formal assessment methods: humiliation of learner because of a low mark; taunting, statements and remarks that insult a learner, preaching; “label sticking”; comparison with others; undervaluation of learner’s learning and efforts, public shaming of a learner.

Adolescents most frequently tend to sensitively react to negative evaluations. Moreover, if a negative evaluation is accompanied by humiliation of learner’s personality and taunting, they go through a whole range of negative emotions, feel lacking sufficient abilities and regard themselves as losers. The teachers indicated in their responses that adolescent self-esteem is diminished, when negative learning outcomes are linked to the learner’s personality, when “a learner of his/her work is publicly criticised”, “public discussion of learner’s personality, parading of mistakes having received a bad mark”. It is important to point out that assessment of adolescent learning achievements connecting them to their personality, character features reflects the flawed attitude: “high marks – a good learner” or “low marks – a bad person”.

A number of teachers think that moralising, preaching, non-constructive remarks and reproaches”, and “label sticking” saying to the learner that “you will never learn”, “you are always late” are harmful because an adolescent is identified with the employed stereotype. The teachers state that such “categorical, negative assessment of teacher, which does not give any hope that everything will be better or different in future” results in learner’s disbelief in own abilities, doubts related to future perspectives.

Table 2. Subcategories that reveal teacher's attitude towards assessment of adolescent learning achievements and progress as diminishing their self-esteem

Category	Subcategory	Illustrating statements
Non-formal assessment of achievements that diminishes adolescent self-esteem	Diminishing of school learner's personality because of low evaluation	<i>"Publicly criticised learner or his/her work"; "public discussion of learner's personality, parading of mistakes having received a bad mark"</i>
	Taunting, insulting remarks	<i>"Taunting, statements and remarks that insult a learner"</i>
	Moralising, preaching	<i>"Moralising, preaching, non-constructive remarks, reproaches", "continuous preaching"</i>
	"Sticking labels"	<i>"Sticking labels", e.g., "you will never learn", "you are always late", etc.</i>
	Comparison with others	<i>"Comparison of learning outcomes and works with those of other learners"; "when a school learner is assessed comparing him or her with other learners; personal improvement of a learner is not evaluated"</i>
	Undervaluation of learner's efforts and learning	<i>"Undervaluation of learner's efforts, depreciation of learning outcomes, seeing of mistakes only and their emphasising"; "emphasising of learners' failures, reminding of mistakes"</i>
	Public shaming of a learner	<i>"Public discussion about a bad mark or inappropriate behaviour of a learner"; "public criticising of a learner, his/her shaming regarding poor evaluation"</i>
Formal assessment of achievements that diminishes adolescent self-esteem	Lack of objectivity, bias	<i>"Assessment as a disciplinary means"; "early prejudices of the teacher while writing the mark: a bad learner cannot get a good mark"</i>
	Prohibition to correct the mark	<i>"Failure of the teacher to forgive a learner depriving him or her of a possibility for correcting the mark"; "prohibition to correct the mark"</i>
	Unclear assessment criteria	<i>"Unclear assessment, undefined assessment criteria"</i>

It should be noted that both teachers and adolescents pointed out that self-esteem is weakened by "comparison of learning outcomes and works with those of other learners", "public criticising of a learner, his/her shaming regarding poor evaluation". Comparison with others prevents a learner from perceiving oneself as a unique personality, she or he loses self-confidence and more frequently encounters failures. A number of teachers

noticed that “undervaluation of learner’s efforts, depreciation of learning outcomes, seeing of mistakes only and their emphasising”; “emphasising of learners’ failures, reminding of mistakes” give an adolescent the feeling of being a loser or a failure.

The teachers drew attention to the necessity not to violate principles of objectivity and impartiality when formal assessment of learners’ achievement is applied. According to the teachers in the research, unclear assessment criteria may also have a negative attitude towards learners’ self-esteem. Therefore, it is essential to provide a justified explanation why a learner was evaluated in one or another way. Assessment should not instil fear or hard feelings and a learner should be aware of assessment criteria and regulations in advance. Assessment used as a disciplinary means is also ascribed to factors that diminish learners’ self-esteem. Moreover, the teachers noticed that prohibition to correct a mark contributes to weakening of adolescent self-esteem and indicates teachers’ disbelief in learners’ self-dependent efforts to achieve progress.

The teachers should attract attention to the fact that school learners’ self-assessment is closely related to adults’ assessment. Adolescents tend to ascribe significant meaning not only to peer assessment but also assessment obtained from adults. The main conditions, which self-esteem is dependent on, are how an individual evaluates own achievements in the activities of importance to him or her and how s/he feels being assessed by people, who are of relevance to him or her. It should be noted that peers’ opinion about a certain adolescent is built on teacher’s attitude and assessment.

The responses of teachers revealed that it is particularly important to help adolescents to perceive assessment results, to justify formal assessment by written or oral comments, to test and assess only what a learner has learnt, to apply various methods and techniques of assessment. Assessment of learners’ achievements and progress should be grounded on acknowledgement of individuality of each school student, belief in his or her abilities and powers to cope with powers.

Conclusions

Assessment of school students’ learning progress and achievements as feedback is a relevant factor of adolescent self-esteem building. Meaningful assessment that strengthens self-esteem is the one, which provides learners with efficient feedback, indicates guidelines for further development and contributes to gaining of self-confidence.

Adolescent-oriented achievement assessment, which activates his or her self-expression, enhances self-dependence as well as responsibility and reveals abilities, was indicated as a factor that strengthens adolescent self-esteem building. Achievement assessment that is based on constant control, disregard of differences and emphasising of learner’s mistakes is said to diminish the adolescent self-esteem building.

A more considerable attention at school should be allocated to non-formal assessment, which allows to avoid such shortcomings of traditional assessment system using marks as subjectivity, mechanical and superficial learning, focusing on knowledge and its memorising rather than on critical thinking, understanding, experience, interpretation and creation.

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Mokymosi pasiekimų ir pažangos vertinimo bei įsivertinimo įtaka paauglių savigarbai

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Santrauka

Mokinių mokymosi pasiekimų ir pažangos vertinimą galima laikyti prasmingu tada, kai jis motyvuoja mokytis ir yra suprantamas kaip kiekvieno mokinio mokymosi procese daroma pažanga, skatinanti pasitikėjimą savo jėgomis. Šiuolaikinis mokymosi pasiekimų ir pažangos

vertinimas vis dar pernelyg yra orientuotas į galutinius sprendimus apie mokinio žinias bei jų fiksavimą pažymiu. Mokykla nepakankamai orientuojasi į individualias mokinių mokymosi reikmes. Tokia vertinimo sistema neatitinka keliamų ugdymo tikslų ir nedera su šiuolaikiniais mokymo(si) metodais.

Šio darbo tikslas yra atskleisti mokytojų požiūrį į formalius ir neformalius mokinių pasiekimų vertinimo būdus, stiprinančius ir menkinančius jų savigarbą.

Situacijos analizei atlikti buvo taikomas kokybinio tyrimo metodas (pusiau struktūruota apklausa). Tyrimo duomenys apdoroti atliekant turinio ir diskurso analizę. Tyrime dalyvavo 86 Lietuvos bendrojo ugdymo mokyklų mokytojai.

Tyrimų rezultatai rodo, kad mokytojai akcentuoja būtinybę sutelkti dėmesį į vertinimą, kuris suteikia mokiniams veiksmingą grįžtamąją ryšį, nurodantį tobulėjimo kryptis, suteikia pasitikėjimo savimi. Mokytojų požiūriu, vertinimas turėtų būti traktuojamas kaip pagalba mokiniui, padedanti adekvačiai įvertinti savo gebėjimus ir galimybes, motyvuojantis siekti pažangos, skatinantis mokinį mokytis sau, pajusti mokymosi sėkmę.

Į paauglių orientuotus, aktyvinančius jo saviraišką, savarankiškumą, atsakingumą, bendradarbiavimą, kūrybiškumą skatinančius bei mokinio stiprybes ir gebėjimus atskleidžiantį pasiekimų vertinimą, mokytojai laiko paauglių savigarbą stiprinančiu veiksniu. Nuolatine kontrole, skirtųjų nepripažinimu, nepasitikėjimu grindžiamu bei į mokinio klaidų akcentavimą orientuotą pasiekimų vertinimą mokytojai nurodė kaip paauglio savigarbą menkinančius veiksnus.

Esminiai žodžiai: *vertinimas, įsivertinimas, savigarba, mokymosi pasiekimai.*

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