

Self-assessment - Key Strategy to Improvement of Higher Education Quality

Irma GRDZELIDZE*
Nino UGLAVA**

Abstract

Georgia is witnessing rapid changes to an expansion of its higher education system and institutions, that have been accompanied by policy interventions at institutional and national levels. These developments have introduced substantial changes in different aspects of higher education management. One of the most important aspects of achieving high quality at university level is supposed to be the implementation of self-assessment in the educational process.

It is widely accepted that self-assessment is a key learning strategy to autonomous language learning, enabling students to monitor their progress and relate learning to individual needs. Students are often passive in their approach to learning, and may become demotivated if they cannot see any clear progress, like their teachers. Self-assessment produces teachers who are more active and focused, and better placed to assess their own progress. The presentation highlights these issues and gives some practical suggestions for carrying out self-assessment at university level.

Teachers simultaneously create and undergo the evaluation procedure, judging their achievement in relation to themselves against their own personal criteria, in accordance with their own objectives and teaching expectations.

Self-assessment can not only make teachers and learners more active, it can assist them with the daunting task of learning how to become better ones. The best motive to teach is a perception of the value of the thing taught.

Key Words: Higher Education Management; Self-Assessment; Autonomous Language Learning.

Georgia is witnessing rapid changes to and expansion of its higher education system and institutions, what have been accompanied by policy interventions at institutional and national levels. These developments have introduced substantial changes in different aspects of higher education system. One of the most important factors of improving quality of higher education is supposed to be the implementation of self-assessment at university level.

As society shifts from an industrial age, in which a person could get by with basic reading and arithmetic skills, to an information age, which requires the ability to access, interpret, analyze, and use information for making decisions, the skills and competencies needed to succeed in today's workplace are changing as well. In response to these changes, content standards - the knowledge, skills, and behaviours needed for students to achieve at high levels - are being developed at the national and state levels in areas such as mathematics, science, geography, and history. In this atmosphere of reform, student assessment is the centrepiece of many educational improvement efforts. Policymakers hope that changes in assessment will cause teachers and schools to do things differently. Assessment reform is viewed as a means of setting more appropriate targets for students, focusing staff development efforts for teachers, encouraging curriculum reform, and improving instruction and instructional materials.

When rethinking assessment and its role in supporting educational reform we can say that assessment is changing for many reasons. Changes in the skills and knowledge needed for success, in our understanding of how students learn, and in the relationship between assessment and instruction are changing our learning goals for students and schools. Consequently, we must change our assessment strategies to tie assessment design and content to new outcomes and purposes for assessment. It means that self-assessment should be highlighted at different levels starting from students finishing with the educational institution itself. At first, we will focus on the benefits of self-assessment on learners and teachers.

* Associate Prof. Akaki Tseretely State University.Georgia

** Assistant Prof. Akaki Tseretely State University.Georgia

With the process of educational reform dramatic changes are being made in the education system and now more and more university teachers are concerned about their future. Admittedly, the job is greater than of teachers' alone. However, the initiative and spirit form improving teaching and learning must come foremost from teachers. How should teachers meet new requirements and cope with challenges? Self-assessment phenomenon will be a reliable ally for teachers in the times of uncertainty and hardship. Educators these days have a daunting challenge for the next millennium: to ensure that all students - no matter what ethnicity, creed, religion, or economic status – earn the rights and responsibilities of an educated citizen.

Besides its specific purpose self-assessment aims at assisting teachers in their work of improving teaching and learning in their classrooms, learning from their peers, setting realistic goals and evaluating their work critically. It will also provide teachers with practical knowledge and skills for improving instruction by making classroom environment work-oriented, as well as warm and supportive, encouraging cooperative learning, challenging students to reflect on lesson content, inviting student opinion on lesson topic, engaging students in active learning, providing them with feedback on their performance and special attention to those experiencing difficulties.

Awareness of teaching is empowering. The more interest teachers have in gaining awareness of how they teach, the more freedom they will have to direct their teaching toward successful student learning. Teachers simultaneously create and undergo the evaluation procedure, judging their achievement in relation to themselves against their own personal criteria, in accordance with their own objectives and teaching expectations.

It is widely accepted that self-assessment is a key learning strategy to autonomous language learning, enabling students to monitor their progress and relate learning to individual needs. Students are often passive in their approach to learning, and may become demotivated if they cannot see any clear progress, like their teachers. Self-assessment produces teachers who are more active and focused, and better placed to assess their own progress. The presentation highlights these issues and gives some practical suggestions for carrying out self-assessment at university level for provision of quality of higher education.

Self-assessment should not be restricted to the field of self-directed learning. However, the traditional formal educational setting is perhaps even more in need of new perspectives on progress than self-directed established from the start. In the conventional school and university classroom it is a practical tool, if implemented systematically and integrated into everyday classroom activities. Self-assessment can not only make students more active, it can assist them with the daunting task of learning how to communicate in another language. Above all, they can be helped to perceive their own progress and encouraged to see the value of what they are learning. The best motive to learn is a perception of the value of the thing learned.

Though the important mechanism for checking the quality of teaching, learning and assessment criteria, it is advisable to have it inspected. Effective self-assessment, supported by an integral quality improvement plan that takes into account the outcomes of inspection, is the key to improvement. For executive bodies it will be an important tool in determining the extent of risks to the quality and delivery of provision and therefore the scale of their response. The basis of self-assessment will derive from the five key questions in the inspection framework:

- How well do learners achieve?

- How effective are teaching, training and learning?

- How well do programmes and activities meet the needs and interests of learners?

- How well are learners guided and supported?

- How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?

The crucial point is to have regular inspections and prepare assessment reports in the following way: when discussing the features of effective self-assessment it should be determined that this process must be effectively led and managed and should be an integral part of the organisation's management. This requires the creation of a climate of trust in which the members of a university staff are constructively self-critical about their performance. All members of the institution should be committed to the aims of self-assessment and actively involved with it. Self-assessment of their own performance will demonstrate leadership by example. Management at all levels will actively participate in the self-assessment process as part of their responsibilities for raising standards and improving the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the provision. They will approve the self-assessment report and continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the self-assessment report and compare their self-assessment in securing improvement.

The nature of self-assessment will vary according to the scale and nature of the provision for which each faculty is responsible. Departments will need to demonstrate understanding of what they do well, what needs improving and how improvement can be monitored, achieved and evaluated. Whatever the precise approach, the key test of self-assessment report is its ability to demonstrate how high quality is sustained and improvement is ensured.

The report should directly relate to and drive the university development/action plan to demonstrate how strengths are weaknesses sustained and improved and how key areas for improvement are addressed. The outcomes of the self-assessment are a basis for action. Effectiveness will need to be measured by the regular monitoring and evaluation of progress against objectives. The self-assessment report should include an evaluation of the extent to which actions identified in the previous report have secured improvement.

The development and dissemination of good practice can assist the university to carry out accurate and robust self-assessment, to write its self-assessment reports and, as appropriate, the summaries of self-assessment reports. The ability to self-assess effectively, to identify strengths and weaknesses and to implement identified improvements is critical to the development of a continuously improving sector. Action to implement identified improvements is a necessary precondition for change.

The involvement of individuals or organisations external to the university can be helpful in assuring the rigour of a self-assessment and in strengthening objectivity. External involvement may also raise significant issues or questions, which had not previously been considered. It will also test the clarity and the effectiveness of the analysis in the self-assessment reports and confirm whether it conveys clearly what the university intends.

Following the report on self-assessment, all faculties will consider what actions will be taken to rectify any weaknesses identified and plans for enhancing the overall quality of their provision. The areas identified for quality improvement will need to take account of inspection outcomes, comparing the findings against their own self-assessment to determine what is being well done and what needs improvement. Since the inspection will judge the quality of the university's own self-assessment, the opportunity should also be taken to improve self-assessment processes in the light of this.

The university is responsible for deciding what improvements are needed and how these will be implemented. It will need to demonstrate to the planning and funding bodies that its plans are robust and are achievable. In particular, the university will need to demonstrate that:

- weaknesses identified in any inspection report are being comprehensively addressed
- a clear and urgent timescale for action is in place
- responsibility for addressing areas for improvement is clearly assigned
- funding to support improvement is in place
- weaknesses in the self-assessment process are addressed

- strengths identified in the inspection are sustained.

There are certain goals to be accomplished at institutions:

- ! At all levels of the education system (i.e., national, state, district, and classroom), assessments will be aligned to agreed-upon standards of student performance.
- ! Administrators and policymakers will support teachers and schools in changing the way they do business by eliminating assessments that are aligned to short-sighted, outdated goals.
- ! Assessments will match instructional goals and reflect the effects of good instruction.
- ! Assessment instruments will be chosen on the basis of the content to be assessed and the intended use of the assessment results.
- ! Research-based changes in teaching and learning will be reflected in improved assessment results.

We consider the following action options are essential to achieve high quality assurance:

- ! Involve teachers, parents, and students at each stage of the change process.
- ! Develop agreed-upon learning goals and standards for students or review and revise existing goals and standards.
- ! Grade-level and subject-specific teachers should review and revise outcomes that they believe are important for their students to learn and decide which grade level or subject should teach specific outcomes.
- ! Compare outcomes to the national standards to ensure sufficient coverage.
- ! Design curriculum and instruction strategies that help students learn established outcomes.
- ! Select or design assessments that elicit established outcomes.
- ! Match assessments to instructional content and student performance goals.
- ! Match assessments to the purposes for assessment.
- ! Consider the technical quality of alternative assessments when designing or selecting such assessments.