

Relationship Between EFL Learners' Self-Perceived Communication Competence and Their Task-Based and Task-Free Self-Assessment of Speaking¹

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Abstract

Self-assessment and task-based assessment have recently attracted attention in language learning and testing contexts worldwide; however, little research has been carried out to document the link between these notions. The present research was an attempt to investigate the connection between task-free/task-based self-assessment and learners' self-perceived communicative competence in speaking. To examine the link, 48 upper-intermediate and advanced language learners participated in the study. Data were collected via a self-perceived communicative competence questionnaire, the learners' self-assessment (task-based and task-free) scores, and the teachers' assessment of learners speaking. The analysis of the obtained data revealed a difference between the learners' task-based and task-free self-assessment, and a high relationship between their self-perceived communicative competence and their self-assessment of speaking. Results also revealed a positive correlation between the learners' task-based and task-free self-assessment of speaking and that of their teachers. Findings highlight the importance of self-assessment and task-based assessment in language learning to foster learner involvement.

Keywords: Self-Assessment; Task-Based Assessment; Task-Free Assessment; Self-Perceived Communicative Competence; Speaking

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1. Introduction

As one of the main alternatives for the traditional ways of assessment, self-assessment has gained a plethora of support and attention from researchers since its introduction by scholars like Upshur (1975). Sitzmann, Ely, Bell, and Bauer (2010) define self-assessment as the evaluations that people make about their current knowledge levels in a particular domain. By considering language learners as the only ones who can truly assess their success in using an L2, Upshur (1975) was one of the first advocates of self-assessment. Since then, self-assessment studies have come up with numerous advantages for self-assessment, including increased learner involvement (Dickinson, 1987), self-regulated learning (Pierce, Gardner, Dunham, & Cummings, 1993), reducing teacher workload (Patri, 2002), enhancement of learning and achievement (McDonald & Boud, 2003), and the like.

According to Kruger and Dunning (1999), overestimations of knowledge occur with unskilled individuals because their low level of competence deprives them of the metacognitive skills which are required to notice their incompetence. Self-assessment owes much of its popularity to the growing emphasis on learner independence and autonomy (Patri, 2002) where researchers like Hunt, Gow, and Barnes (1989) believe “there can be no real autonomy” without self-assessment. Similarly, Chen (2006) argues that “equipped with self-assessment skills, students gradually develop a critical attitude toward learning throughout their lives and in the long run achieve the fullest autonomy.”

The popularity of self-assessment can partly be due to self-regulated learning which requires the learners to “accurately monitor and assess their performance and recognize what an appropriate next task would be” (Kostons, Van Gog, & Paas, 2012). This popularity has increased so much that despite its shortcomings, some researchers have voted for the use of self-assessment measures instead of achievement exams as a means of measuring language education (Ghaslani, 2015; Ishag, Altmayer, & Witruk, 2015), standardized placement exams at universities (Krausert, 1991) or as vital helping tools for placement (LeBlanc & Painchaud, 1985).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Self-Perceived Communication Competence and Self-Assessment

According to McCroskey and McCroskey (1988), self-perceived communication competence (SPCC) is the way a person, based on self-awareness, considers his or her communication competence, which may not be an actual communication competence. McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) consider SPCC even more important and define it as the individuals’ perceptions of how competent they are in different communication contexts. Shahbaz, Seemab Khan, Ishtiaq Khan,

and Mustafa (2016, p. 159) define SPCC as how “an individual perceives her/his own competence for spoken communication in a certain context.” Lockley (2012) agrees that SPCC in speaking refers to how individuals perceive their own competence during spoken communication.

In order to promote accurate SPCC in English learning, some educational methods can be used to lessen the learners' anxiety. Thus, two main contributory areas are mentioned, the first of which is referred to as “the educational environment, classroom and teaching method” by Ushioda (2010) and the second which might have the greatest effect on a learning situation is referred to as educators' attitude and approach by Horwitz (2001).

As indicated by Boud (1995), all types of assessment including self-assessment involve two main points: making decisions to see whether the standards of performance are met or not and making judgments about the quality of the performance. When self-assessment is presented, it should involve students in both of these aspects. McDonald and Boud (2003) define self-assessment as a characteristic of the learners which can improve their learning if it is properly developed. Self-assessing one's knowledge and skill is a complex practice (Dunning, Heath & Suls, 2004), especially when it happens in an L2. Trainees should be able to form a cognitive representation of the training domain (Campbell & Lee, 1988, cited in Sitzmann & Johnson, 2012). After this step, they should decide how well their knowledge or skill matches the standards of the course content, but these self-assessments are not always consistent with the real skills due to the limitations of human information processing (Sitzmann & Johnson, 2012).

2.2 Task-Based Assessment, Task-Free Assessment, and Task-Based Assessment of Speaking

One of the concepts with a pivotal role in learning language and assessing is task. Nunan (2004) defines task as “a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form” (p. 4) Task-based learning requires a syllabus where the content is specified in terms of the tasks to be performed (i.e., as the basis for the whole language curriculum). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), task-based learning requires learners to actively participate in pair-work and group work, facilitate learning and deliberation, and create and explain messages for which they lack sufficient linguistic resources and prior experiences. Performing tasks makes learners engage eagerly and practically in learning practice and obtain good results. Task-based learning can make learners involve more in their own learning; hence

this can help improve their speaking. Also, task-based learning can be a chance for learners to assess their learning via self-assessment.

Although researchers in SLA (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 1989; Prabhu, 1987) define a task in different ways, most believe that the significant feature of a task is its emphasis on the communication of meaning. Brindley (1994) defined task-based assessment as “the process of evaluating, in relation to a set of explicitly stated criteria, the quality of the communicative performances elicited from learners as part of goal-directed, meaning-focused language use requiring the integration of skills and knowledge” (p. 74). In task-based language assessment (TBLA), language use is more realistic and complex than in discrete skills assessments, and it typically requires the combination of topical, social, and/or pragmatic knowledge with the knowledge of the formal components of language (Mislevy, Steinberg, & Almond, 2001).

In contrast to task-based assessment, task-free assessment refers to the method in which no task is included in the assessment of the participants’ abilities. For example, in assessing a skill such as reading, instead of being given any tasks in order to evaluate the ability, the participants read the passage, and based on the comprehension questions, accent, pronunciation or any other intended criteria, the assessor assesses the skill. Speaking in English plays a pivotal role as it helps participants to communicate better in English speaking contexts. There are different methods for assessing this fundamental skill, including oral interviews and role plays. Task-based, task-free, and self-assessment are three different types of assessing this skill that will be dealt with in this study.

Self-assessment is one way of self-evaluation, but it might not be the most popular and the best one. It is a process for looking at one’s progress which is important to learning. In other words, in self-assessment, students make judgment about their own work. Task-based assessment of speaking refers to assessing students’ speaking abilities as they are doing a task. In other words, a task provides learners with a context which seems natural for language using. Based on the participants’ interaction and speaking with each other for completing the task, the researcher can assess their speaking skill. Furthermore, as learners want to complete a task, they will have more opportunities to interact. The interaction is considered a way of facilitating language learning because learners need to try to understand each other and to express their own ideas (Candlin & Murphy, 1987, as cited in Bygate, 1999).

2.3 Task-Based vs. Task-Free Self-Assessment of Speaking

Task-free assessment and task-free self-assessment are two methods of assessment that can be used for assessing different skills. As the name speaks for

itself, in these methods, the assessment process is not conducted with completing a task, and the participants' skill is assessed without considering their task completion. Whereas task-based self-assessment of speaking refers to an assessment where a participant fulfills a task through speaking, task-free assessment of speaking refers to the kind of assessment where there is not any specific task in the assessment process and the skill is assessed without administering any task to the participants. Task-free self-assessment of speaking refers to a particular method of speaking where the participants assess their own speaking skill without any special kind of task. For example, the participants speak on a specific topic and record their voice simultaneously. Then they can listen to the recorded voice and assess their speaking ability based on the intended criteria.

3. Review of Related Literature

Almost no systematic research seems, to our knowledge, to have been conducted on the task-free assessment so far, and the existing studies favor task-based assessment of different skills (Babaii, Taghaddomi, & Pashmforoosh, 2016; Ellis, 2003; Fastré, van der Klink, Amsing-Smit, & van Merriënboer, 2014; Wilches 2014). A brief account of the existing literature on SPCC, self-assessment in general, self-assessment of speaking, and task-based assessment of speaking is provided next to pave the way for our project.

According to Blood and Blood (2004), research reveals that poor self-perceptions of communicative competence can inhibit communication learning and cause reduced interactions and social withdrawal. In a study of SPCC, Blood, Boyle, Blood, and Nalesnik (2010) examined the communication apprehension and SPCC of adolescents who stuttered. The results revealed higher levels of communication apprehension and lower scores of SPCC in learners who stuttered in comparison to regular learners. More pertinent to this study, some scholars have found significant correlations among SPCC and anxiety (Cheek & Buss, 1981; Duran & Kelly, 1988). Considering the importance of self-assessment of speaking ability and SPCC in focusing on the learner and their significant role in the process of L2 learning, research studies are needed to shed light on these two concepts and their effect on each other as well as on the L2 learning process.

The assessment-for-learning approach is one of the fields which highlights the importance of self-assessment and considers it a necessary means in making the transition from summative to formative assessment, besides highlighting the productivity of formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Some studies have revealed low correlations between teacher and student assessments (Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 1997). For instance, Patri (2002) examined the agreement among teacher-, self-, and peer-assessments of oral presentation skills with undergraduate

Chinese students. He found that in the context of feedback, peer-assessments were comparable to teacher-assessments but the self-assessments were not.

In their summary of research studies on self-assessment, Brantmeier, Callender, Yu, and McDaniel (2012) mention that most studies examining self-assessment from 1978 to 2010 have focused on adults and skills of listening and reading and most of them have inconclusive findings. Many of these studies have investigated the correlations between teacher assessment and self-assessment and as mentioned earlier; some have reported high correlations between self- and tutor-assessment (Chen, 2006; Stefani, 1994; Sullivan & Hall, 1997); and others have come up with low correlations (Abolfazli Khonbi & Sadeghi, 2015; Patri, 2002).

Among the few studies focusing on self-assessment in speaking, De Saint-Leger and Storch (2009) worked on self-assessment in adult students of French in Australia and found that speaking self-assessment affected willingness to communicate in class as well as confidence in a positive way. Butler and Lee (2006) also worked on self-assessment of speaking with elementary school students learning English in Korea and found the on-task format to be more accurate than off-task format.

Wilches (2014) investigated a private language school in Bogotá, Colombia, which tried to foster students' oral competence via task-based teaching. The language school was interested in the use of technology for English learning and teaching, and had recently begun utilizing Laboratory Means of Speaking (LMS), which offers interactive tools for learners to practice their language skills. They also utilized some types of voice tools, which included voice authoring, e-mail, presentation, podcasting and a message board. In his study, Wilches (2014) concentrated on the use of the Voice Board tool—a threaded voice discussion board—by which students could record, playback, listen, edit, and post audio messages while performing a communicative speaking task. Having assessed students' performance in speaking tests at the end of the semester, the researcher revealed that utilizing LMS and speaking tasks throughout the course had a great effect on improving students' performance and self-confidence. In the final test, students were asked to perform tasks like the ones they had practiced throughout the course such as presenting a spontaneous talk, role playing, and so on. Similarly, Wu, Liao, and Debaker (2016) investigated TBLA on two groups of Chinese marine engineers. The results revealed that students with task-based assessment were greatly satisfied with task-based instruction.

Fastré, van der Klink, Amsing-Smit, and van Merriënboer (2014) investigated the effect of performance-based assessment criteria on students' performance and their self-assessment skills. The participants were 93 students from the domain of nursing and health care. The performance-based assessment group

was provided with a preset list of assessment criteria and then the performance-based group was compared with the competence-based group. It was found that the performance-based group outperformed the competence-based one. The students who had been given performance-based assessment criteria made more accurate assessment and scored higher on task performance during practice compared to those who had been given competency-based assessment. Fastré et al. (2010) concluded that the use of performance-based criteria is beneficial for students due to their task-specific character. Consistent with Fastré et al.'s claims (2010), Munirah and Muhsin's (2015) study showed that task-based assessment could significantly contribute to speaking accuracy and fluency. In their study, task-based assessment was employed as a classroom action research; speaking test and observation were used as instruments. The study found support for the positive role task-based assessment and task-based teaching play on language learners' success.

Babaii, Taghaddomi, and Pashmfroosh (2016) investigated the match between the learners' ($n = 26$) assessment of their own speaking performance and that of their teachers ($n = 6$). The learners were asked to assess their own audio-recorded speaking performance before and after their being provided with scoring criteria and practice session. Also, the teachers were asked to assess the learners' audio-recorded speaking performance according to the given scoring criteria. The outcomes revealed a significant difference between the learners' assessment before and after practice session. Furthermore, a difference was traced between the teachers' and learners' assessment of the learners' audio-recorded speaking performance. Such studies help teachers to identify the gaps and teach learners how to assess their own performance and employ it positively in improving their skills.

To the best knowledge of the present researchers, there is a scarcity of studies on task-free self/assessment, in general (Ginther, 2012; Luoma, 2005; Khabbazbashi, 2015), and only a few studies have investigated task-based assessment of speaking ability (e.g., Wilches, 2014). As such, there seems to be a gap in the literature on the task-free assessment of speaking, and this study is one attempt to fill this gap by comparing task-free and task-based assessment of speaking. To fill this gap, this study was proposed to compare task-free and task-based assessment (self and teacher) of speaking by seeking answers to the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between task-free and task-based self-assessment of speaking?
2. Is there any significant relationship between task-free self-assessments of speaking and learners' SPCC?

3. Is there any significant relationship between task-based self-assessments of speaking and learners' SPCC?
4. Is there any significant relationship between task-free self-assessment of speaking and teacher's task-free assessment of learners' speaking?
5. Is there any significant relationship between task-based self-assessment of speaking and teacher's task-based assessment of learners' speaking?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

In order to conduct the study, 48 male and female (within the age range of 18-37) learners studying at a language center were recruited. The participants were studying in upper-intermediate and advanced levels (based on the institute's in-house placement and final achievement exam results) in Urmia University Language Institute. The sampling method adopted was purposive sampling (because we needed participants at upper-intermediate/advanced levels and we had easy access to participants at that institute).

4.2 Instrumentation

The data were collected through the speaking assessment scale (see Appendix A) which was developed considering the standard criteria employed in speaking assessments based on factors like fluency, accuracy and grammar, content, pronunciation, intonation, and vocabulary, ranging from 1 to 6: 1 (*starter*), 2 (*preintermediate*), 3 (*intermediate*) 4 (*upper-intermediate*) 5 (*advanced*), and 6 (*native-like*).

The Self-Perceived Communication Competence scale (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, see Appendix B) was used to assess the participants' communication competence. This scale is not a measure of actual communication competence: It is a measure of perceived competence. The scale has a good alpha reliability estimate (above .85). This scale measures SPCC on a scale of 0 (*completely incompetent*) to 100 (*completely competent*). Total scores higher than 87 indicate high SPCC, and total scores lower than 59 are indicators of poor SPCC.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

The self-assessment process consisted of two types: task-free and task-based self-assessment of speaking. For the task-free self-assessment, the learners were required to self-assess their speaking ability through narrating a memory from their past and meanwhile recording their speech. Then, they were asked to give themselves a score on a scale of speaking assessment, ranging from (1 to 6). In order

to rate their speaking, before listening to their recorded voices, the learners were trained on how to rate themselves based on the criteria identified in the self-assessment scale.

For the task-based self-assessment of speaking, the students were assigned to pairs to do the task together. They were given a topic (Lying can be acceptable in some situations. Do you agree or disagree? Support your idea by reasons and examples.) to discuss with their partners. They were also asked to record their voices while doing the task and then listen to their voices and complete the task-based self-assessment process.

Moreover, in order to find the relationship between the learners' self-assessment and the teacher's assessment, their teacher was asked to listen to the learners' recorded voices and assess both task-free and task-based performance of each learner on the speaking assessment scale mentioned above.

Furthermore, to find the link between the learners' self-appraisals of their speaking ability and their communication competence, they were requested to file out the Self-Perceived Communication Competence scale (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988). It was developed to gather information on how competent people think they are in different communication contexts (public speaking, meetings, group discussions, and interpersonal conversations) and with different receivers (strangers, friends, and acquaintances).

5. Results

5.1 Question #1

To answer the first research question, both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. The mean scores for the learners' task-based and task-free self-assessments were 25.97 and 23.64, respectively (out of a maximum score of 36). These results indicate that the learners in task-based self-assessment outperformed themselves in task-free self-assessment. To check whether this difference was statistically significant, a paired-samples *t* test was run. The *t* value of 3.44 showed a difference between the mean scores of the two groups of task-based and task-free self-assessments.

Moreover, in order to investigate the effect size of the administered *t* test, Eta squared was calculated. The obtained effect size of this *t* test was 0.20, which is considered a small size based on the criteria developed by Cohen (1988). Based on the results of the *t* test obtained above, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the learners' task-based and task-free self-assessment, in favor of task-based self-assessment.

5.2 Question # 2

In order to answer the second research question, descriptive statistics and correlational analysis were conducted. The mean scores for the learners' SPCC and task-free self-assessment speaking were 68.14 (out of 120) and 23.64 (out of 36), respectively. A Pearson correlation was run to probe any significant relationship between the learners' task-free self-assessment of speaking and their SPCC. There was a statistically significant relationship between their task-free self-assessment of speaking and their SPCC ($r = .71, n = 48, p < .0005$). It can be concluded that the learners' high task-free self-assessment speaking scores were associated with the high scores of SPCC, and that low task-free self-assessment speaking scores were associated with the low scores of SPCC.

5.3 Question # 3

The mean scores for the learners' task-based self-assessments of speaking and their SPCC were 25.97 and 68.14. To investigate the degree of correlation between their task-based self-assessment of their speaking and their SPCC, another Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was run. There was a significant relationship between the students' task-based self-assessment of their speaking and their SPCC ($r = .72, n = 48, p < .0005$), with the learners' high task-based self-assessment rating associated with their high scores on SPCC.

5.4 Question # 4

To investigate the difference between the mean score of the learners' and teacher's assessments, descriptive statistics for the learners' task-free self-assessment of their speaking and the teacher's task-free assessment of their speaking were employed. The mean scores for the learners' task-free self-assessment of speaking and the teacher's task-free assessment of their speaking were 23.64 and 21.95. There was a slight difference in the mean score of the learners' self-assessment and their teacher's assessment of their task-free of speaking performance. This means compared to the learners, the teacher scored the learners' performance more meticulously. This overestimation by the learners indicates that they considered their performance more successful and scored it higher, compared to their teacher.

Another Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was run to find out whether there was a relationship between these assessments. There was a strong positive relationship between the learners' task-free self-assessment of their speaking and the teacher's task-free assessment of their speaking ($r = .87, n = 48, p < .0005$). This means the learners' self-assessment was in line with their teacher's assessment of the learners' performance. The learners who had assigned high scores

in the speaking assessment scale for their own performance were equally assigned as having a good performance by their teacher and vice versa.

5.5 Question # 5

To answer the fifth research question, first descriptive statistics were calculated. The mean scores for the learners' task-based self-assessment and the teacher's task-based assessment of their speaking were 25.97 and 22.39. There was a little difference between the mean scores of tasked-based speaking assessed separately by the teacher and by the learners. The data indicate that the learners overestimated their performance in comparison to the teacher's assessment. This can be due to the self-assessment aspect of evaluation. In self-report tools, in order to create a high image of themselves, individuals may reveal self-appraisal of their skills.

Another Pearson product-moment correlation was employed to see whether there was any significant relationship between the learners' task-based self-assessment and the teacher's task-based assessment of their speaking. A significant relationship was found between the learners' task-based self-assessment and the teacher's task-based assessment of their speaking ($r = .89$, $n = 48$, $p < .0005$), with the high scores of learners from their self-assessment associated with the high scores of teacher's assessment of learners' speaking performance. Based on the strong correlation, it can be concluded that the learners' self-assessment was, to a great extent, consistent with their teacher's assessment of their speaking performance. The performances scored high by the learners were also scored high by the teacher.

6. Discussion

This study was conducted to investigate the links between self-assessment (task-based and task-free) of speaking and SPCC, on the one hand, and the relationship between self- and teacher-assessment, on the other. The results revealed that there was a significant relationship between self-assessment and SPCC, and that teacher assessment and student assessments were highly correlated. Also, a significant difference between task-free and task-based self-assessments of the learners was detected. In other words, the learners scored themselves better in task-based speaking (which was a discussion about telling a lie in some situations) than in task-free one (which involved telling a story from past memories). This finding can be understood as better student engagement while performing a task and is in line with literature on self-assessment which finds it to be a rather valid measure of language skills and advocates its use instead of more traditional and teacher-centered types of assessment (Chen, 2006; Stefani, 1994; Sullivan & Hall, 1997).

This finding also suggests the importance of context, episodic memory, and the experience of using different skills in the classroom and the effects it can have

on increasing the accuracy of learners' self-assessments (Ross, 1998). This finding can be interpreted to add support to Butler and Lee's (2006) research which suggested that self-assessment questions completed by learners immediately after a task were more accurate than off-task questions where students could not attend to the language directly. It seems that in order to have more accurate self-assessment practices and use them as an essential part of the classroom experience, we need to focus more on self-assessments that are based on immediate concrete classroom tasks.

TBLA has recently received great attention from language testers as a means to increase the quality of learners' communicative performances via the integration of skills and knowledge (Gleason & Suvorov, 2011). Compared to discrete skill assessment, TBLA is more realistic and challenging (Mislevy, Steinberg, & Almond, 2001); this is in accordance with our observations for the first research question, as learners' task-based self-assessment of speaking was found to be more successful than their task-free self-assessment. Ellis (2003) points out that task-based assessment is regarded as a way of obtaining a close relationship between the test performance and the criterion of performance, that is, their performance on test and their real world performance.

Many scholars argue that task-based speaking assessment can improve learners' motivation, involvement, and success in learning. Richards and Rodgers (2001), for example, debated that tasks enhance learners' motivation to perform better as they require learners to involve themselves in differently designed interactions or in cooperative work. According to Sae-Ong (2010), through communicative tasks in speaking classes, accuracy and fluency can be achieved and promoted. Mislevy, Steinberg, and Almond (2001) claimed that compared to traditional discrete-skills assessments, TBLAs can assess language in more realistic and challenging context, which is an indicator of actual performance. Similarly, Shehadeh and Coombe (2010) raise concerns that the use of traditional examination-oriented systems can impede learners' willingness to get involved in their learning experience. Traditional examination-oriented systems have been proven to be fruitless in developing learners' communicative skills whereas task-based assessments are getting more and more popular by learners.

6.1 Self-Assessment and Self-Perceived Communication Competence

As for the possible correlations between self-assessment and SPCC, the results revealed significant correlations between task-free and task-based self-assessment of speaking and SPCC scores. This means that the learners' SPCC scores were in line with their actual performance. The outcome of the current research validates the view that SPCC brings about willingness to communicate in learning contexts (Ghonsooly, Khajavy, & Asadpour, 2012; Hashimoto, 2002). The findings

are also in accordance with Galajda's (2012) study in which he found a positive relationship between willingness to communicate and SPCC. The participants were 50 first-year Polish University students that completed Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and SPCC scales. The results showed that SPCC strongly impacted the participants' willingness to communicate. This indicates that EFL contexts may inhibit one's willingness to engage in communication where the level of WTC may not be reasonably high.

Consistent with the findings of the present research, Lockley (2012) indicated that self-assessment can be a facilitator of accurate SPCC; thus, educational methods that promote self-evaluation must be supported and enhanced. Self-assessment encourages self-criticism and self-discipline which, in turn, lead to awareness and concern about one's weaknesses (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Making learners involved in self-assessment tasks assists them in deepening their understanding of the quality of their learning and learned materials and skills and reflects their progress.

Also, the relationship between the learners' task-based self-assessment of speaking and their SPCC was stronger than the relationship between task-free self-assessment of speaking. This can signify that learners feel a close relation between their task-based speaking performance and their communication competence skills. In line with the findings of the present study, Shahbaz, Seemab Khan, Ishtiaq Khan, and Mustafa (2016) concluded that through task-based speaking, learners perform more successfully and often have high SPCC. This may be due to the fact that EFL learners may assess their own abilities in light of their perceived communication competence.

However, the present results contradict Lockley's (2012) findings in that he concluded that SPCC did not correlate with the actual speaking performance of the learners. In the current study, both teacher's assessment of the learners' performance and the learners' self-assessment of their speaking performance enjoyed a significantly positive relationship with each other, which can be an indicator of the learners' actual speaking performance capability.

6.2 Learners and Self-Assessment

Despite their unfamiliarity with self-assessment practices, the learners in this study were really enthusiastic about assessing their own speaking ability, especially in the task-based assessment when they needed to discuss the topic, record their voice, and assess their speaking all on their own. All this highlights the effectiveness of self-assessment practices in fostering learner autonomy, self-regulated learning, and learner motivation (Gardner, 1999; Ross, 1998). While brainstorming the proper criteria for speaking assessment, the learners were also

eager to rate their own performance, which indicates how motivating the self-assessment can prove for learners (Ross, 1998). This is in line with Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling's (2002) proposal on using self-assessment as a learning tool and paying attention to the process. They claimed that self-assessment increases learners' involvement in language learning and even brings the feeling of responsibility among learners for their own learning.

The surge of interest in self-assessment motivates learners to perform better self-assessment in a long-life learning skill. In a study on the benefits and problems of self-assessment, Nikolovska (2015) found that the learners benefited from many aspects including developing reflective skills, critical thinking, and raising learners' motivation for learning. He also argued that besides advantages, self-assessment may involve some problems such as finding the time to check learners' self-assessment checklists and their perception of self-assessment. Hattie (2008), in a meta-analysis of 800 studies, found that the self-reported scores from the learners' self-assessments were a prominent strategy for improving their achievement. These results find support from the current study as to the benefits of self-assessment in enhancing the performance and motivation of learners. This fact highlights the importance of training learners how to self-assess their performance and enhance their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.

In contrast to the findings of the present study, some researchers could not identify a significant difference between self- and teacher-assessment. One of such studies was conducted by Abolfazli Khonbi and Sadeghi (2015) in which they investigated Iranian EFL learners' attitudes toward self-, peer-, and teacher-assessment in the form of three intact classes. Sixty-three participants from Urmia and Tabriz Universities participated in the study, and the results of the analysis revealed that all the three experimental groups had positive attitudes toward their assessment experience; however, no significant difference was found between the assessment types.

Although the findings of this study support the reliability and necessity of using self-assessment in L2 classrooms and emphasize its influence on other characteristics of the learners, the results should be interpreted with caution. Like any other studies concerned with speaking self-assessment, this study is susceptible to extraneous factors in the self-assessment process. To come up with more reliable results, future studies should try to control more intervening factors, such as unequal proportion of male and female participants and employing purposive sampling instead of randomly selected sampling. The current study was an empirical study intended to examine the difference between task-based and task-free assessments in an EFL context. A bigger number of learners as participants with different demographic backgrounds and various tasks can be employed to make the results

more generalizable. Furthermore, in-depth investigations can be done to support the effects of self-assessment in learning and testing contexts, particularly the self-assessment of task-based activities.

7. Conclusion

The importance of self-assessment and task-based assessment in learners' learning experience becomes evident at the end of this study. Thus, this research was an attempt to investigate task-free, and task-based, self-assessment and SPCC in learners' speaking skill and delve into the relationship between these concepts. A difference between the learners' task-based and task-free self-assessment and their outperformance in task-based assessment indicates the influential effects of task in learners' performance. Also, the close relationship of the learners' SPCC with their self-assessment of speaking highlights the importance of learners' opinion in their communication skills. The present study can influence EFL instruction by taking into account concepts like task-based instruction and testing, and highlighting their roles in learners' success. Besides, this research can have contributions to the field of language testing via involving learners more actively in their assessment process and by boosting motivation among them to do so.

From the evidence provided in this study, some theoretical and pedagogical implications may be drawn for L2 learning and teaching researchers, teachers, syllabus designers. More elaboration on self-assessment and task-based speaking performance can provide educators and teachers with the opportunity for practicing task-based activities and self-assessment performances. Hence, teachers and language educators are recommended to enhance self-assessment and task-based assessment in language learning classes and environments to foster their involvement and pave the way for their success. Also, the outcomes of this study may inspire teachers teaching speaking to adapt some of the activities in the usual course book according to a more task-based approach, so that students would participate in oral practice of language actively and, in turn, it would help them improve their speaking abilities.

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Appendix A
Self-Assessment Scale

| Name..... | Gender | | Age | Level of Class | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | Poor 1 | Preintermediate 2 | Intermediate 3 | Upper- Intermediate 4 | Very Good 5 | Excellent 6 |
| Accuracy & Grammar | | | | | | |
| Fluency | | | | | | |
| Vocabulary | | | | | | |
| Content | | | | | | |
| Pronunciation | | | | | | |
| Intonation | | | | | | |