

SELF-ASSESSMENT:

The experiences with and opinions on self-assessment among students and their teachers

Master's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Itsearviointi on merkittävä osa kieltenoppimista, sillä sen avulla oppilaat voivat muun muassa huomata vahvuutensa ja heikkoutensa, kehittää itseään tarvittavilla osa-alueilla, sekä asettaa itselleen realistisia opiskelutavoitteita. Tämän tutkimuksen kohteina olivat oppilaiden sekä heidän opettajiensa itsearvioinnin tuntemus ja sen käyttö englannin oppitunneilla. Tutkimus koostui kahdesta yhdeksäsluokkalaisten ryhmästä ja kahdesta abiturienttiryhmästä. Lisäksi jokaisen ryhmän opettajat vastasivat heille tehtyyn kyselyyn. Yhteensä tutkimukseen osallistui 95 oppilasta ja neljä opettajaa Kuopiosta ja Jyväskylästä. Aineisto kerättiin joulukuussa 2011 ja tammikuussa 2012.</p> <p>Oppilaat täyttivät kyselyn koskien itsearviointiin kohdistuvia asenteita, sen käyttöä englannin oppitunneilla ja sen tarjoamia hyötyjä sekä haittapuolia. Tämän lisäksi jokaisen ryhmän senhetkinen englanninopettaja täytti kyselyn, joka koski opettajien asenteita ja mielipiteitä oppilaiden itsearviointeja kohtaan. Tuloksia analysoitiin kvalitatiivisesti. Ensin samanikäisten ryhmien vastaukset yhdistettiin ja niitä vertailtiin. Lisäksi näiden kahden eri ikäluokan vastauksia vertailtiin keskenään. Lopuksi myös opettajien antamien vastauksien verrannollisuutta toisiinsa ja heidän ryhmiinsä tarkasteltiin.</p> <p>Tuloksista huomattiin, että monet oppilaat ovat käyttäneet itsearviointia aiemminkin. Oppilaat pystyivät näkemään itsearvioinnissa monia etuja, mutta he eivät olleet innostuneita käyttämään sitä nykyistä enemmän englannintunneilla. Opettajien kokemukset itsearvioinnin käytöstä olivat suurimmalta osin positiiviset, sillä sen nähtiin auttavan myös opettajia muun muassa arvioinnin suhteen, mutta heillä oli epäilyksensä oppilaiden omien arviointien rehellisyydestä.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Self-assessment can be seen as an important factor to language learning and teaching, as it can, for instance, provide various kind of information on the skills of students, help them to notice their strengths and weaknesses in certain areas of language learning and use, and thus to focus on the essential in learning for them. In addition, self-assessment can help students to set individualistic and realistic goals for their future studies (Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001: 54). Through evaluating oneself, students can become more independent in assessing their own skills. Moreover, not only students can benefit from self-assessment, but also teachers can get valuable information to help them with grading and to notice the level of their students' skills. Based on this, teachers can plan their teaching methods and future lessons. Thus the concept of self-assessment, its use in general, the possible factors affecting its use and results, and its use as a part of grading system are more discussed in the present study.

The concept of self-assessment has gained more value in recent years in the European countries, as it has been emphasized in curricula (Huhta 2003: 20). Thus it is encouraged to be used in every subject in schooling. Moreover, it does not limit only to school subjects, as it can be used in various workplaces too. Self-assessment can give its participants significant information about their skills in certain areas, especially about those, in which they need improvement. Therefore it is productive to study the concept of self-assessment more deeply in order to find out the ways in which self-assessment could affect present and future learning, for instance.

The present study was conducted in Kuopio and Jyväskylä in December 2011 and January 2012. The main focus was on two different groups from two age-levels. The participants were two groups of 9th graders in comprehensive school and two groups of 3rd graders in upper secondary school. The results from the same-aged groups were studied together when the findings from the students were considered. Altogether 95 students took part in the study. In addition, the attitudes towards and the opinions on self-assessment of their teachers', in total four, were studied. These participants were

chosen, since they provided an example of a continuum in the Finnish school system. Therefore they were expected to have quite similar studies, studying methods and topics to be covered in their English lessons.

The following chapters concentrated on presenting the term *self-assessment* in depth. First, the concept of self-assessment was looked into in Chapter 2. Within the concept the topics of its history, criteria and the features of introducing self-assessment to students were discussed, for instance. The factors promoting and affecting self-assessment and its use were covered too. In other words, the concept of self-assessment was defined more deeply.

Second, the use of self-assessment among students and teachers was discussed in Chapter 3. There were various factors affecting its use, such as teachers' roles and the possibility of using self-assessment as a part of grading system. In addition, the topic of the importance of practice in self-assessment was discussed in length.

Subsequently, the present study, its participants and methods were presented in depth in Chapter 4. In addition, the findings were profoundly covered, as the present study included five major topics. First of them was the familiarity of self-assessment. Second, since the introduction of self-assessment was seen to have a significant value to the successfulness of assessing oneself, both the teachers and their students were asked about introducing self-assessment to the students and its methods. The introduction was depicted as having a significant influence on how students perceive self-assessment and use it in their future studies. This was discussed more in Chapters 2.3, 5.1 and 5.5.1.

Third, the various features of self-assessment were discussed in Chapters 5.2 and 5.5.2. The students were asked about the possible positive and negative features of self-assessment in general, and the personal experiences they had had with self-assessment. Thus the students and the teachers got a chance to contemplate the various aspects of self-assessment. Fourth, discussed more in Chapter 5.3, the students were asked to record the method of evaluating themselves, or in other words, the factors on which they based their own assessments.

Subsequently, discussed in Chapter 5.4, the topic of using self-assessment as a part of grading was covered in the present study. The students were asked whether their self-assessments had previously affected their grades and whether they should have an effect on grading. The latter question was asked from the teachers too.

The results gotten from the students were then compared among the same-aged groups and between the two different age-groups in Chapters 5.1 through 5.4. In addition, the results were compared to the ones given by their teachers. Some of the answers gotten from the teachers were individually analysed or compared with their associates too. In Chapter 5.5, the results from the teachers were discussed in depth. Finally, the discussion brought some of the most notable findings and the possible suggestions for future studies together in Chapter 6.

2 THE CONCEPT OF SELF- ASSESSMENT

2.1 The history, purpose and use of self-assessment

One way to define self-assessment is to say that it is a term that includes a variety of practices, some of which are more applicable to higher education than others. In other words, self-assessment is not a concept that can be described shortly, as it involves a range of factors affecting its design, process and evaluation. The topic of self-evaluation is not an entirely new topic in schooling (Dann 2002: 73; Brew 1995: 50), as it is an integral part of teaching and learning (Schratz et al. 2000: 94) However, it has gained more value in recent years as it has been emphasized in curricula at least in the European countries, no matter what the subject is (Huhta 2003: 20). In addition to its stronger role, the concept of self-assessment is nowadays used in many different ways, and thus it is important to distinguish the possible uses of it, as one can think of self-assessment as a constantly on-going process or as a goal to reach for. Moreover, self-assessment can be used in various situations, such as in schools and workplaces (Tuominen 2010: 5).

In self-assessment, students have a chance to take more responsibility for their own learning as they get to judge their own skills. Through this they have the possibility to realize the areas of language use that need to be improved. Thus learners can develop their language skills independently, responsibly and to monitor them (Lehtola 2011: 13; Walser 2009: 299). This individualization that self-assessment can bring has been an important topic in the Nordic countries and a concern already since the sixties (Eriksson 1993: 3; Boud 1986: 3). According to Boud (1995: 14-15), it is important to develop one's self-assessment skills, since they are central to effective and meaningful learning for everyone for the future. With effectiveness, he continues, learners become more able to influence their own learning and do not only wait for others to do it for them. In addition, effective assessment can help learners to close the gap between where they are currently performing and where they could or should be (Paratore and McCormack 2007: 16). In other words, self-assessment can help learners to set future goals and to

learn for themselves in order to achieve these goals (Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001: 54). This issue of being more self-directive will be discussed later in Chapter 2.4.2.

Although the concept of self-assessment seems to be quite often promoted in schools, it can be rather difficult to understand (Dann 2002: 73), especially for those who are dealing with it for the first time or have not gotten proper introduction and/or instructions, which will be discussed later in Chapter 2.3, for it. However, one should concentrate on its benefits and not see it as a time-consuming activity or as an assignment that shows only weaknesses, as instead as an essential part of teaching, meaningful learning and assessing. (Schratz et al. 2000: 94; Rodriguez-Garcia and White 2005: 11; Lepistö 2008: 1). However, this might be difficult if one has never used it, has only had negative experiences with it or is not as self-directive as one should be in order to achieve the wanted learning goals (Elsinen 2007: 362).

When dealing with self-assessment, it is significant that students understand why they are doing it, since otherwise they would not benefit from it. If the given assessment truly seeks to give some indication of one's level of learning and development in beneficial ways, learners have to understand and contribute to its process (Dann 2002: 2). The active participation of students in all stages of learning process was emphasized more in the 1970s than before (Huhta 2003: 20; 2007: 327). This has led to a change of goals, especially in higher education, and nowadays the focus is more on helping students to recognize their own skills and how to use them successfully in their future learning and professions (Lew et al. 2010: 135).

There has been a quite recent conceptual shift in education, where the perspective has changed from being teacher-centred to a more student-centred one (Boud 1995: 24). It could be due to this that self-assessment has gained more and more popularity and has been the topic of discussion in many cases, as an emphasis on student-centred learning has grown over the years (Butler and Lee 2010: 6). Lehtola (2011: 7) agrees on the change in learning methods, as she states that learning has become more of a topic of inner regulation, which is discussed within the topic of self-directive learning in Chapter 2.4.2 too, than before, and that empirical learning is now greatly emphasized.

However, in addition to student-centred self-assessment, teachers have had their fair share of the increase of self-assessment too. Teachers are encouraged to share their authority in assessment with their students (Cram 1995: 272), and have students to become more able to assess themselves, which can decrease staff's pressure in assessing. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.2.1. These educational advantages have gained more attention and now one of the goals in schooling is to make students life-long learners and help them to self-reflect their own development through monitoring (Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001: 53; Anderson 2009: 3). Lepistö (2008: 1) mentions that teachers are even obliged to enhance student's reflective skills in assessment in the best possible way. In addition, teachers' self-evaluation has gained more importance and increased even rapidly since the 1950s, being now a standard part of being a teacher in most education systems (Nikolic and Cabaj 2000: 14).

2.2 Criteria in self-assessment

When one considers the concept of self-assessment, it is significant to involve the terms of criteria too, as they can be considered as salient components of self-assessment (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 66). Simplistically explained, criteria should consist of information about the learning area to be assessed, the goals one wants to achieve through self-assessment and the standards one should reach with assessment (Boud 1995: 194) However, criteria cannot be specified more closely, as its contents, such as goals and area of learning, vary according to the situation at hand. Moreover, one should notice that thinking in terms of criteria has been thought to be one of the most difficult aspects in self-assessment for both teachers and students (Boud 1986: 16; 1995: 194).

For self-assessment to be useful and reliable, it must meet the following standards. First of all, it should be credible enough. Therefore it should be as objective as possible, although credibility alone does not make self-assessment profitable. However, this is contradictory with the overall concept of self-assessment, where it is seen as a more personal and subjective way of assessing oneself, which should be taken into account when using it as a part of grading. Thus one can contemplate whether self-assessment

can be used as an objective evaluation and therefore if the standards of it being a reliable source of evaluation can be achieved. In addition, self-assessment should be systematic, and thus well-planned on the basis of the wanted goals and purposes behind learning. Another criterion to consider is how valuable the given assessment is, as it should have some value to authority and students. If it does not present any beneficial sides to it, students and teachers can neglect it already from the beginning. Moreover, self-assessment should be user-owned. This means that if its results are to be further used, they should be used for getting better management for the gotten results by teachers and students. (Rodriguez-Garcia and White 2005: 10)

A significant factor to criteria is that students understand the goals of learning, since otherwise they would not know how to assess their current performance. This means that students need to be able to assess their work and skills based on criteria that are understandable to them. In addition, the given criteria must be shared, so that a whole group of learners has the same standards and stable targets to measure their work against. (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 66)

Although criteria have to be mutually shared within a group, the outlook of self-assessment can vary a lot in different cases, as there are many ways to produce it. These procedures can be almost unnoticeable if they are integrated into learning, such as learning diaries, or they can be more separate and noticeable, test-like actions given by teachers or other authorities. (Huhta 2003: 22) Thus one can use self-evaluation scales to describe a variety of skills in language learning.

However, self-evaluation scales differ from other assessment scales in two ways at minimum. The first difference is that a self-assessment scale is in first person singular form, whereas other scales are more neutral or expressed in third person. Therefore self-assessment scales are more personal and individual than other scales. Another difference is that self-evaluation scales can include highly personal topics that could not exist in other assessment scales, since an outsider assessor could not in any situation “see” them and thus assess them. Nevertheless, one should remember that evaluation based on scales can be difficult at times and even inaccurate due to a learner’s difficulties to decide their true skills based on scales. (Huhta 2003: 23-24) The use of

self-assessment becomes easier and more accurate if learners can refer to a concrete situation or task, instead of using a more general scale to evaluate themselves (Alderson 2005: 99). Thus the majority of questions in self-assessments concentrate on certain areas of language skills, for instance speaking or writing that students have dealt with during the course at hand, in order to help them to benefit from it properly.

The majority of previous studies concerning the use of criteria in self-assessment seem to focus more on predetermined criteria given by authorities, such as teachers (eg. Falchikov and Boud 1989; Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001). However, there are some studies (eg. Dochy and McDowell 1997) that emphasize the significance of having a co-defined basis for criteria. In other words, criteria should not be created solely by any single authority, as they should be defined in co-operation with all participants, teachers and students. (Andrade and Du 2007: 160) In this manner students would become more familiar with self-assessment and its goals and understand better what is expected of them in their assessments and the reasons behind it.

2.3 Introducing self-assessment to learners

When using self-assessment as a part of the overall assessment in learning, one needs to consider the introduction of self-assessment clearly, since it is depicted as having a significant influence on how students perceive self-assessment and use it in their future studies. Thus one needs to take a number of factors, discussed below, into consideration when introducing self-assessment.

For self-assessment to be used successfully and for students to notice its various beneficial sides, it should be introduced properly and taken gradually into use. Moreover, teachers should begin with activities that are more familiar to students from their earlier courses and that they are most likely able to do. This should help students to familiarize themselves with the concept of self-assessment and understand the various beneficial aspects of it easier and not feel anxiety or frustration. (Cram 1995: 297; Tuominen 2010: 23) These feelings could evolve if students feel that they are given an unprofitable additional task or are confronted with a task that requires a lot from them.

In addition to a well-done preparation, attitudes of teachers and learners have a major role when introducing self-assessment to students (Cram 1995: 300). For instance, Boud (1986: 11) states that in order to introduce self-assessment successfully, students have to have at least neutral or, by choice, positive attitudes towards self-assessment and its purposes. This is due to the finding that a positive attitude towards self-evaluation seems to favour success in school too (Vanhoof et al. 2009: 21).

Moreover, self-assessment should be introduced gradually to reduce learner anxiety and to maintain motivation (Young 1991, cited in Cram 1995: 295). In other words, the possible negative attitudes should be decreased already from the beginning. The attitudes of teachers are not mentioned widely in the previous studies, which might be explained by stating that one of the major obstacles to introducing self-assessment might be learners' attitudes. This means that a number of learners might continue to cling to more traditional power roles, where teacher has a greater authority in learning situations. (Boud 1986: 273) However, one should notice that the concept of self-assessment has become more familiar in recent years to learners, as it is more emphasized in curricula.

Clinging to the traditional roles of teacher and learner is not the only possible obstacle in the introduction of self-assessment, as instead students need to see at least some value or worth in self-assessment for them to accept it (Boud 1986: 11). If there is no immediate benefit, or sure future benefits such as assisting students with assessed course requirements, there can be questions raised about why self-assessment has been introduced at all if it is not important enough to be evaluated. Moreover, one could assume that it is unlikely to expect students to think of self-assessment as a useful new development to which they will eagerly respond. (Boud 1995: 181-182) In addition to this, it could be improbable for students to be eager towards self-assessment if they feel that the idea has been force-fed on them (Boud 1995: 178). Therefore there needs to be some rationale for the activity of self-assessment that benefits students themselves or otherwise, with other excessive demands on students, the resistance of learners is no surprise (Boud 1995: 181-182). A significant favour to self-assessment would be that students could see it as a meaningful and productive assignment, not only as a coercive

assessment (Vanhoof et al. 2009: 21). In addition, it would be ideal for teachers to see the benefits of self-assessment themselves in order to introduce it properly. Thus a good principle for introduction is that it should not normally place an additional burden on staff, as it should benefit them too (Boud 1995: 178).

Another factor to be taken into consideration is the time of introduction of self-assessment to students, as it can be difficult for learners to change their already formed attitudes and way of working towards monitoring their learning if self-assessment is introduced towards the end of a course and not the beginning of it. Therefore self-assessment should be introduced at the beginning of a course, since it would be the best for students to know what is expected of them already from the start and not have had developed an expectation of what is to occur later. (Boud 1986: 13-14) In addition to this, it can be difficult for learners to change their attitudes and habits towards monitoring their own learning and skills if self-assessment is introduced at the end of a course (Boud 1995: 183). An early introduction to self-assessment can be seen as a long-term investment too, and if this is emphasized, self-assessment should be introduced when students are in their most receptive state – in the first year of school, when self-assessment practices can have a greater cumulative value. (Taras 2001, as cited in Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 71) In addition, Boud (1986: 8) agrees that self-assessment should be developed in undergraduate courses. Another reason for introducing self-assessment in lower grades could be that it is likely that learners will approach to a given assessment in ways which are similar to those they adopt for the rest of their studies, and thus the introduction should be meaningful and encouraging to students from the beginning. (Boud 1995: 26)

In addition to the before-mentioned, the introduction of self-assessment has to consider the needs and abilities of learners at different times and the possible internal and external restraints on an assessment (Cram 1995: 300). In other words, self-assessment is not needed in every situation or constantly, and teacher has to decide whether students could truly benefit from the given assessment in different learning situations or if it does not provide any profitable aspects.

However, the surrounding learning environment and one's personal characteristics can have some constraints on the introduction of self-assessment. The greatest one of these constraints in environment is time limitation. In addition, there can be unavailability of self-assessment tools and overall inflexibility of participants and environment. Other affecting limiting factors can be learning arrangements or the amount of contact learners have with their teacher. Personal characters that can affect introduction then again are, for example, literacy level, second language proficiency, specific needs and goals and previous learning experiences. (Cram 1995: 286) Thus there are a number of factors that can have an effect on the introduction of self-assessment, and a teacher needs to be subtle enough, as the beneficial sides of it should be properly and profitably presented and the possibility of students evolving more negative attitudes towards it should be reduced to minimum.

2.4 Factors promoting self-assessment

2.4.1 The concept of life-long learning related to self-assessment

The concept of life-long learning is a part of the idea of self-assessment, as it includes, among others, areas of assessment practises. (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 20) Self-assessment can be seen as a part of life-long learning, which means that learning is a life-long process and individuals have to take care of their own learning without constantly needing external factors, such as teachers, affecting it (Eriksson 1993: 47). According to Dragemark Oscarson (2009: 20), the concept of life-long learning is closely related to independent learning. However, Knowles (1975: 16) states that the whole concept of learning should be defined as a life-long process. Self-assessment can be linked to life-long learning, since it requires skills of learning to learn. However, one should notice that students need time to develop their assessment skills. (Lehtola 2011: 4) Therefore the concept of life-long learning does not limit to any certain stage of learning. According to Falchikov and Boud (1989), life-long learning requires students to be able to work independently and assess their own progress and performance (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 395).

Boud (1995: 13) mentions that self-assessment is a necessary skill for life-long learning, as self-assessment gives information to learners about their stage of learning and the possible goal where they should be or want to be. Dragemark Oscarson (2009: 14) mentions that self-assessment practices and their possibilities should be further studied if one wants the implementation of life-long learning skills to become reality, as the recent knowledge does not seem to be as adequate as it could be. Thus one has to develop this concept and the use of self-assessment in order to get it to be a meaningful and developmental part of learning.

2.4.2 Self-assessment as a part of self-directed learning

Self-assessment is a part of self-directed learning, in which learners are more responsible for their own development and skills than they would be in authority-centred learning, in which there are one or more authorities controlling learning and most likely its assessment too. Lehtola (2011: 22) defines self-directive learning process by saying that learners take initiative in identifying their own needs and learning objectives as well as make decisions concerning the on-going learning process and evaluate their learning outcomes. By this the autonomy of a learner increases. However, one should not confuse the term “self-directive” with the term of being a completely independent learner, as independence is a feature more adequate to adults, whereas children can act in a self-directive way. The want to act in a certain way and commit to it are in central part of being self-directive in learning. (Lepistö 2008: 7)

Self-directed learning has quite a number of beneficial sides, as it offers, for instance, almost unlimited opportunities for students to work in accordance with their own needs and interests. In addition, self-directed learning could be seen as a way for learners to cope with the problem at hand, provided that learners are willing and able to take responsibility for planning, monitoring and evaluating their own work. Moreover, teachers need to be willing to give some of the responsibility in this to students and guide them towards a higher degree of autonomy. (Eriksson 1993: 49-50)

In general, self-directed learners see self- assessment as a useful tool for their own learning, as it can enhance and support learning by improving one's awareness of their own skills. In addition to this, self-directed learners are able to assess their own skills more appropriately. This means that students understand the meaning of self-assessment in their overall learning process as a supportive factor and not simply as assessing one's own language proficiency without any further significance to learning itself. (Lehtola 2011: 21)

However, although self-directive learning emphasizes the role of a learner and the significance of one's own autonomy, it does not mean that learning takes place in a social vacuum. Knowles (1975: 18) states that it is typical for a self-directed learning process to take place in association with other people, who can be, for example, teachers and peers. One often reflects own actions and motives on others and their expectations. Thus one is likely to have the surrounding social environment and the overall context affecting the learning process and the outcome, as will be discussed more in Chapter 2.5.2.

Another factor to be taken into consideration when talking about self-directed learning is that we do not know much about the efficiency of self-directness compared to a more authority-centred learning, which often means a teacher-led learning situation, and, according to Eriksson (1993: 44), it is not likely that research will give any direction to this within the near future. However, more recent comments on the topic are missing, and therefore this statement should not be taken as a qualified fact without further research.

2.5 Factors affecting self-assessment

2.5.1 Motivation and self-esteem

Although the topic of motivation is quite difficult to cover, since there are a number of contextual and non-contextual factors affecting it and it is individual, it is a significant factor in self-assessment, as it can be a product of or an affecting factor for the outcome of self-assessment. Many researchers notice the significance of motivation, as it has been seen as the most effective source of development in evaluating and learning. (Lepistö 2008: 13) Motivation is needed in order to attain good results, since force, an external reward or even a threat do not result in learning in as profitable ways as internal enthusiasm does (Koppinen et al. 1994: 14). In addition, one can assume that students with internal motivation do not specifically need external thanking or recognition for their achievements. However, usually occasional random rewarding is needed in order to strengthen the experience of succeeding and validating for students (Koppinen et al. 1994: 19). Moreover, self-assessment can be seen as an important factor for motivation, since one of the most significant tasks of assessment is to motivate learners to develop and produce their skills even further (Koppinen et al. 1994: 8).

As already mentioned, motivation can be the product of self-assessment, as learners get to see the areas of language learning in which they are the strongest and in which they need more assistance. This can give a burst of motivation to maintain the already achieved results or to get better by learning more or in a different way. In addition to this, it can be a factor affecting the outcome of self-assessment. As Lehtola (2011: 6) says, well-motivated learners are likely willing to assess their own skills and thus become more aware of their own learning. In addition, this helps them to develop their own skills. It is mentioned too that it can be assumed that well-motivated learners find self-assessment easy to do (Lehtola 2011: 72).

However, it should be acknowledged that motivation can be affected very easily due to various factors, such as peers, age and personality. Therefore one cannot assume that

one's motivation stays the same throughout a whole course or even one lesson. Especially environmental influences, which are easier to study than inner factors, have a great impact on motivation (Anderson 2009: 12), and thus one should take into account that a learner can be affected by many diverse factors in a learning situation, and even happenings in their past or the ones that are yet to occur can have a significant impact on learning and evaluation.

In addition to motivation, the notion of self-esteem has been noticed to have an effect on self-assessment and its outcome. Both of them can be considered as important tools of self-assessment, since they improve personal development and learning (Tuominen 2010: 19). Thus developing one's confidence and building one's self-esteem are significant for learning from experience through self-assessment (Boud 1995: 32). In addition, self-esteem has a significant influence on assessments that learners make of their own achievements (Boud 1995: 212). Lehtola (2011: 6), too, says that self-esteem is closely related to self-assessment since it defines the way in which students see themselves as language learners and what they think of their learning.

There is a strong relationship between self-esteem and learning. It could be even suggested that self-esteem is one of the most important factors affecting learning, as it has more influence than, for instance, the intelligence of students and its importance seems to increase according to the level of learning (Keltikangas-Järvinen 2010: 40). Koppinen et al. (1999) seem to agree on this, as they include self-assessment as a part of learning. They say that students with high self-esteem have realistic ideas about their own skills and knowledge in learning as well as about their strengths and weaknesses in certain areas of language learning. In addition to this, learners know the quality of their own performance. This means that self-esteem gives an idea of how students see themselves as learners. (Lehtola 2011: 24)

2.5.2 Environment affecting the process and results of self-assessment

Although self-assessment can be used as a tool for self-inspection and stating one's skills privately, it does not directly mean that students work in isolation from judgements and views of others. (Boud 1986: 5; 1995: 15) According to Boud (1995: 31), the concept of self-assessment is meaningless in a social vacuum, as it includes and responds to various opinions and attitudes of others around a learner. This mind-set is a part of constructivism, where knowledge is built through interaction between a learner's experiences and ideas. In school this means that teachers should always try to pay attention to students' inner, mental processes instead of concentrating only on successful learning. This could be achieved, for instance, through listening and interpretation. (Lepistö 2008: 5) Therefore the environment at hand must be taken into account when evaluating and analysing an assessment, as one's personal history and surroundings can affect the outcome of self-assessment. This affecting environment, such as teachers and peers, is further discussed in Chapter 3.2.

In addition to this, a learner is affected by the structure of defined events and contexts (Dann 2002: 12), since it is said that self-assessment cannot be content- or context-independent, as there are always other external factors affecting it (Boud 1995: 35). Moreover, the importance of context can be seen in self-assessment's process, as assessment can be easier and even more accurate if students have a possibility to refer to a concrete task or situation (Alderson 2005: 99). Using a more general scale can give more unclear answers and decrease the significance of self-assessment. Koppinen et al. (1994: 38) also mention that the feedback one gets from assessment is easier to understand when it is tightly related to the time being and its content agrees to the learning situation at hand.

2.5.3 Learner's beliefs affecting the process and outcome

Self-assessment includes students' beliefs about their own skills and competence. It can be interpreted that language-wisely insecure students are more likely to consider themselves as weaker students than as confident ones, and this might affect their grading, self-portrait and/or future learning and their motivation for it. Learners' beliefs about their ability to produce wanted results in a certain area, or their beliefs about their capabilities to apply meaningfully the knowledge and skills they already possess are thought to influence learning (Shunk 1989, as cited in Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 41). The role of beliefs can be further emphasized by stating that low beliefs of one's own abilities are usually associated with poor learning strategies (Lemos 1999, as cited in Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 41).

However, one should notice that not only beliefs can affect performance, as it can go the other way around too. A learner's performance can also influence one's beliefs about their own capacity to learn, and thus beliefs are not only a reflection of performance (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 41). In other words, what students experience in their learning can affect the way they evaluate their skills in their future studies. In addition to this, beliefs can change from one situation to another, as they are in most cases related to a certain task or situation at hand (Benson and Lor 1999, as cited in Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 42).

Dragemark Oscarson (2009: 42) states that students' beliefs can affect a range of skills that are needed in a learning situation by saying that beliefs about learning a language are thought to have an effect on students' self-regulatory learning, their learning strategies and their ability to self-assess their learning. In addition, if students believe that a certain style of teaching affects their learning in a positive way and makes the students learn better and easier, they are likely to be positive and eager to attend to this kind of teaching (Benson and Lor 1999, as cited in Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 42).

However, Lew's et al. (2010: 151-152) findings suggest that there are no inter-relationship between students' self-assessment ability and their beliefs about the usefulness of self-assessment. Furthermore, in these findings, students did not show considerable improvement in their ability to assess themselves over time. Thus this data indicates that the accuracy of self-assessment is not different for students with strong beliefs and for those with weak beliefs about how self-assessment can affect their learning. These findings seem to suggest that learners' beliefs about the use of self-assessment are not relevant to the development of their assessing skills, although more research is yet necessary.

2.5.4 Previous language learning experiences, gender and cultural background affecting self-assessment

In addition to motivation and self-esteem, there are a number of other factors that can affect the process and outcome of self-assessment. However, it should be noticed that one cannot measure or predict all influencing factors. Nevertheless there are certain indications that can give out the process and outcome of self-assessment.

First of all, it is said by many sources that the stage of one's learning skills has a significant effect on how a learner evaluates themselves. For example, Boud (1986: 3) states that learners in introductory courses and in earlier years of their studies tend to overrate themselves, whereas more advanced students and later years have the tendency to slightly underrate themselves. There is an agreement on this statement by Boud and Falchikov (1995: 162), who selected their studies, for example, from searches of computerised databases in education and the social science related to self-assessment and teacher marks, as they found that high achieving students tend to underrate themselves whereas "weaker" students tend to overrate themselves.

However, it is not mentioned how self-esteem affects the results, but one could believe that it could have an influence on self-assessment, based on the previous discussion. One can assume that advanced students can underestimate their skills quite easily, since they realize the amount of knowledge they lack on the subject at issue (Huhta 2003: 32).

Therefore they tend to be more realistic and perhaps even too harsh on themselves when it comes to assessing oneself (Boud and Falchikov 1995: 163) However, there are some controversies to this, as it is mentioned that university students rate themselves the highest and primary students rate themselves the lowest (Alderson 2005: 109). This might be due to higher standards, which do not exist in primary schools, in order to get to study in a university. Having reached the required standards, university students can be more confident about their own skills and thus rate themselves higher.

Another factor affecting self-assessment is experience with the target language. Those learners who report using the target language often tend to rate themselves remarkably higher than those who use the language more sparsely. In addition to this, the length of time learning English affects, as people who have been learning the language for a longer time rate themselves higher. (Alderson 2005: 110-111) However, Boud and Falchikov (1995: 164) seem to disagree on the topic of the development of self-assessment affecting learning over time, as they say that there are not enough studies that consider improvement over time in general. Therefore one cannot draw any firm conclusions. Moreover, they mention that the interest towards the connection between self-assessment and developmental change is growing.

In addition to experience, even age has been seen as an affecting factor, as it was found in a research alongside piloting DIALANG to students that the youngest learners tend to rate themselves lowest and the oldest rate themselves highest (Alderson 2005: 109). However, one can contemplate the meaning of this, as younger learners are naturally more inexperienced with the target language than more advanced students, and thus it is normal that they rate themselves lower. Moreover, there is some controversy in these findings, as it has been reported in other studies that children under seven years appear to be excessively optimistic and naïve, and lack the ability to reflect upon their performance (Butler and Lee 2010: 8). Thus they tend to give more positive opinions on their ability, which does not agree with the previous finding. Huhta (2007: 382) mentions too that, in his findings on reactions to feedback in self-assessment, age had an effect on how different students reacted to the feedback of their self-assessment in their studies, although it only considered how interesting the given feedback was, not how

useful. However, it is not mentioned how students of different ages reacted to the actual self-assessment, and not just to its feedback.

In addition to previous experiences and age that can affect one's own evaluation, there has been a vast body of research on male and female differences in self-assessment too. (Boud 1995: 212) Nevertheless, it seems that studies on gender differences in self-assessment are inconclusive (Boud and Falchikov 1995: 165). However, there seems to be some controversy in the findings, as Boud mentions (1995: 212) that women are more self-critical than men. Then again, Alderson says (2005: 109) that males tend to rate themselves somewhat lower than females, although there is no statistically significant difference between the genders. Then again, when discussing the reactions of males and females to the feedback gotten from their self-assessment, there seemed to be statistically differing attitudes (Huhta 2007: 382), as males tended to be more negative. This means that they found the given feedback less interesting or useful than females. In addition to these findings, Andrade and Du (2007: 169) give a completely differing view by stating that they did not find any evidence of gender differences in responses to academic self-assessment in their studies where they interviewed undergraduate students in teacher education.

In addition, learners from different cultures tend to self-assess in different ways, as some cultures are held to overrate their abilities and then again other cultures are said to be more modest and thus underrating their language levels (Alderson 2005: 111). Cram (1995: 296) agrees on the above-mentioned by stating that one's cultural background has an effect on how one views self-assessment. It is possible for one to explore these assumptions when one has information on students' native languages even though when one does not have data on learners' cultures, as their native language affects their self-assessed language ability. However, further research is needed in this area of self-assessment, as there are not enough studies on the impact of culture on self-assessment, and therefore the whole influence of one's culture might not be fully understood. (Alderson 2005: 111-117)

Blance and Merino (1989) suggest that foreign language learners might have more problems in self-assessing their skills than native speakers, as they found in their studies

that a number of foreign language learners did not see themselves as being able to compare their skills and development to native speakers of the language at issue. This was due to foreign language learners feeling themselves being in a more disadvantaged position compared to native speakers when considering self-assessment, since the process of learning a foreign language is more complex and many factors, such as student beliefs, might play a significant role in learning. (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 67)

3 THE USE OF SELF-ASSESSMENT

3.1 About the importance of practising self-assessment

One has to take into account that it is not sufficient to only introduce self-assessment to students and leave it as it is without further instructions. The practice and development of self-assessing skills has been seen as significant factors for further learning by many researchers (eg. Boud et al. 1995: 79), and therefore, if self-assessment is to be developed, it must be practiced properly (Boud 1986: 27). The concept of self-assessment should be seen as a learning activity in addition to seeing it as an assessment practice in order to get the best of it (Boud 1995: 207). Thus, as language learning and its assessment are related and often even intertwined in practice, the assessment practices are significant factors in realizing the wanted learning goals (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 13).

Generally students tend to get more realistic views in judging their own language skills by getting experience in self-assessment (Dragemark Oscarson 2009). In other words, practice helps students to become more familiar with their own skills and evaluating them. For instance, Oscarson (1980: 17; 1998: 137, as cited in Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 71) as well as Oscarson, Gustafsson, Franke and Arvidsson (1999) in the Swedish National Evaluation of School Achievement, and Janssen-van Dieten (1989) have emphasized students' need to practise in autonomous learning and self-assessment. Lehtola (2011: 13), too, says that for students to be successful in assessing their own language proficiency, most of them need practice in the use of possible techniques.

In Lehtola's (2011: 65) findings, language students were asked about self-assessment of reading skills. Many of the participants considered self-assessment as difficult and had problems in assessing their language skills due to their insufficient practice in self-assessment. Thus, she continues, it is obvious that more guidance and practice is needed to develop the skills of learners. Moreover, Oscarson (1980: 17, as cited in Lehtola

2011: 3) states that if students do not get a chance to practise their skills in self-assessment, there is a greater possibility that personality factors may affect, or possibly even cancel the gained results.

For a successful practice and a meaningful self-assessment, the practice has to be continuous and extensive enough. In addition, students need to be provided with supporting tools for it, as self-assessment is an activity in which learners need enough guidance and time to grow into (Tudor 1996: 167, as cited in Lehtola 2011: 13). Moreover, McDonald and Boud (2003) found, in their study across school subjects, self-assessment training to have had a significant role in learning and that students got better results with training than those without similar training. This is reinforced by Black (1998: 129) and Black et al. (2003: 52; 2004: 14) by adding that since self-assessment takes time and practice, teachers need to be able to help their students to develop their assessing skills, especially with low achievers. (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 72)

In addition, student-given feedback is significant when considering practicing self-assessment and assessing others. This way one can improve the various activities in self-assessment in order to make it more beneficial for both, teachers and students. Andrade and Du (2007: 169) found that students claimed to have experienced several benefits from practicing self-assessment. These benefits included, for example, the improvement in the quality of their work and learning, in motivation and even in their grades. From this it can be claimed that effective self-assessment is likely to produce positive results among students.

Moreover, it is important that students get feedback from what they can do and what they should yet practise on (Koppinen et al. 1994: 25). However, when students get enough practice and become more self-monitoring, teacher-given feedback is likely less needed, since students' own monitoring can provide continuous feedback on their achievements and give strategies for future actions. (Cram 1995: 275) Self-monitoring can be challenging when students are confronted with new types of knowledge and skills (Boud 1986: 1), since they have not dealt with the new topics before and do not have these ready-made. This is when students most likely need help to develop their

skills, and therefore there needs to be a shift in practice to help students to become familiar with the new areas of practice (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 59)

It should be noticed that self-assessment should in some way relate to what students actually experience. Thus it should be meaningful and connected with learning (Boud 1995: 30). The process of practice should be extensive and continuous enough for students to benefit from it (Lehtola 2011: 13). In addition, practice and exercises should have a form of flexibility in them, since students have different backgrounds and they all should benefit from them with their prior experience. The differing backgrounds and personalities conduct that students interpret the same events in a variety of ways. (Boud 1995: 30-31)

These practices ideally take the development of a learner as a whole person into consideration, not only certain areas of skills and knowledge (Boud 1995: 31). Thus the wanted goals and ideas on self-assessment need to be translated carefully into practice. Nevertheless, it is rare that the self-assessment practices work perfectly for the first time, and therefore these should be evaluated properly for further improvements. (Boud and Holmes 1995: 63)

However, one should take into consideration that even a qualified self-assessment is not successful when it comes to learning if there is no practice at all, since if one does self-assessment without any further preparation or practice, the results can be unrealistic. One should take account of whether self-assessment is actually practical and beneficial and whether it has a positive influence on learning or not (Huhta 2003: 29-30), as students might have problems with motivation, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2.5.1, if a given self-assessment practice does not give any further benefits.

Nevertheless, there seem to be some possible problems with the practice of self-assessment. For instance, it seems that the exact influence of being able to practice self-assessment on learning is not yet completely understood in schooling (Butler and Lee 2010: 7). This could be due to the growth in the use of self-assessment, which has been more rapid than the dissemination of proper practice (Boud 1995: 23). It even seems that, although the importance of self-assessment has been emphasized in curricula, its

actual practice in education in general is quite rare (Walser 2009: 300). In other words, self-assessment is being used before all the possible prospects that self-assessment could truly offer are completely understood, and thus it should be studied more.

3.2 Other participants in self-assessment

As has been discussed earlier in chapter 5.2, self-assessment does not occur in a social vacuum (Knowles 1975: 18). In addition to a learner's previous experiences and learning history affecting the process and outcome of how one evaluates themselves, the participation of teachers and peers in self-assessment could enhance self-assessing. Teachers have a significant role in introducing, in the outcome and in dealing with the gotten results of self-assessment. Then again, peer assessment is encouraged to be used with self-assessment, as it can give more information on the actual skills of learners (Boud 1986: 22). According to Boud (1995: 15), peer assessment is commonly linked with self-assessment and it can enhance self-assessment greatly. Knowles (1975: 18), too, mentions that various kinds of helpers, such as teachers or other staff and peers, can be used in association with self-directed learning.

3.2.1 Teachers' roles in self-assessment

Students might evaluate themselves independently according to their own beliefs, as discussed previously in Chapter 2.5.3. However, there is a possibility that teachers might convey their own opinions on students - whether on purpose or not - and this might affect students' self-image and thus the results in self-assessment. Therefore teachers need to be aware of their views and how they form these (Black 1998, as cited in Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 43). By doing this, teachers continue to have authority even in self-assessment, since students might reflect their own learning on what their teacher has let them to believe by a giving certain type of feedback.

However, using self-assessment can give major benefits to teachers too when used properly. When learners take greater responsibility for their learning with the help of assessing, they can become more independent and this can reduce teacher's assessment burden in total and reap personal benefit (Cram 1995: 277, 300). In general, teachers need to take responsibility of three areas in order to benefit themselves from students' self-assessments. They need to create a supportive environment for students, implement a learner training programme and sequentially introduce activities involved in self-assessment. (Cram 1995: 293) When these areas are covered, students' self-assessments should ease the pressure of general assessment.

Teachers usually give guidance to students when considering self-assessment, as proper introduction and instructions are often needed. Teachers can support self-evaluation, if they help students to follow the development of their own learning and encourage students to give out their own opinions on their achievements. (Dann 2002: 2; Koppinen et al. 1994: 92)

When starting with the concept of self-assessment, one should start from helping students to set realistic goals for themselves in the guidance of teachers (Koppinen et al. 1994: 88), as students evaluate themselves in relation to their own goals and those by their teacher or their peers. (Koppinen et al. 1994: 29) Since assessment and setting future goals go hand-in-hand, self-assessment procedures need to be generally accepted by a teacher. Thus they can be suited to the needs of students. (Cram 1995: 288)

However, since teacher is often the one to validate the real skills and truth of students' self-assessments and to legitimize it, it can be argued that this could reverse the power of self-regulatory assessment (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 47). In other words, teachers' authority can decrease the wanted independence and students' regulation of their own work and skills. Therefore teachers should discuss the wanted qualities of self-assessment with their students and make sure that students understand the guidelines and expectations for the given assessment. Moreover, this could reveal possible discrepancies between teachers' and students' conceptions of quality. (Andrade and Du 2007: 172)

3.2.1.1 Teachers evaluating themselves

Self-assessment does not only mean students assessing themselves, as it can include teachers evaluating their own work and development too. It is significant to teachers and learners for teachers to evaluate their own language and teaching skills constantly. Koppinen et al. (1994: 27) agree on this by stating that it is always needed in some form, even though it is often done subconsciously and informally (Nikolic and Cabaj 2000: 15). With the help of self-assessment, teachers can grow as assessors and guides, become better in their work and use this as a motivation (Koppinen et al. 1994: 95).

Assessment is a significant part of the teaching process (Nikolic and Cabaj 2000: 14). Teachers evaluate many factors, such as themselves and their teaching, their environment, curriculum and their students. (Koppinen et al. 1994: 5, 34) The evaluation of oneself is an integral part of the teaching process (Nikolic and Cabaj 2000: 14) as it is generally thought that experiences of a teacher in language learning have a significant effect on how they teach. (Eriksson 1993: 121) Thus it could be the best for teachers to be aware of how they act, what they give out, the reasons behind certain behaviour and what they expect from their students.

3.2.1.2 Possible problems teachers might encounter in student-centred self-assessment

Teachers need to be aware of the possible influence they have on self-assessment done by students, as it is generally only a supplement to teacher assessment. If teachers see themselves only as assessors and not as guides too, they can limit the achievement of their students, as an excessive reliance on teacher assessment can make students distrust their own assessments and rely too much on their teacher. (Boud 1986: 5)

Moreover, teachers need to be aware that their own motivation, expectations and actions usually have an influence on students (Boud 1995: 15). Dragemark Oscarson (2009: 43)

agrees on this by stating that teacher feedback gives students a possibility to monitor their own progress and evaluate their learning strategies. In addition, it can give essential information about their own skills and capabilities to learners.

In Andrade and Du's (2007: 166-169) study fourteen undergraduate teacher education students filled in a self-evaluation assignment, examined it and gave their opinions and perceptions on it afterwards. According to these findings, there can be some tension found between teachers' expectations and students' own standards of quality. In other words, the notion of self-assessment and of assessment according to teachers' expectations differed according to some students. They continue that this data suggests that the students at issue felt that they could assess their work better when they knew the expectations of their teacher. However, they (2007: 171) propose that students who are lower-achievers are less likely to experience this tension due to them actively attending to and internalizing teacher's definition of quality. In contrast, high-achieving students tend to have enough skills to create their own standards that are more probable to have tension when faced with a mismatch between their own and teacher-given standards.

In addition, teachers should be actively engaged in introducing and encouraging different learning styles to their students, since this is a significant part of self-assessment and helps students to evaluate themselves better (Boud 1995: 27). Butler and Lee (2010: 5) found in their studies on the effects of self-assessment among young learners of English that an individual teacher's actions and views towards self-assessment influenced their effectiveness in implementing the wanted self-assessment practice to their students.

Another problem could be the difficulty for teachers to assess their students' language learning progress in all possible areas (Dragemark Oscarson 2009: 14). As self-assessment can help to give an insight to their students' skills, there is a possibility that a teacher relies even too much on a student's opinion without better knowledge of their realistic skills, which could be possible in a big learning group, for instance. In addition, in order to improve the given instructions, teachers need to be able to assess various performances of individual students as their level of knowledge and skills can differ greatly (Butler and Lee 2010: 5).

Differing views on the use of self-assessment between students and teachers might raise problems. Lew and Schmidt (2006) compared teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of self-assessment. Their findings implied that both teachers and students understood the purposes of self-evaluation but perceived its actual use differently. The data suggested that most teachers believed that self-reflection helps students to become better learners. However, students did not see assessment as valuable. Many students seemed to believe that their self-assessments could have an effect on their teachers' impressions of their performance and that their self-assessments were used by their teachers to decide their final grades. (Lew et al. 2010: 137) This again raises the question of properly introducing and explaining self-assessment in order to prevent mismatches between the expectations of students and teachers.

In addition to the previously mentioned possible problems, another one might be that teachers are unwilling to share their authority in assessing. The sharing of responsibility for assessment decisions is one of the most significant characteristics of self-assessment. The enhanced role of a learner was fairly accepted already in the 1990s, and has most likely even increased during the 21st century. This is due to that students are nowadays seen as more active participants in their own learning. In addition, the concept of constructivism, where knowledge is built on a student's experiences and ideas, has gotten more attention and is seen as an enhancing factor to learning. However, some teachers yet appear to be reluctant to lose their authority over assessment. This could be due to teachers' concerns for accuracy or unfamiliarity with collaborative procedures in assessment. (Cram 1995: 271-272)

3.2.1.3 Ways in which to improve self-evaluation for teachers

The skills of self-evaluation are constantly needed and thus the development of assessment skills is important. There are quite a number of ways in which teachers could improve their own skills at work and in assessing. One of them is that teachers can use personal reflection through diaries or journals to describe their feelings about teaching and students, for instance. Another possibility is to use self-reporting, where teacher can make checklists or questionnaires. Many teachers conduct self-evaluation

through these means, although there does not seem to be any practical guide discussing all aspects of teaching for this approach. The use of self-observation - or to be more precise, audio or video recording of lessons – is possible too. This should be the most reliable and accurate way of documenting what truly happens in a classroom as it captures most of class interaction. In addition to these means, role reversal is possible too. (Nikolic and Cabaj 2000:15-17)

Self-assessment could be a better route of assessing for many, as teachers tend to find traditional supervisory evaluation quite stressful. In this kind of evaluation teachers tend to see themselves passively practising their listening skills and not give actively meaningful interaction, as they see supervisors only pointing out the possible weaknesses and then giving own opinions on how to improve their programmes. Teachers often point out that supervisors do not have the needed understanding of their classes and students, since they have not seen the whole variety of factors that can affect learning and teaching. (Nikolic and Cabaj 2000: 19) In addition, in many cases an official assessment given by supervisors might affect one's own opinions about their skills and change them (Huhta 2003: 31), which applies to teachers too.

There are a number of benefits in self-evaluation to teachers, which encourage teachers to evaluate themselves. It can, for instance, improve teacher's feelings of workplace security and increase the possibilities of growth and promotion. Teachers can get tools for raising their awareness about identifying their strengths and weaknesses in teaching too, and it directs development in addition to career planning. Moreover, it helps to understand and articulate the rationales behind certain type of classroom activities, events and behaviours. (Nikolic and Cabaj 2000: 19)

However, Nikolic and Cabaj (2000: 20) mention that all teachers do not self-evaluate in the same ways, as there are personal differences due to many affecting factors. Each teacher has their own priorities for improvement and self-assessment can vary in emphasis on aspects of teaching, for instance. Therefore one cannot expect that the same style of self-evaluation is proper for everyone.

Although the topic of teachers using self- assessment is significant and was further discussed in this chapter, the present study did not particularly concentrate on this area of assessment. Only four teachers took part in the study, and thus their answers would not have given adequate or profitable information about the use of self-assessment among teachers in general. Even though the personal use of self-assessment was asked from the teachers, the study focused more on how the students used and saw self-assessment, and on the opinions of the teachers towards student-made self-assessments.

3.2.2 Peers as evaluators

Using peers as evaluators is an area of assessing that has gained much attention especially in higher education (Pope 2005: 51), and the existing literature on the topic has been filled with empirical studies, which have examined the accuracy of peer-given marks compared to self-generated or staff awarded marks (Lew et al. 2010: 138).

The benefits of using peer assessment include the practice of criticizing peers in productive ways, since thus evaluators can develop their own cognitive skills and ability to analyse their own performance realistically. (Elsinen 2007: 352; Cartney 2010: 552) Moreover, peer-assessment can help students to involve constructively in their own work and have collaborative efforts (Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001: 54). In addition to the benefits of an evaluator, peers can provide useful perspectives on learners' work in ways which are more informal than given by a teacher. Therefore the given feedback is likely to be less threatening to a learner. (Boud 1995: 206) Learners also get an opportunity to observe peers throughout their learning process and often get even better knowledge and understanding of other's work than their teachers. (Lew et al. 2010: 138) In addition to learners and peers, staff can also benefit from the use of peer assessment. Peers as assessors are promoted partly due to an increasing need for efficiency, since the use of peer assessment could reduce the cost of educating students and help staff to decrease the pressure of marking and minimise the cost in staff time. (Hanrahan and Isaacs 2001: 54; Pope 2005: 51)

However, according to Boud (1986: 22), one constraint on using peer assessment alongside self-assessment is the amount of time required for students to get the needed appreciation of each other's' work to be able to give valid assessment on their performance. Another block on peer assessment is that peers are frequently not used to giving proper feedback to one another. (Boud 1995: 206) If one is unsure about the reliability of peer feedback, it is possible to have more than only one peer giving marks to a certain learner. (Boud 1995: 171) This way one can decrease the possibility of having, for example, personal relationships of students affecting the evaluation at issue and get a wider view of a learner's performance and abilities. In addition, according to Lew et al. (2010: 138), difficulties and limitations have repeatedly been reported considering peer assessment, as students seem to see peer assessment as unreliable and unfair in several studies in higher education (e.g. Dochy, Segers, and Sluijsmans 1999; Lew and Schmidt 2006; McDowell 1995).

In Lew's et al. (2010: 142) findings, where the participants were 3588 students in their first year of studies at a polytechnic in Singapore, the correlations between self-assessment and peer assessment scores seem to be higher for high-achieving students as compared to low-achieving students. The overall correlations between the scores given by students and their peers, and the self-assessment scores and tutor-given grades point out weak to moderate accuracy in the ability to self-assess. (Lew et al. 2010: 151) These findings indicate that students who were judged as academically more competent were able to assess themselves with higher accuracy as compared to their academically less competent peers. However, Matsuno (2009: 75) has contradictory findings on this. In his study 91 students and four teachers took part in investigating how peer assessments and self-assessments worked in comparison with teacher assessments in actual university writing classes. It was found that peer-assessors did not give as harsh assessments as teachers did, and they were consistent enough to grade others. Then again, they rated high-achievers lower and vice versa in writing. This was independent of their own abilities and thus it does not support the idea that high-achievers tend to rate severely and low-achievers leniently. However, most peer-assessors were seemingly consistent and produced fewer bias interactions than self- and teacher-assessors.

3.3 Self-assessment used for grading purposes

There is the question of whether to use the gotten results of self-assessment for grading purposes or not. It is important to be very clear about its purpose, whether self-assessment is primarily used for learning, for grading or for both (Boud 1995: 47) According to Boud (1986: 26), there is insufficient research done on this matter in real settings. When talking about grading, I have discussed it within two topics below: the use of self-assessment in grading in general and students marking themselves.

3.3.1 Self-assessment used for grading purposes in general

In addition to using self-assessment to develop learning, it is possible to use it for final grading purposes. This can be a very controversial matter, as one has to decide whether to use self-assessment in grading or only as a learning tool, since both possibilities might include some flaws (Boud 1995: 167). Therefore one needs to consider several factors, discussed below, when self-assessment has a role in grading.

When it comes to using self-assessment as a way of learning without further benefits in grading, students tend to be less eager to work with any topic which does not have a profitable extrinsic reward. In these circumstances, even if students could see the value in the self-assessment exercise at hand, some of them can be reluctant to take part in self-assessment practices if they do not see any formal assessment purposes in it. Moreover, tasks which are not graded at all seem to be treated less seriously by students than tasks from which they get some form of grading, mostly from their teacher. (Boud 1995: 168) Thus self-assessment can have some kind of role in grading. However, a single course grade affected by self-assessment does not have a significant influence in general, when there are other factors affecting the overall grade. (Huhta 2003: 21)

It seems that using self-assessment clearly for grading purposes is not highly valued, as self-assessment as a significant part of final grades could turn students' attention away from the quality of their work and how to improve their skills, and make them

concentrate more on their grade itself. Due to this, it is possible that students would compromise their honesty – in other words, rate themselves higher than their real skills would be - and not focus properly on learning itself (Andrade and Du 2007: 172). However, one should remember that, for instance, self-esteem can affect the results of self-assessment and students in diverge learning stages can have the tendency to rate themselves “wrongly” – whether too high or too low- too, and this should not be confused with the concept of cheating.

3.3.2 Students marking themselves

Another way of looking at self-assessment in grading is to give students the possibility of marking themselves and using these in the actual grading. There are benefits to it, such as the potential for saving staff time and energy on marking. (Boud 1995: 168) However, in addition to the possible benefits, there can be flaws and other factors to be taken into account. All three considerations are discussed below.

First of all, Boud (1995: 174) gives criteria for when student marked self-assessment for general grading purposes is legitimate. According to him, there needs to be a high-trust, high-integrity learning environment for students, who need to be rewarded with marking. These marks have to be moderated by staff so that deviations from these need to be justified clearly. Blind peer marking should be used as a method of checking and random staff marking should be used as a way to make sure of the correctness of self-assessment. In addition to this, effort should be excluded as a criterion, since it does not provide any actual information about one’s skills.

In order for students to mark themselves in ways which are accepted by their teacher and could even be used straightforwardly in their grading, there needs to be marker reliability. One cannot assume that students know beforehand what to do and how to assess themselves. To improve marker reliability, there needs to be explicit and shared criteria established for satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance. In addition, students have to prove that they can be reliable assessors of their own work and skills, and this

could be done through adequate practicing. One factor contributing to the lack of needed reliability is that students might have a less well developed sense of criteria compared to staff. These criteria should be used to evaluate students' work and they might find it difficult to interpret the provided criteria effectively. (Boud 1995: 170-173)

According to Boud (1995: 167), if self-generated marks are to be used as a part of officially recorded assessments, it has to be demonstrated that learners can produce acceptable marks to teachers. He continues that normally this has meant ones where there is a high probability that self-generated marks are similar to staff-given marks for the given assignment. There is a number of literature reporting empirical studies on the topic of self-generated marks compared to those of teachers, if one is interested in comparing the accuracy of the given grade by a teacher or a learner. (Lew et al. 2010: 137)

Another way to encourage students to be serious about assessing themselves, and to check the consistency of markings, is to randomly check their papers. (Boud 1995: 171) Therefore the possibility of cheating can be decreased. If students are not able to produce acceptable marks for themselves, self-assessment should be kept only as a learning tool and a developable skill, or its potential bias and misrepresentation should be recognized in grading. (Boud 1995: 167) This way the possibility of wrongfully given marks in formal records could decrease.

3.3.3 Problems with using self-assessment for grading

However, there can be several problems when talking about student-marked self-assessment for grading purposes. One of the main difficulties in most cases is that students have not often had very much exercise or opportunity to develop their assessment skills. (Boud 1995: 173) Boud (1995: 169) mentions that it is possible that the problem might not be students' inadequacy in assessing, as it could be that learners might have difficulty with giving adequately unbiased opinions on their own work. In

addition, there are often doubts concerning self-assessment, as a learner cannot always predict how s/he would manage in new situations based on previous grades.

If the results of students and of external assessor differ from each other, which can be quite common, external assessing is seemed to give a more realistic view of student's skills, since there is the possibility of overrating or underrating oneself among students (Huhta 2003: 29). There have been some differences considering the topic, as Boud and Falchikov (1995: 159) say that in most studies student-given marks often agree with staff marks. However, it should be noted that student marks cannot usually be used straightforwardly without any further checking or other actions, since they tend not to be consistent enough with staff marks for the same assignment (Boud, 1995: 169; Tuominen 2010: 29). The inconsistency of staff marks and student marks has been noticed by Huhta too (2003: 30).

In addition, students can achieve more realistic and variant assessing skills by getting proper feedback from a number of participants assessing their skills, as learners often reflect their skills on others. However, in this case, there is the possibility that participants can understand the concept of language skills differently, and thus the gotten assessing results can differ too. (Huhta 2003: 31-32)

In the answers of the present study the majority of topics discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 were clearly noticeable. The most important areas of self-assessment were its introduction to students, as it was depicted as having a significant influence on later learning, as discussed in Chapter 2.3. In addition, the various factors that can have an effect on self-assessment, such as peers, motivation and understanding the level of one's skills were notified in the present study. The role of a teacher was discussed in the previous studies as it was seen as quite a significant factor to the way how students perceived self-assessment. This was notified in the present study too. Moreover, using self-assessment as a part of grading was discussed in length, as it was seen as a highly influential matter, for instance, for one's motivation in the previous and the present study.

4 THE PRESENT STUDY

4.1 The participants

The participants in this study were two different age groups: 9th graders in comprehensive school (15-16 years old, N= 36) and 3rd graders in upper secondary school (18-19 years old, N= 59) in Jyväskylä and Kuopio. The data was collected from two different classes from each age group, making thus in total four different learning groups. In addition, their teachers filled in a questionnaire. All groups had different teachers in order to give a variety of viewpoints. To sum up, there were 95 students and four teachers as participants in total. The data was collected in December 2011 and January 2012.

These target groups were chosen since they gave a variety of perspectives on the familiarity and use of self-assessment. Most of the 9th graders in comprehensive school and the 3rd graders in upper secondary school are finishing their studies in their present schools during this school year, and therefore one can analyse the differences in the use and familiarity of self-assessment between these age groups. As discussed in Chapter 2.3, self-assessment should be introduced to students in their first years of school. Thus one can assume that the 9th graders and the 3rd graders should already have familiarized themselves at least to some amount with the topic. In addition, one can presume that the students in each target group should have had at least to some extent quite similar learning backgrounds, since due to the Finnish school system they have had the same school levels and subjects on most parts.

4.2 Methods of data gathering and analysis

Before filling in the questionnaire, the students were given a brief explanation of self-assessment and its different forms, such as open-ended or multiple choice questionnaires. This way the students got to familiarize themselves with the upcoming topic and understand the concept a little bit more before the actual questionnaire. The questionnaire for the students considered their opinions on and experiences with the

concept of self-assessment in learning English. Therefore, the questionnaire did not concentrate on their language skills but rather on their *skills in assessment and the concept of self-assessment itself*. In addition, another questionnaire was given to the teachers in order to get their opinions that can give a different point of view to the topic, since teachers are the authorities that are responsible for introducing and guiding students in self-assessment.

I chose a questionnaire as a study method, since it could be used for both qualitative and quantitative studies, and it did not have to include right or wrong answers. A test would not have been an adequate method for the present study, as it is possible to measure one's skills in certain areas of language use but not one's skills and attitudes towards filling in a self-assessment and the various aspects of evaluating oneself. In addition, a test would measure how good someone is at something, and this study did not concentrate on one's abilities on a certain task, for instance (Dörnyei 2010: 4). In addition, a questionnaire can contain questions dealing with their attitudes towards self-assessment. Since the questionnaire was for a smaller group of participants, it contained both multiple-choice questions and open questions. However, it concentrated more on open questions, since this way one could get a deeper insight into the opinions given by the teachers and the students. Thus the study was more qualitative. If the study had been more quantitative, the concentration would have been more on the amount of certain answers on certain questions. However, in the present study I found important that the students and the teachers had to explain what kind of attitudes and opinions self-assessment evolved and the reasons behind them. In addition, it was a case study, since it did not tend to represent all the students in Finland, and one could not have generalized the answers to hold good for everyone within the same age or learning level. (Alanen 2011: 146-148)

In the multiple-choice questions the students were given a number of possible answers, from which (s)he had to choose the best one to describe his/her feelings or opinions. Therefore the arrangement of questions was important. Then again, in the open-ended questions the students got to deepen their opinions and to give a more personal insight

to the given answers. However, the open-ended questions were to be simple and short enough for the students to maintain their interest on the topic. (Alanen 2011: 150-151)

After collecting the data, the results were analysed by grouping the answers by their themes and by the age-group of the students. The main points to pay attention to in the results were the similarities and differences between the students within one age-group. From the results one could get a more general view on how the concept of self-assessment was used and seen within a certain age-group. In addition, the variable aspects and similarities in the answers were analysed between the 9th graders and the 3rd graders in upper secondary-school. This way one could see whether the experiences with and the opinions on self-assessment could vary or varied between the different learning groups. Thus grouping was an important aspect. Moreover, there were questions in the students' questionnaire, as one can see in Appendix, and in the teachers' questionnaire, in Appendix B, which both can be seen in Chapter 7, including comparable answers, from which one could see whether the results between the teachers and their students had consistency or did they give differing opinions when it comes to, for instance, introducing self-assessment or its use as a part of grading. This topic is more discussed in Chapter 5.5.

One possibility could have been to use an interview as a part of the study. In this case there would have been a small number of students selected from the main study groups to answer to more detailed questions about the questionnaire or the concept of self-assessment. However, I did not find this necessary, since the present study is not as micro-levelled one as it could have been if it involved an interview as a method of study. My goal in this study was to find consistency between the answers at least to some extent and the greatest variables, and I did not believe that getting a few separate interviews would have helped the study towards this direction. Moreover, the problem with interviews could have been that the participation needed to be voluntary, and the 9th graders in comprehensive school and the 3rd graders in upper secondary-school could have been unwilling to participate without any good reward (Dufva 2011: 142), which I could not offer them.

5 THE VIEWS OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS ON SELF-ASSESSMENT

Since there were several parts to the study, it was important that the findings were divided into separate sections by their topics on which they concentrated. From the results one could notice if there were any significant variations in the use of and opinions towards self-assessment among the same-aged groups. Another separation was done between the answers given by the students in upper secondary school and in comprehensive school. Thus the study had two different major groups, one consisting of the 9th graders and the other of the 3rd graders. First of all, the present study concentrated on the varieties and similarities among each age-group. Secondly, the answers between the two different age groups were compared to see whether there were significant varieties or consistency in their results.

The last section concentrated on how the answers given by certain groups were comparable to the ones given by their teachers. In other words, whether the students saw, for instance, the concept of self-assessment, its use and how it was presented to them in the same way as their teacher, or if there were significant differences to it. Some of these results were analysed without comparison to the ones with their students, whether individually or compared with their associates.

5.1 The familiarity of the concept of self-assessment

Table 1. The familiarity of self-assessment from earlier English courses

	YES	NO	NO ANSWER
9th graders	35	1	-
3rd graders	56	3	-

As discussed in Chapter 2.3, self-assessment should be introduced to students already in lower grades, as it is depicted as having a significant influence on how students perceive self-assessment and use it in their future studies. According to the results in the present study, the participants have used self-assessment before and seemed to be quite familiar with it. From the answers in Table 1 one could notice that there was a significantly high consensus on the question of knowing the concept of self-assessment already from earlier English courses in both groups. Only one 9th grader out of 36 and three 3rd graders out of 59 mentioned that the concept of self-assessment was not familiar from the earlier courses. One student out of both groups did not answer.

However, when asked if their present teacher had introduced the concept of self-assessment to the students, covered in Table 2, the answers were more divided, especially among the 3rd graders in upper secondary school. Among the 9th graders 29 students out of 36 answered that their teacher had introduced self-assessment. However, six students did not feel the same way and one student did not answer the question. Since the 9th graders have had their present teachers throughout the comprehensive school, one could have assumed that the answers would have been even more uniform.

Table 2. The introduction of self- assessment by the present teacher.

	YES	NO	NO ANSWER
9th graders	29	6	1
3rd graders	23	35	1

As the answers varied greatly among the 3rd graders, the results from the two same-aged groups were taken apart from each other. Among the 3rd graders in one group 15 students out of 31 felt that their teacher had introduced self-assessment to them, whereas 15 declined this, as one student did not answer. In the other group 8 students out of 28 mentioned their teacher to have introduced the topic, as instead 20 students felt the opposite. Thus in total only 23 students out of 59, in other words less than a half of them, felt that their present teacher had introduced self-assessment to them, and 35 students answered the opposite. Thus the possibility of introduction gained highly controversial answers, as the opinions divided exactly into half in one group and the majority of the students in the other group answered negatively. However, one has to notify that, as mentioned in Chapter 2.3, the concept of self-assessment would be better to introduce at the beginning of the course, and not at the end, as otherwise it could be difficult for learners to change their attitudes that have formed already in the beginning of the course and their way of working towards monitoring their own learning in a different way. In addition, it would help the students to know what is expected of them already from the start (Boud 1986: 13-14). Thus one should notice that there had been a few weeks off due to Christmas, and therefore there had been quite a while from the beginning of the course at hand, which might have affected the results.

5.2 The various aspects of self- assessment

Some of the questions concentrated on the students' opinions towards and experiences in self-assessment. Self-assessment was mostly seen to have various beneficial aspects, as the majority in both groups saw self-assessment especially as a way of noticing one's strengths and weaknesses, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Self-assessment as a way of noticing one's strengths and weaknesses

	YES	NO	NO ANSWER
9th graders	27	8	1
3rd graders	48	9	2

As one can see from Table 3, 27 students of the 9th graders and 48 students of the 3rd graders felt that self-assessment had helped them in their studies, and only 8 students in comprehensive school and 9 students in upper secondary school said that they had not noticed the beneficial features. In total 3 students did not answer the question.

Table 4. The opinions on whether self-assessment should be more used in English courses or not

	YES	NO	NO ANSWER
9th graders	6	28	2
3rd graders	12	46	1

Although self-assessment was seen to point out the strengths and weaknesses of students, it was not recommended to be used more in English courses among the students, as can be seen in Table 4. Only 6 students out of 36 9th graders and 12 out of 59 3rd graders thought that self-assessment should be used more often during courses.

Thus the number of those who did not see the need to do more self-assessments was four times greater among the 9th graders, as 28 students answered negatively. The number among the 3rd graders in upper secondary school was almost as many times greater. Two 9th graders and one 3rd grader did not answer the question.

The topic of various aspects of self-assessment and the students' experiences with and opinions towards it are more discussed in the following chapters. Due to the wide scale of subjects to be covered, the topic was separated to three different parts, and in the first section, in Chapter 5.2.1, the various aspects of self-assessment in general were asked. In the second section, in Chapter 5.2.2, the personal benefits that the students had had with self-assessment were asked. The third part, Chapter 5.2.3, concentrated on the general experiences with self-assessment, where one could see whether the students had more positive or negative experienced.

5.2.1 The possible positive and negative aspects in general

When it came to the possible positive and negative sides of self-assessment *in general* that the students could think of, the results were quite blank especially among the 9th graders. As many as 12 students out of 36 found nothing worth mentioning or could not think of any possible positive or negative aspects. In addition, three students did not answer the question at all. The number among the 3rd graders was not as remarkable as among the 9th graders. However, six students out of 59 3rd graders and 9 out of 36 9th graders did not find *any negative aspects* to self-assessment. Then again, 13 students of the 3rd graders left the space empty.

Among the 9th and the 3rd graders, one of the greatest positive features of self-assessment was said to be the possibility for the student to see where they had areas of improvement. This result could be found in 36 answers among the 3rd graders and in 9 of the 9th graders. This way the students got the possibility to consciously concentrate on the areas of development. Notable was that the students concentrated highly on their found weaknesses and not on their strengths.

In addition, self-assessment was seen to have the possibility to raise their self-esteem and to give more motivation to study and to try harder next time, as can be seen in Example 1. This was seen to hold good especially when the results were positive for the students, or in other words, when the students' own evaluations were on the same level with their teacher's. Moreover, one could learn new aspects about themselves and about their learning methods via self-assessment and use them in their future studies. It was even mentioned that self-assessment was comparable to giving feedback to oneself.

Example 1. Huomaa asiat, jotka osaa ja itseluottamus kasvaa, motivaatio voi kasvaa ja kynnys esim. puhumiseen voi laueta, kun huomaa osaavansa esim. kielioppiasiat hyvin

One can notice the areas in which one is good at and self-esteem rises, the motivation can rise too and one can, for instance, speak more easily when one notices that one knows, for example, the grammar topics well.

Three students out of 36 among the 9th graders mentioned their teacher as an important factor to their self-assessments, as they answered the positive aspect to be that their teacher could see their answers. One of the three said that from their self-assessments the teacher could see what the students know at the moment and in which areas they need more help. This would require that the teachers saw the self-assessments done by their students, which is not always the case. In addition, it was mentioned that in large groups one could get their voices heard through self-assessment. In general, when the positive features were found, they were quite extensive, as can be seen from Example 2 and Example 3. In the latter one, the student emphasized that one can learn to independently evaluate oneself and not only based on what it is expected of them at the moment in a certain course.

Example 2. Ymmärtää omat rajansa ja oppimiskeinonsa joilla saa hyviäkin tuloksia. Itsearviointilla voi kehittää itselleen uusia tavoitteita ja haastaa itseään yhä uudestaan.

One realizes one's own limits and learning methods with which one can accomplish even good results. With self-assessment one can create new goals and challenge oneself all over again.

Example 3. Suhteuttaa oman arvion opettajan arvioon ja pystyy miettimään kohtia, joissa on hyvä ja missä parantamista. Itse ei välttämättä vaadi niitä asioita, mitä opettaja vaatii.

One can realistically compare one's own evaluation with the teacher's evaluation and can contemplate the points, where one is good and where improvement is needed. One does not necessarily require the same matters as the teacher.

As negative sides to self-assessment was mentioned the possibility that the students did not have a realistic view of their skills, and could thus evaluate themselves either too low or too high. As discussed in Chapter 2.5.4, the stage of learning skills affects how learners evaluate themselves. Boud (1986: 3) mentions that learners in earlier years of their studies have the tendency to overrate themselves, whereas more advanced students tend to slightly underrate themselves, since they have a more realistic view of their actual skills. However, slightly surprisingly, the 3rd graders mentioned the problem to be more due to overrating their own skills. According to Boud, they should be more likely to underestimate their knowledge and skills rather than to overrate them.

Another negative aspect of self-assessment was that it does not cover all the areas of language that are important when evaluating one's skills. Thus one could get a very limited view, and possibly even a false one, of their knowledge and skills. This again could lower their self-esteem and motivation to study more. In addition, it was mentioned that it is quite difficult for the students to evaluate themselves in general and it can be stressful, even depressing, as the students were not accustomed to complimenting themselves. In addition to compliments, one of the 3rd graders mentioned that it is difficult to describe one's skills and to evaluate them, if one is not completely sure about them. The possibility of evaluating oneself incorrectly was seen as a problem, especially among the 3rd graders, as it seemed to be difficult for the students to give completely unbiased answers, which they thought as important, as can be seen in Example 3.

Example 3. Omaa oppimista on hankala arvioida puolueettomasti, itsensä kehuminen on vaikeaa.

It is awkward to evaluate one's own learning in an unbiased way, it is difficult to praise oneself.

Another problem was that, according to a 3rd grader, the teacher can take the answers "in a wrong way" if a student answers humorously to the questions. In this situation the

true meaning of the evaluation would not come across in the answers and could give wrongful interpretations on the students' true skills and opinions. A 9th grader mentioned that self-assessment could affect too much the teacher's opinion and thus the final grade too. Two 3rd graders said that the whole grading system in Finland, where self-assessment can be used as a part of grading, is based on wrong values. According to them, the grading bases only on written exercises and thus oral skills, which were mentioned to be their area of strength, did not have as much value as needed. In addition, it was mentioned that one should consider the needed courage for a successful communication as a factor to be evaluated. However, it is not covered in self-assessments.

Quite a surprising reason for doubting the usefulness of self-assessment among the 9th graders was that it was always done in Finnish. The background literature used in the present study did not provide any viewpoints to the possible problems created by using students' native language. In addition, self-assessment was seen to take too much time and this happened at the expense of "actual" teaching, according to the students.

5.2.2 The personal benefits of self-assessment for the students

Another question of the possible benefits of self-assessment to the students concentrated more specifically on the *individual experiences* that the students had had. Therefore some of the answers were comparable to the previous answers, which concentrated on the possible positive and negative features of self-assessment *in general*.

Table 5. The personal experiences of the students on the benefits of self-assessment

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NO ANSWER
9th graders	22	11	3
3rd graders	43	15	1

When it came to the personal benefits of self-assessment, most of the students in both groups understood the benefits that self-assessment could offer and had had them, as can be seen in Table 5, as 22 9th graders out of 36 and 43 3rd graders out of 59 mentioned that they had found even remarkable benefits from self-assessments. The question of the beneficial sides of self-assessment was slightly more controversial among the 9th graders than among the 3rd graders. However, most of the students in both groups did find self-assessment to be useful for themselves and considered it to have a number of beneficial aspects for their learning and development.

These aspects included the possibility to see one’s strengths and weaknesses, which were mentioned in Chapter 5.2.1 too, and especially the areas in which one could need more improvement. The concept of possible development was most often mentioned in the answers, as 13 9th graders and 28 3rd graders mentioned it as one of the most important factors that self-assessment could provide. With self-assessment the students in both groups were able to set realistic goals for themselves, especially when self-assessment was done at the beginning of a course, and to see what they had already achieved, especially at the end of a course. In addition, self-assessment had been a motivational factor, as with its positive results it had encouraged the students to study and learn more.

Particularly it was mentioned that self-assessment helped the students to see what they *needed to do more* in greater amount than to notice what they had *accomplished so far*. Among the 3rd graders as many as 25 students mentioned that self-assessment helped them especially to notice the areas in which they needed to improve their skills, such as

in listening or speaking. Thus one could get the feeling that the students thought that they should know more and were not satisfied to the amount of knowledge they had for the moment being. This kind of realization can be seen in Example 4.

Example 4. Olen tiedostanut, missä minulla on parannettavaa ja jo pelkän itsearviointin täyttäminen selkeyttää omaa osaamista ja työskentelyä

I have become aware of the areas I need to improve, and already the filling of self-assessment clarifies one's own know-how and work.

Another even surprising factor was that self-assessment was seen as a profitable route of giving feedback to the teacher and making one's voice heard, as in Examples 5 and 6.

Example 5. Olen saanut omat mielipiteeni esille esim. puhumisen suhteen. Suurissa ryhmissä opettaja ehtii keskittyä enimmäkseen kirjallisiin suorituksiin, joten itsearviointin avulla voi "personoida" itseään paremmin.

I have had the possibility to give my own opinions, considering, for instance, my speaking skills. In large group the teacher has time to concentrate mostly on written skills, and thus via self-assessment one can "personify" oneself better.

Example 6. Silloin helpoiten tiedostaa omat vahvuudet ja heikkoudet. Usein myös samassa yhteydessä voi antaa opettajille palautetta ja tulla oppilaana kuulluksi.

Then one can easily be conscious of one's own strengths and weaknesses. One can often give feedback to teachers and become heard as a student too.

The role of the teacher was further mentioned, as one benefit of self-assessment had been that the students were able to show their skills and development to their teacher via self-assessment, as seen in Example 7.

Example 7 Opettaja saa käsityksen siitä mitä itse ajattelen opiskelusta ja kuinka motivoitunut olen. Se voi myös vaikuttaa korottavasti arvosanaan.

The teacher gets the idea of what I think about studying myself and how motivated I am. It can also have a positive effect on the grade.

In addition to the possibility to give feedback to their teacher, the teacher-given feedback, given alongside their own evaluation, was seen as a significant factor among the 9th graders and the 3rd graders, as it could help the students to concentrate on their

areas of weaknesses and to develop them. However, one 3rd grader mentioned that self-assessment was beneficial, because it was *personal* and *private* feedback to oneself where one knows one's own skills the best and did not need to please anyone. As instead, another student considered their teacher to be more beneficial than self-assessment for their learning, as seen in Example 8.

Example 8 Mielestäni opettajan palaute on itsearviointia hyödyllisempää

I think that the feedback given by the teacher is more useful

Although self-assessment was mainly seen to have quite extensive benefits, there were a number of negative reactions to self-assessment too in addition to the one seen in Example 8, as 11 9th graders out of 36 students and 15 3rd graders out of 59 students were suspicious towards the benefits of self-assessment and had not experienced them themselves. The assessments were considered to be frustrating, as they were to be done several times especially during upper secondary school, which had a negative effect on the students' motivation as they did not feel that they were learning anything new. One student mentioned that she did not find self-assessment useful to herself, as it was done only at the end of a course. This answer supports the idea that self-assessment should be used already at the beginning of a course, as otherwise students would not be able to change their learning methods or concentrate on the areas that needed improvement the most, as discussed in Chapter 2.3. 10 of the 9th graders and 14 of the 3rd graders did not consider self-assessment to provide any personal benefits to them, as can be seen in Example 9. One 3rd grader did not feel that self-assessment was to be used for their own learning and understanding, as more for the teacher to see, and gave quite harsh evaluation on the use of self-assessment, given in Example 10.

Example 9. Ei mitään. En ymmärrä mitä hyötyä siitä voisi olla.

Nothing. I do not understand what benefits it could have

Example 10. ei mitään, se on vaan turhaa opettajan nuoleskelua, jotta sais paremman arvosanan, mutta ei niillä omilla arvioinneilla niinkään loppujenlopuksi ole mitään vaikutusta.

Nothing, it is only pointless brown-nosing in order to get a better grade, but in the end the assessments do not really make a difference.

Only one 3rd grader and four 9th graders did not answer the question.

5.2.3 Students' personal experiences with self-assessment

Table 6. Experiences that the students have had with self-assessment

	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NO ANSWER
9th graders	17	12	12
3rd graders	28	16	20

One has to notice in these results that some of the students mentioned to have both negative and positive experiences with self-assessment, and thus the total number of answers was greater in Table 6 compared to the actual amount of students in each group. In addition, one should not assume that when the students answered to have negative or positive experiences with self-assessment, they have *only* had this one kind of experiences. Thus one should consider the results more with what kind of experiences the students personally have with self-assessment in general.

The difficulty of evaluating oneself was mentioned as a negative personal experience, which was discussed in Chapter 5.2.1 too, as shown in Example 11, especially if one had to give a certain grade to oneself. It was quite contradictory that a 9th grader said that there were too many self-assessments to be done during the school year and each one of them contained too many questions to be answered. However, another student from the same group mentioned that she had had quite a few experiences with self-assessment, since they did them quite seldom. Another problem was said to be that self-assessments were too similar. Thus the students could lose their interest easily after two or three similar self-assessments and not find any useful and new areas of language learning skills to be evaluated and/or improved.

Example 11. Minulla on ollut positiivisia kokemuksia, vaikka välillä itsearviointit ovat ikäviä kun ei haluaisi vain kehua mutta kaikki on mennyt niin hyvin, ettei ole mitään huonoa.

I have had only positive experiences, although -assessments are at times troublesome self, since one would not always only want to compliment oneself, but everything has gone so well that there is nothing negative to be mentioned.

One 3rd grader answered that it was at times frustrating to evaluate oneself, if the results were not then used as a part of the final grading. Another student mentioned frustration too, but due to their over simplicity. Thus, according to her, the results had not given any additional information that could be beneficial to her.

In total 11 students mentioned their teachers as a part of their experiences with self-assessment. A positive experience was that their own evaluation had been on the same level as the ones given by their teachers, or even better. Thus the students had noticed that they could identify their own skills and evaluate themselves quite realistically when compared to their teacher. In addition, the students felt that they had the possibility to affect their grades and give their own opinion on their learning to their teacher through self-assessment.

5.3 The sources on which the students base their own evaluation

In self-assessment it is important to recognize the basis on what students have evaluated themselves, as this could affect greatly the way in which they see their own skills and knowledge. In the present study it was asked what factors affected the way in which the students based their evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses in the target language.

The results from the 3rd graders contained two major areas of factors affecting their own evaluation. These areas were the experiences and feedback given by their teacher and the various kinds of exercises and exams they had in school life, which were the most important sources of evaluation, and the communication and support gotten from outside school. 14 students among the 3rd graders mentioned that their experiences outside school offered very significant basis for their self-evaluation, at times even

better than the ones in school. Instead, only one student among the 9th graders answered her family as a source of information for further self-evaluation. Otherwise none of the 9th graders mentioned any possible connections or communication outside school that could have affected their own evaluation.

Most of the students in upper secondary school answered that they got information about their skills based mostly on their grades, as 40 students out of 59 answered grades as one of their ways of evaluating themselves. Among the 9th graders, 21 out of 36 answered their grades as a base for evaluation. Thus the majority of students in both groups believed their skills to be on the level in which their teachers evaluated them and did not question this evaluation. In this case, there is the possible problem that the students do not see the variety of their skills, as school exams often concentrate on a certain area of skills and knowledge, and do not include every area of skills that the students have or need. In addition, five 3rd graders and two 9th graders said that they based their own evaluation on comparison between their earlier and present grades.

However, two 3rd graders out of 59 did not believe that their grades alone could provide the correct information on their skills, as can be seen in Example 12. One student felt that his grade was lower than his real skills in English, and that the grade could not extend to all areas of knowledge and comprehension needed when using the language. None of the 9th graders mentioned to question the grades their teachers had given them.

Example 12. Yllämainitut esimerkit ovat mielestäni aivan toissijaisia, jopa merkityksettömiä seikkoja. Arviointi tapahtuu todellisissa tilanteissa, kun englantia tarvitaan! (esim. työhaastattelu, sosiaalinen kanssakäynti, valituskirjelmä... → kaikki englanniksi)

The above-mentioned factors [comparing with a peer's result, teacher-given feedback, grades and so on] are completely irrelevant, even insignificant factors. Assessment happens in real situations, when English is needed! (For instance job interview, social interaction, letter of complaint... → all done in English)

Another significant way of evaluation was the comparison done between peers. This was done while working with a partner during a lesson and especially by comparing one's grade with a peer's grade. It seemed that some students had a form of competitiveness among them, as five 9th graders and 9 of the 3rd graders mentioned that

they graded their own learning and overall skills in English based on their peer's results, as can be seen in Example 13. In general, however, it was important for the students *to be able to understand* and *to be understood in* English. Nevertheless, one 3rd grader mentioned that one should not only base their skills on comparison with peers, since it does not provide a truthful image of one's skills.

Example 13. Kavereiden suoritukset, koenumerot, luetun ymmärtäminen ja se, että minun puheestani saadaan selvää.

Peers' results, grades, reading comprehension and that people understand my speech.

Example 14. koenumerot, käytäntö (englanninkielisten kirjojen, lehtien, TV-sarjojen yms. ymmärtäminen), kielitaidon puutteiden huomioimisella.

Grades, practice (understanding books, magazines, TV-programs and so on), noticing the flaws in language skills.

As mentioned above, quite surprising was that 14 3rd graders based their level of skills on how well they could communicate with others, especially with foreign people, whereas no one from the 9th grade mentioned communication with foreign people as a method of evaluation. The success of communication was important in and outside the classroom especially in personal authentic situations. The mentioned communication included listening, writing and oral skills. However, especially one's speaking skills were mentioned to be a significant criterion for evaluation, whereas four students mentioned to evaluate their skills more based on written exercises and comprehension, in addition to the exams. This kind of communication was not mentioned among the 9th graders.

Other interesting finding was that one 3rd grader felt that one should always over-evaluate oneself. Thus one could not get a worse number than the one the teacher already had in mind, in case their self-assessments affect grading. Another student mentioned that the amount of time spent on homework was an indication of one's level of skills in English. In addition, the amount of effort put on the given exercises was seen as an important factor.

Eight of the 9th graders and one of the 3rd graders answered too vaguely and thus their answers could not be used.

5.4 Self-assessment used as a part of grading

When it came to the question of whether self-assessment was and/or should be used as a part of grading or not, the results were quite diverse. There were three different aspects to this. The first part considered whether the students felt that self-assessment *had affected* their grades in previous courses. Secondly, whether self-evaluation *should affect* their grading, no matter what their previous answers were. Lastly it was asked, whether the *teachers should see their self-assessments* or not, thus having the possibility that self-assessment could have an effect on their grades.

Table 7. Had self-assessment affected the previous grades

	YES	NO	NO ANSWER
9th graders	9	20	7
3rd graders	8	47	4

When asked about self-assessment as a part of grading, a high number of students answered that their previous self-assessments had not affected their grades, seen in Table 7, as 20 9th graders out of 36 and 47 3rd graders out of 59 denied the use of self-assessment in grading. Only 9 students of the 9th graders and 8 students of the 3rd graders believed that self-assessment had had an influence. 7 students of the 9th graders and 4 of the 3rd graders did not answer the question.

Among the 3rd graders it was very likely to get a variety of answers, as they have had quite many teachers, and thus various grading styles. However, among the 9th graders the amount of undecided persons was surprising to some extent, as the groups have had the same teacher for three years. Therefore one could have expected a more cohesive

result from them. Moreover, the variation of answers can point that there had not been enough information on the topic of whether self-assessment have affected the grades or not.

The question of whether self-assessment *should* be used as a part of grading gave a variety of answers from both groups. As two students did not answer the question, the result divided exactly into half among the 9th graders. 17 students felt that self-assessment should affect their grades, as instead 17 answered the opposite. Among the 3rd graders the results were clearer, as 43 students out of 59 said that self-assessment should not be used as a part of grading. 15 students said that is should be used as an affecting factor and only one student did not answer.

Table 8. The opinion on whether self-assessment should affect one’s grade or not

	YES	NO	NO ANSWER
9th graders	17	17	2
3rd graders	15	43	1

These results were slightly surprising when compared to the results of whether the teachers should see the self-assessments done by their students, which can be seen in Table 9. 28 students of the 9th graders mentioned that their teachers should see their assessments, and only 8 students declined this. The results did not vary as much among the 9th graders as among the 3rd graders, as 32 students of the 3rd graders answered that their teachers should see the assessment, and 21 answered the opposite. Six 3rd graders did not answer the question.

Table 9. The opinion of students on whether the teachers should see the self-assessments

	YES	NO	NO ANSWER
9th graders	28	8	-
3rd graders	32	21	6

The results were interesting, since, as discussed in Chapter 5.2.3, one of the most significant aspects that self-assessment could provide was that the students could point out their level of knowledge and skills in English to their teacher. Thus they implied that self-assessment was proper for giving their teachers a view of what the students themselves thought of their skills and how well they should manage in English in and outside the classroom. However, if the teachers saw these self-assessments, they could possibly have an effect on the grading too, and, as one can see from Table 8, 17/36 9th graders and 43/59 3rd graders did not find the possibility of self-assessment used as a part of grading appealing.

In general, the results from the 9th graders and the 3rd graders had many similarities, such as with both of the groups being familiar with the topic of self-assessment from the previous courses of English. Both of the groups thought that self-assessment was a profitable way of noticing one's strengths and weaknesses too, and one of the greatest assets in both groups was that self-assessment could help them to notice the areas of language, in which they needed more improvement. In addition, the 9th graders and the 3rd graders had both personally had mostly positive experiences with self-assessment. However, neither of them wanted self-assessment to be more often used in their English courses.

However, there were some differences in the results too, for instance, when it came to the question of whether their present teacher had introduced the topic of self-assessment to them. The majority of the 9th graders answered positively, whereas the majority of the 3rd graders denied this. Another significant difference between the groups was that the

results among the 9th graders divided exactly into half, when asked whether self-assessment should affect grading or not, whereas the 3rd graders answered more negatively (43/ 59). In addition, when asked about the basis on what the students assessed themselves, 14 3rd graders mentioned communication with foreigners outside school as an important basis for evaluation, whereas only one student among the 9th graders mentioned her family as a source of evaluation outside school.

5.5 The results from the teachers' questionnaire

In addition to the questionnaire given to the students, their teachers were asked to fill in one too. A number of the questions in the questionnaire for the teachers were comparable to the questions asked from their students, which is done in the following chapters. From the results one could notice whether the students and their teachers saw the different aspects of self-assessment in a similar way or not. The comparisons were done within one group and their teacher, not including both of the same aged-groups. In addition, there were questions not comparable to the student-given-ones, and therefore these answers were individually looked into.

The answers from the teachers' questionnaire were significant, as the teachers were seen as an important factor to self-assessment, as discussed in Chapter 5.2.1. In addition, the teachers should evaluate themselves too, and from the results one could see that every one of the teachers mentioned to assess themselves on a regular basis. Self-assessment was seen by the teachers to be a continuous process, being at times more or less consciously done. In addition, all of them believed that assessing oneself was an important factor in teaching, as one needed to adjust their teaching methods during the class from time to time. Three teachers out of four mentioned that they went through the events of the day afterwards and tried to see where they needed to improve the exercises and the used teaching methods, for instance.

Example 15. Jo opetuksen suunnitteluvaiheessa pohdin miten jokin asia kannattaisi opettaa, mikä opetusmetodi sopisi kunkin kieliaineksen käsittelyyn ottaen huomioon oman persoonani, oppilaiden tarpeet, käytettävissä oleva aika ja luokkatilanne. Jokaisen tunnin jälkeen pohdin miten suunniteltu opetus onnistui ja mitä olisi kannattanut tehdä paremmin.

Even while planning the lesson, I wonder how some things could be taught, what teaching methods would fit to each area of learning a language while taking my personality, the needs of the students, the time at hand and the classroom situation into account. I ponder after every lesson the success of the planned lesson and what should have been done better.

One teacher mentioned that one cannot assume that a teacher is ever “ready”, as one needs to develop one’s skills continuously. Two of the teachers have had teacher trainees in their classes, and they both felt that the trainees brought new aspects to their assessments. However, no one of the teachers mentioned to fill in a self-assessment, as they only mentioned about evaluating their teaching styles and the lessons in their heads.

5.5.1 The introduction of self-assessment according to the teachers

As discussed in Chapter 5.1, the students were asked whether their teachers had introduced the concept of self-assessment to them or not. When it came to the results gotten from the 9th graders, the answers were highly cohesive. As one can see from Table 2, in Chapter 5.1, only 6 students out of 36 felt that self-assessment had not been introduced to them. However, the majority of the students felt that their teacher had introduced the concept. The teachers in both groups felt the same way, as they answered to have introduced the topic to their students. Therefore one could not find any significant differences.

However, in the groups of the 3rd graders, the results were more ambiguous. As discussed in Chapter 5.1, when it came to the introduction of self-assessment, both groups of 3rd graders had very diverse answers, as can be seen from Table 2. In both groups, the majority of the students (35/59) did not feel that their teachers had introduced the concept of self-assessment. However, in both groups of the 3rd graders, their teachers answered that they had introduced self-assessment to their present students. Thus the answers given by the teachers differed significantly from the results gotten from their students.

In addition to asking whether the teachers had introduced self-assessment to their students or not, the method of introduction was asked from them. Quite surprisingly, three teachers out of four mentioned that they *used* self-assessment especially when they gave their final exams back to their students, as can be seen in Example 16.

Example 16. Joka kurssin päätteeksi opiskelijat täyttävät kurssipalautelomakkeen, jossa heidän tulee vastata mm. seuraaviin kysymyksiin: Kehittyikö kielitaitosi kurssin aikana, ja jos kehittyi, miten? Miten mielestäsi työskentelit kurssin aikana? Kuinka paljon käytit aikaa läksyihin? Millä kielenosaamisen osa-alueella (puhuminen, kirjoittaminen, kuunteleminen, kielioppi) koet olevasi vahvimmillasi? Minkä arvosanan antaisit itse itsellesi kurssista?

After every course the students fill in a feedback form for the course, in which they need to answer, for instance, the following questions: did your language skills improve during the course, and if they did, how? How did you work during the course in your opinion? How much time did you spend on homework? In which area of language skills (speaking, writing, listening and grammar) do you feel the strongest? What grade would you give yourself for this course?

However, since the teachers mentioned the cases when and the methods in which the students have *used* self-assessment, one cannot interpret clearly *the method of introduction* from the answers. In addition, one cannot notice from the given answers whether the concept of introduction was generally *introduced* only at the end of a course, when the students were asked to fill in a self-assessment, or whether the concept was introduced in some way at the beginning of a course, but the first time for the students to use it was at the end of it.

Only one of the teachers mentioned that she had explained the reasons why self-assessment should be done in English courses to her students. These reasons were that, for instance, via self-assessment the students could get individual and personal feedback on their learning from themselves and they could see their own strengths and weaknesses, which was mentioned as one of the greatest advantages that self-assessment could provide among the 9th and the 3rd graders, as discussed in Chapter 5.2.

Two teachers mentioned that they encouraged their students to fill in the self-assessments provided in their textbooks already during the courses. Other methods of introduction, in addition to those given in the textbooks, were open-ended questions and

feedback discussion, for instance. All of the teachers mentioned the importance of goals set by their students. Therefore it was emphasized that self-assessment was used for the students to see whether they had accomplished their own goals or if there were some areas that needed to be improved. This was seen important by the students too, as discussed in Chapter 5.2.

Two 3rd graders mentioned, as mentioned in Chapter 5.2.2, in their answers that self-assessments done at the beginning of an English course helped them to realize their own weaknesses and this was then used during the on-going course, as they could pay more attention to the areas that needed improvement. It was said that it helped their motivation to try. In addition, when they got assess themselves again at the end of the course, it could be rewarding for them if they had succeeded in their goals. If the goals were not met, it could help to try more in the next course. Their teacher had introduced the concept of self-assessment already at the beginning of the course and encouraged them to use it during the course too. Thus it had helped the students with their goals and achievements.

5.5.2 The teachers' opinions on students' self-assessment

The possible benefits and problems of self-assessment to the students were discussed in Chapter 5.2 from the students' point of view. In addition, the various features of self-assessment were asked from the teachers. The greatest benefit that self-assessment could offer to the students was that, according to the teachers, the students got to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. The results were the same among the students. By identifying their skills the students got the possibility to concentrate on the areas that needed to be improved.

One of the teachers mentioned that even teachers could benefit from self-assessments done by students, as they can support the grading and help teachers to see whether their students agree with them when it comes to their grades or if there are any major inconsistencies. Another benefit was mentioned to be that teachers could get more

valuable information about their students and their real skills, which can be seen in Example 17.

Example 17. Kun lukioissa ryhmäkoot ovat suuria, opettajan on mahdotonta huomata kaikkea mitä yksittäisen opiskelijan oppimisprosessissa tapahtuu, ja joskus itsearvioinneista nousee esiin tärkeitä huomioita, joihin opettaja voi sitten jatkossa tämän opiskelijan kohdalla kiinnittää huomiota

When the groups are big in upper secondary school, it is impossible for the teacher to notice everything that happens in a single student's learning process, and at times important notifications of some students come up in self-assessments that the teacher can later pay attention to.

A negative side to self-assessment was that the students can overrate or underrate themselves. One teacher mentioned that it was at times difficult to know whether a student has answered truthfully, as some students did not want to admit their low level of learning. In addition, the students tended to evaluate their skills *for their teacher* in order to improve their grade or to prove how much they had learned and *not for themselves*, which was seen as a more important factor among the teachers. This again could complicate the grading and the planning of future lessons.

Another negative aspect was that self-assessment can be exhausting for the students if it was required in every English course. Thus the students could lose their motivation and give wrongful answers. A 3rd grade teacher mentioned that, as she had a class of 1st graders in upper secondary school to teach too, the younger students did not seem to understand the true meaning and value of self-assessment, as they did not concentrate on their answer or results, as self-assessment could give them more than they tended to realize. She continued that it seemed that age played a significant role in this matter, as the 3rd graders then again seemed to understand the benefits of self-assessment better than the younger students. In addition, according to the same teacher, the 3rd graders could realistically understand and analyse their skills in English and the self-assessments done by the students were most often on the same levels as her own evaluation. Therefore, she concluded, in order to get beneficial results and to learn from the results, the students needed to be mature enough.

In addition, three teachers mentioned that some of the students tended to evaluate themselves too hard and not to have a realistic view of their skills in English. One of the teachers said that students demanded too much from themselves in general. However, she continued, this did not seem to be the case in her group of 9th graders. The teacher mentioned that among these 9th graders none of the students *underrated* their own skills. However, the possibility of overrating was not mentioned in the answer.

According to the teachers, there were a number of possible reasons for harsh self-evaluations done by the students. It was mentioned that the students might feel that they were not competent enough in the target language, as can be seen in Example 18.

Example 18. Joillakin oppilaille on suhteeton itsekritiikki ja riittämättömyyden tunne.

Some of the students do not base their self-criticism correctly and they feel themselves inadequate.

One should notice that the number of negative aspects on self-assessment was due to the various answers given by the teachers. Instead all of them answered the possibility of realizing one's strengths and weaknesses and setting goals for themselves as a beneficial side to self-assessment. The teachers seemed to use self-assessments regularly and found them to be highly profitable for their students.

5.5.3 The possibility of self-assessment being a part of grading

As discussed in Chapter 5.4, most of the 3rd graders (43/59) answered that self-assessment should not be used as a part of grading. Among the 9th graders the result divided exactly into half (17/36), as two students did not answer the question. The results varied among the teachers as well, when asked whether self-assessment should affect the grades or not. However, the results were more negative among the teachers, as two out of four teachers answered that self-assessment should not be used as a part of grading. One teacher mentioned that it should and should not, depending on the situation at hand. Another teacher said that it *can* affect, but it does not have to.

In addition, the teachers were asked about their students' attitudes towards self-assessment, if it was used as a part of grading. The given answers were quite variable. One of the teachers answered too vaguely and her answer could not be used. In the other answers it was mentioned that the students could take self-assessments more seriously and be more thoughtful than they were now. One of the teachers added that one problem with self-assessment as a part of grading could be that the students, especially boys, could try to get a better number by evaluating their skills too high. Thus they would not evaluate their skills in English realistically.

The possible stress of writing down the "correct evaluation" was mentioned too as a probable reaction to self-assessment, as the students could try to be too specific with their answers. One teacher did not mention how the attitudes of the students might change if self-assessment would affect their grades. However, she said that the whole self-assessment, whether it would be used as a part of grading or not, could reveal the attitudes of the students towards English and the courses.

If self-assessment was used as a part of grading, the teachers would need to see their students' evaluations. This was seen more as a positive feature among the 9th graders (28/36) and the 3rd graders (32/59) too, as discussed in Chapter 5.4. Three out of four teachers mentioned that they preferred to see their students' self-assessments, as it was seen as a benefit for the teacher and for the students. Seeing one's self-assessment was seen as a profitable way of giving feedback to the students and for the teacher to plan the upcoming lessons better based on the students' needs. The given feedback was mentioned to be encouraging but realistic when needed.

In addition, it was mentioned that there should be various kinds of self-assessments, some of them done only for the students themselves to be seen and others available for the teachers, as mentioned in Example 19. This way the teachers could get information about their students' level of learning and about their skills when needed but not give the students any possible stress and/or dishonesty that could arise if self-assessment was always used for grading.

Example 19. Mielestäni itsearviointeja voidaan tehdä sekä sellaisia jotka ovat vain opiskelijalle itselleen (joihin voi sitten kirjoittaa arkaluontoisiakin asioita) että sellaisia, jotka opettaja katsoo. Koen että oppiminen on kuitenkin sosiaalinen prosessi ja tapahtuu yhteistyössä, joten se, että opettaja näkee itsearviointit, on vain positiivinen asia.

I think that there could be self-assessments only for the students themselves (where they can write topics that are more personal) and those that the teachers can see. I feel that learning is a social process and it occurs in co-operation, and thus it is only positive that the teacher sees the self-assessments.

One teacher did not answer the question of whether the teachers should see their students' self-assessments.

To sum up the results, the teachers and the students had a lot in common in their answers. Both of them mentioned the similar strengths to self-assessment for the students, which were the possibility to see one's skills in different areas of language and to set future goals for their learning. In addition, the teachers mentioned the benefit that they could get valuable information about their students through self-assessment. Among the students, one of the greatest flaws of self-assessment was that the students could overrate or underrate themselves. However, according to the teachers the problem was more that the students did not answer honestly to the questions in self-assessment. Another significant flaw was that the students tended to evaluate their skills for their teachers and not for themselves, which did not serve the case of the students getting realistic and mostly personal information about their own skills.

Although there were some variables among the 9th graders in whether their teacher had introduced the topic of self-assessment to them, the results were mostly positive in both groups, which were then comparable to the answers given by the teachers. However, there was a significant inconsistency between the results from the 3rd graders and their teachers. In addition, both the teachers and the students mentioned the possibility of losing one's motivation and interest towards self-assessment if it was done too many times. Whereas the students mentioned the loss of motivation as a result, the teachers thought that this could lead to wrongful answers in self-assessments. One of the teachers mentioned the maturity of the students as a reason for understanding the possible

benefits and usage of self-assessment. None of the students considered their age to be a factor in their attitudes towards self-assessment.

Probably the greatest consistency in the answers given by the teachers and the students was when asked whether self-assessment should be used as a part of grading or not. Although it was mostly preferred among the students and the teachers that latter ones saw the self-assessment done by their students, since it could be beneficial for both parties, the majority of the students and the teachers did not want self-assessment to be used as a part of grading. Thus, as one can see from the results, there were some different opinions on the use and the assignment of self-assessment. However, both the teachers and the majority of the students could see self-assessment to have a number of beneficial sides to it.

6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the main points of the present study were summarized. The first aim of the study was to find similar and variable factors between the results gotten from the two same-aged groups among the 9th graders and the 3rd graders. This comparison was done to notice whether there were any aspects with a high consensus within the results, or whether certain topics divided the experiences with and the attitudes towards self-assessment among the same-aged groups. The second aim was to compare the results gotten from the different age-groups in order to notify whether there were new variables among the answers and whether the experiences and attitudes had a consistency or divergent answers among the two groups. As a third aim, the teachers were asked to fill in a questionnaire in order to analyse whether the answers were similar or varied among the teachers and how the answers from an individual teacher were comparable to the ones from her students.

As can be noticed from the findings in the present study, the concept of self-assessment was generally seen as a beneficial factor for learning and for improving one's skills in certain areas of language among both groups. As one can see in Table 6 in Chapter 5.2.3, most of the students in both age-groups had positive experiences with self-assessment, but there were a number of students who had negative experiences too (9th graders, N= 11/36 and 3rd graders, N= 15/59). The benefits were mainly the same as in Andrade and Du's (2007: 169) findings, mentioned in Chapter 3.1, where the students mentioned the improvement in the quality of their work and learning, in motivation and even in their course grades as profitable experiences with self-assessment. As discussed in Chapter 2.1, one should concentrate on the benefits of self-assessment and not see it as a time-consuming activity or as an assignment that shows only weaknesses. Instead it should be seen as an essential part of teaching, meaningful learning and assessing. (Schratz et al.2000: 94; Rodriguez-Garcia and White 2005: 11; Lepistö 2008: 1). However, as seen in Chapter 5.2.1, it was mentioned among the 9th graders that self-assessment was too time-consuming and thus it was not seen as profitable as the feedback given by their teacher. In addition, negative experiences or not being self-directive enough were affecting factors too (Elsinen 2007: 362). Another reason for the

negative experiences could be that the students had not completely understood the reason why they needed to do self-assessments. Thus they were not able to benefit from it, as the students would have had to understand and contribute to the process if the given assessment was used to give some indication of the students' levels of learning and development. (Dann 2002: 2).

The timing and method of introducing self-assessment to students was considered to be a significant factor to the successfulness of self-assessment according to various authors, such as Young (1991, cited in Cram 1995) and Boud (1986; 1995), as discussed in Chapter 3.2. The concept of self-assessment should be introduced gradually to reduce learner anxiety and maintain motivation. Thus possible negative attitudes could be decreased already from the beginning. The concept of self-assessment should be introduced rather early in order for students to be more able to monitor their own learning. The results for introducing self-assessment to the students were quite diverse. All of the teachers mentioned to have introduced the topic, as discussed in Chapter 5.5.1. However, as one can see in Table 2 in Chapter 5.1, most of the 9th graders (N= 29/36) agreed with their teachers, whereas the results were more negative among the 3rd graders (N= 35/59).

One of the most significant beneficial sides to self-assessment was mentioned to be that the students got valuable information about their present skills and could set future goals for their learning, as discussed in Chapter 5.2.2. However, in order to get valuable information about themselves, the students needed to be honest and motivated enough in their answers in order to get realistic results. The topic of students overrating or underrating themselves was covered more in Chapter 2.5.4, as it was mentioned that students who are further in their English were assumed to be able to evaluate their knowledge more realistically and critically compared to beginners, since they realize the amount of knowledge they lack on the subject (Huhta 2003: 32). In addition to the level of one's skills, the experience in self-assessment should help them to get more realistic views in judging themselves (Dragemark Oscarson 2009).

Another benefit was the concept of possible development, as 13 of the 9th graders and 28 of the 3rd graders mentioned it as one of the most important factors that self-

assessment could provide. However, one should remember that evaluation based on scales can be difficult at times and even inaccurate due to learners' difficulties to decide their true skills based on scales. (Huhta 2003: 23-24) Thus one can ponder whether the results pointed out more that the 3rd graders knew the realistic level of their skills and knew that they should know more, or that the students had problems with giving accurate evaluations on their skills based on scales.

The topic of using self-assessment as a part of grading raised quite negative attitudes, as was discussed in Chapter 5.4. Most of the 9th graders (N= 20/36) and the 3rd graders (N= 47/59) did not believe that self-assessment had affected their grades in prior English courses. When asked about the opinion on whether self-assessment *should* affect their grades, the answers divided exactly into half among the 9th graders (N= 17/36), since two students did not answer, whereas the results were more negative (N= 43/59) among the 3rd graders. However, as discussed in Chapter 3.3.1, self-assessment should have some kind of role in grading, since tasks which are not graded at all can be treated less seriously by students than tasks from which they get some form of grading (Boud 1995: 168). Nevertheless, using self-assessment clearly for grading purposes is not highly valued, as this could turn students' attention away from the quality of their work and how to improve their skills. In addition to this, the question of rating oneself realistically, which was one of the problems of self-assessment for the teachers, as discussed in Chapter 5.5.3, could be a possible problem.

There are several possible suggestions for future research within the topic. One of the suggestions would be the topic of introducing self-assessment, discussed above, as the present study did not concentrate on the reasons behind the diverge answers. Another suggestion could be to study self-assessments done by teachers, as teachers' self-evaluation has gained more importance and increased even rapidly since the 1950s. Now it is a standard part of being a teacher in most education systems (Nikolic and Cabaj 2000: 14). The present study focused more on how the students used self-assessment and how their attitudes and opinions could be perceived. The teachers were mostly asked about their attitudes towards self-assessment done *by their students*, and *not by themselves*. Thus one could turn the focus on teachers and how self-assessment is

used among them, as self-assessment should have some value to authority too. If the value is not noted, teachers, in addition to students, can neglect it already from the beginning, as discussed in Chapter 2.1. (Rodriguez-Garcia and White 2005: 10) In addition, the basis of evaluation, discussed in Chapter 5.3, could be further studied, as the students in the present study gave a notable prestige to their peers and grades in this matter. Especially the influences outside school found in the present study could be the focus for further research, as among the 3rd graders 14/59 students mentioned communication outside school as a source for their own assessment, whereas among the 9th graders only one student out of 36 answered in the same way. As a conclusion, there are many options for further studies in self-assessment, and it would be profitable to study the concept more, as it is included in curricula and is often used regularly in teaching and learning languages.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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8 APPENDICES

8.1 APPENDIX 1. The questionnaire for the students

Tällä kyselyllä tarkastellaan itsearvioinnin tuntemusta ja hyödyntämistä opetuksessa englannin oppitunneilla. Kysely tehdään Jyväskylän yliopistossa tehtävää maisterintutkielmaa varten. Vastaukset käsitellään anonyymisti. Kyselyyn vastaaminen ei velvoita mihinkään.

Itsearvioinnilla tarkoitetaan oman oppimisen ja oppimistapojen arvioimista. Itsearvioinnin välineinä voivat olla muun muassa aarrekartat, portfoliot ja erilaiset kyselylomakkeet, jotka voivat sisältää avoimia kysymyksiä ja/tai monivalintakysymyksiä.

1. Sukupuoli Mies / Nainen

2. Onko käsite *itsearviointi* sinulle tuttu aiemmilta englannin tunneilta? Kyllä / Ei

3. Onko nykyinen englanninopettajasi esitellyt itsearviointia ja sen merkitystä sinulle? Kyllä / Ei

4. Mitä hyötyä itsearvioinnista sinulle on (ollut) englannin oppimisessa?

5. Millä eri tavoin arvioit omaa englannin oppimistasi? (esim. kaverin suoritukseen vertaamalla, opettajan antamalla palautteella, koenumeroilla jne.)

6. Pitääkö itsearviointia käyttää englannin oppitunneilla enemmän? Kyllä / Ei

7. Mitä positiivisia vaikutuksia itsearviointilla voi olla englannin oppimisessa?

8. Mitä mahdollisia ongelmia itsearviointilla voi olla englannin oppimisessa?

9. Millaisia kokemuksia (positiivisia tai negatiivisia) sinulla on ollut itsearvioinneista?

10. Uskotko itsearviointin auttavan sinua ymmärtämään vahvuutesi ja heikkoutesi englannin kielessä? Kyllä / En

11. Pitääkö englanninopettajasi nähdä tekemäsi itsearviointi? Kyllä / Ei

12. Onko itsearviointi vaikuttanut englannin arvosanaasi? Kyllä / Ei

13. Pitääkö itsearviointin mielestäsi vaikuttaa englanninkurssisi arvosanaan? Kyllä / Ei

Kiitos osallistumisesta!

8.2 APPENDIX 2. The questionnaire for the teachers

Tällä kyselyllä tarkastellaan itsearvioinnin tuntemusta ja hyödyntämistä opetuksessa englannin oppitunneilla. Kysely tehdään Jyväskylän yliopistossa tehtävää maisterintutkielmaa varten. Vastaukset käsitellään anonyymisti. Kyselyyn vastaaminen ei velvoita mihinkään.

Itsearvioinnilla tarkoitetaan oman oppimisen ja oppimistapojen arvioimista. Itsearvioinnin välineinä voivat olla muun muassa aarrekartat, portfoliot ja erilaiset kyselylomakkeet, jotka voivat sisältää avoimia kysymyksiä ja/tai monivalintakysymyksiä.

1. Arvioitko itse omaa työtäsi? Jos arvioit, kuinka usein ja minkälaisissa tilanteissa?

2. Oletko itse esitellyt itsearvioinnin käsitettä nykyisille oppilaillesi?

Kyllä/En

3. Jos vastasit kysymykseen 2. *kyllä*, millä tavoin olet esitellyt itsearviointia oppilaille?

4. Kuinka usein oppilaasi käyttävät itsearviointia oppitunnilla ja millaisissa tilanteissa?

5. Voiko itsearviointi auttaa oppilaita huomaamaan vahvuutensa ja heikkoutensa?

Kyllä/ Ei

6. Ovatko oppilaat mielestäsi liian ankaria itselleen itsearvioinneissaan?

ei kukaan/ jotkut/ useimmat/ kaikki

7. Jos vastasit kysymykseen 6. myönteisesti, miksi uskot näin olevan?

8. Minkälaisia haasteita oppilaiden tekemässä itsearviointissa voi olla?

9. Minkälaista hyötyä oppilaiden tekemästä itsearviointista voi olla?

10. Tuleeko opettajien nähdä oppilaiden tekemät itsearviointit? Miksi/miksi ei?

11. Pitääkö oppilaan itsearvioinnin vaikuttaa hänen kurssiarvosanaansa?

Kyllä/ Ei

12. Jos itsearviointi vaikuttaa arvosanaan, miten oppilaat suhtautuvat itsearviointiin?

Kiitos osallistumisesta!