Graduates' self-assessment of their oral presentations of group projects: An EFL case study in Romania

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This study investigated tourism graduate students' perceptions of academic achievement as revealed in the end of term self-assessment grids for the course English for tourism. Data were collected from 59 first year Romanian Master of Arts students by examining their personal portfolios after the in-class and follow-up activities. The selection of the questions intended to enable students to recognise the major gains at the end of the semester and, through guided self-reflection, to adjust their positive self-image. Results indicate that after participating in the course activities, respondents manifested an increased ability to identify the nature of the difficulties they had encountered while working on the project and to propose amendments. An important pedagogical implication that can be drawn from this study is that, as students proved to be receptive to the course format, it can be replicated and professionals teaching in other career and technical education programs can use it to help learners develop self-reflective skills, and build a supportive community for those who feel insecure about working in a team and speaking to an audience in a foreign language.

Introduction

Because Master of Arts (MA) students have learning needs and perceptions that are more focused than those of Bachelor of Arts students, the teaching and assessment strategies should be tailored in accordance with their prevailing interests in the practical side of course work. The relevance of such strategies becomes especially obvious in the case of teaching English for special purposes (ESP) courses in career and technical higher education MA programs, since learning in these programs at all levels involves both knowledge and skills. It usually requires content knowledge built around academic work connections, coherently associated with an occupation or broadly defined career cluster. Learning also involves the ability to apply content knowledge and skills as tools for performing tasks and/or solving problems found in work settings of interest. To this end, the development of skills actually entails foundational content to set the cognitive stage for student motivation, meaning, and further understanding. The development of skills also requires that teaching and learning occur under conditions ranging from contextually relevant to authentic representations of conditions under which knowledge and skills of interest are actually used (Berryman, 1995, in Hernández-Gantes & Blank, 2009, p. 99).

Academic achievement is the major goal of any level of formal learning, understood as "planned learning that derives from activities within a structured learning setting" by "enrolling on a program of study, attending lectures, preparing coursework, engaging in seminar/tutorial discussions" (Harvey, 2004-14). It can be defined as "performance outcomes that indicate the extent to which a person has accomplished specific goals that were the focus of activities in instructional environments, specifically in school, college, and university" (Steinmayr, 2014). In education or training institutions, the relation

between formal learning and academic achievement normally materialises in degrees and/or certifications obtained by the learner. In fact, traditionally, only grades and standardised achievement, including entrance/admission and graduation tests, are the indicators that measure academic achievement, but in the current environment of student-centred education in which evaluation is incorporated in the learning process, summative assessment by itself is no longer reliable or desirable. Especially with adult learners, when the effectiveness of an academic program or class is measured, summative data must be complemented by formative records that show students' strengths and weaknesses. In this view, the learner's performance perceptions become relevant for the process of both teaching and learning **(**Wiggins 1993; Coronado-Aliegro, 2000, 2006, 2008; Pickford & Brown 2006; Roberts, 2006; Brown & Diem 2009; Macari, 2009, 2014; Cad, 2012; Patterson 2014).

With MA and doctoral students, achievement furthermore translates into success in finding employment in their field after or even before graduation. According to Billett's (2011) research, in advanced industrial countries higher education programs have already shifted away from the liberal arts towards specific occupations, and universities are currently providing "higher vocational education" and "occupationally specific courses" which come together with "expectations that university graduates will enjoy smooth transitions from their studies into professional practice" where they will "function as effective practitioners". This happens because "graduates are expected to have the capacities to engage immediately and effectively in the professional setting where they secure employment upon graduation" (Billett, 2011, pp. 21-22).

Such expectations are present in a survey conducted in Romania, which has shown that managers generally think that university graduates are deficient in the practical skills required on the job market, while students and graduates feel that the academic curricula is crammed with theory and traditional evaluation lacks reliability and relevance (Macari, 2009, p. 25). Consequently, the need for appropriate adjustment to the realities of the Romanian labour environment has started to trigger a reconsideration of the nature of the academic programs, as well as of the principles and practices of teaching and evaluation, by including all the actors in the teaching and learning process. Thus, besides teacher's grades, peer and self-assessment have begun to find their place in current evaluation practice in Romanian universities, the latter being one of the most effective tools for the evaluation of performance, as it empowers individuals to become autonomous learners (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Rolheiser & Ross, 2001; White & Frederiksen, 1998). One practical reflection of my own understanding of the importance of student-centred teaching and assessment was to engage the students into the evaluation process; for that reason, I decided to do that when I taught *English for tourism,* even though my students had no or little previous experience of self and peer assessment.

My choice chiefly targeted the development of students' reflection aptitude as an essential component of effective self-assessment which can realistically adjust self-perceptions. The extensive literature on self-perceptions (Bem, 1967, 1972; Laird, 1974, 2007; Harter, 1982; Robak, Ward & Ostolaza, 2005; Baumeister & Brad, 2007; Guadagno, Lankford, Muscanell, Okdie & McCallum, 2010) has defined them as an individual's predictions of

their capabilities and performance, which may differ from their actual performance. Harter (1982) distinguished between academic, social, emotional, and behavioural self-perceptions, of which only academic self-perceptions are directly related to the present research. If *academic self-perceptions* refer to the personal beliefs about the academic abilities or skills students form about themselves, then *performance self-perceptions* can be defined as the personal beliefs that learners develop about their work at the end of an academic assignment.

Rationale

When students self-assess, they gather information about and reflect on their own learning, thus evaluating their own personal progress in knowledge, skills, processes, or attitudes. Self-assessment raises students' awareness and understanding of themselves as learners (Ministry of Education, Canada, 2002, p. 3). Self-assessment used to measure MA students' perception of achievement at the end of a course can provide insight into the learning process, but can also be a valuable tool for the teacher who wants to adjust content and strategies in order to better meet the requirements of teaching adults. By involving students in the evaluation of learning, assessment and feedback become more transparent and consistent, and develop students' skills in critiquing their own performance. Thus, the focus shifts from measuring the quantity of knowledge a student is able to display in an end-of-term exam to the assessment of the student's progress on a particular task (Macari, 2014, p. 215). The development of self-assessment skills benefits students because those "who are better at assessing themselves allocate their study time more efficiently and have better academic outcomes" (Marsh *et al.,* 2005, cited in Chevalier, Gibbons, Thorpe, Snell & Hoskins, 2007, p. 6).

In deciding on the teaching and assessment framework for this particular course, I started from the assumption that MA students, most of whom have jobs and only attend evening or weekend classes, will be understandably reluctant to carry out assignments based on EFL grammar drills, tables with rules or the like. Nevertheless, developing language proficiency is crucial with tourism students who are expected to be fluent in English in future professional situations, and such an objective is only attained by hours of language practice. In the activity I proposed, language practice actually came in many forms because, while preparing and delivering oral presentations, students needed to do research as well as practise speaking, reading, writing, and listening in the foreign language (L2). The actual participants in the course had previous English language training ranging between a minimum of 2 years (the first two years of BA studies) and 14 years (12 years in primary and secondary education plus two BA years), which resulted in a mixed-ability class. As a consequence, before beginning to teach the course, I started by identifying, designing, and implementing the instructional strategies that responded to such challenges. The framework I provided set the following requirements for the students: to form teams and prepare and give oral group presentations involving ICTs in front of the whole class, to participate in follow-up discussions, and to carry out peer and self-assessment. The presentations and debates were to be held in English.

In agreement with Hernández-Gantes and Blank's idea of contextual teaching and learning that stands in contrast to the traditional behavioral and cognitive perspectives which separate knowing from doing by placing learning outside situational contexts, emphasizing knowledge, and expecting learners to reproduce it in rote fashion (2009, p. 103), this format allows for the use of elements that involve more than students' EFL grammatical knowledge. In addition, oral presentations combined with ICTs engage students in proactive learning and help them cope with the emotional impact of speaking in front of an audience and receiving comments and marks, since most students are self-conscious in oral production, especially in a foreign language. Another outcome of this format is that it ensured a good attendance rate, which is essential for foreign language classes. Attendance can be a problem with MA students, but in this way students were implicitly driven to show up and participate in the activities.

When presentations are prepared and delivered in a foreign language, assessment must also consider the issue of the L2 (i.e. English, as opposed to L1, i.e. Romanian) linguistic proficiency. Although no universally accepted definition of English proficiency across disciplines (Cummins, 2008) or across states (Solorzano, 2008) exists, English proficiency (or *language-specific knowledge*) has been identified as a strong student-level predictor of academic achievement in English language learners (ELLs) (Ardasheva, 2010; Ardasheva, Tretter & Kinny, 2012; Mahon, 2006; Solorzano, 2008; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008; Yoko, 2007). Limiting effects of low levels of L2 proficiency on L2 academic outcomes have been long recognised (Clarke, 1979, 1980; Schoonen *et al.*, 1998). Reading comprehension research found that low levels of L2 proficiency "short circuited" or limited the extent to which students were able to use their L1 academic skills **-** namely, cognitive skills such as reading strategies (Clarke, 1979, 1980; Schoonen *et al.*, 1998) and metacognitive skills such as task-knowledge and metacognitive strategies (Schoonen *et al.,* 1998) **-** to support their L2 performance (Ardasheva, Tretter & Kinny, 2012, p. 278).

Participants

The 59 participants (46 female and 13 male) were first year MA students in tourism and regional development at the Faculty of Geography and Geology, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iaşi, Romania. Most of them had studied English in elementary and secondary school for 4 to 12 years, as well as at BA level, for four semesters, during their first and second years. In the first year, the MA program requires two lecture and one seminar hours per week.

Description of activity

The optional course *English for tourism* (the Romanian course title *Limbă engleză aplicată în turism* appears on the site:

    http://www.geo.uaic.ro/index.php/programmstu/171-
    depgeoplan/mastergeografie/dom-geografie-2-master/turism-si-dezvoltare-
    regionala/seria-2012-20156/195-turism-si-dezvoltare-regionala-anul-i

in the unfortunate translation "English Language Applied in the Tourism") is a second semester course, 3 hr/week for 14 weeks. The present article describes the *English for*

tourism course of February to June 2012 and the data source for this research, further discussed in the *Results and discussion* section, is chiefly the self-assessment table in Appendix 1. The project presentation and the peer-assessment tables, filled in within the teams, not individually, are outside the scope of the present investigation and are only mentioned in passing, in association with self-assessment. Although the material researched may seem somehow dated, due to the course's replicable and adaptable format, it can definitely be viewed as an example of good practice for the potential benefit of the development of assessment strategies at graduate level.

Over the required interval (until the second meeting) students chose to form 16 teams of four or five, with two groups of two members each, and one student who opted to work alone. Each group selected one topic from the list proposed by the tutor during the first class (see Appendix 2), as follows: T1, T2: 1 group each, T3, T6, T7, T8: 2 groups each, T4, T5: 3 groups each. The list is based on two ESP course books: *High season: English for the hotel and tourist industry* by Keith Harding and Paul Henderson, and *English for international tourism*, by Paul Strutt (2003). In accordance with the agenda agreed upon, students created *PowerPoint* or *Prezi* presentations and other materials they considered necessary (posters, leaflets, etc.), which were subsequently brought before the class. Each presentation was allotted 30 minutes and was followed by 50 minutes' question and discussion sessions. Because in most high schools and universities in Romania instructional technologies are used on a regular basis in teaching and learning, most students are familiar with ICT tools and resorting to such technical competence was not an issue.

Within groups, students decided how to share roles during the documentation, writing and presentation stages, with no interference from the instructor. The members of each group participated as a team in the follow-up discussions and in the self- and peer-assessment. The self-assessment questionnaire was adapted from Macari (2009) and included questions related to the students' perceptions of the tasks they had been engaged in over the semester, and of their performance. All the members of the team were expected to undertake an active and fair share in all stages of the project.

Procedures

The format of the activity was discussed during the first meeting, when students also learnt their responsibilities. At the end of the semester, each team member was expected to hand in a portfolio containing the presentation and the assessment rubrics I provided. Work on the projects was to be done outside scheduled classes, and the members of the teams were free to decide the meetings calendar (i.e. frequency and duration) and form (i.e. in person, online, virtual collaborative sessions). In this activity, self- and peer-assessment accounted for 50% of the final grade, and instructor assessment for the other 50%.

As part of their assignment, students were to practise on tasks such as designing touristic leaflets and other materials, providing tips and information for foreign visitors, assessing online touristic materials, proposing strategies for improving tourism websites, visiting

local tourist offices and assessing their materials and proposing strategies to enhance the effectiveness of their impact on the market or the region's exposure, etc. I offered further explanations wherever necessary and I also recommended the two above-mentioned course books to be used as supplementary resources.

Students carried out the assessment process by actually filing in three tables with 4 to 8 questions, as follows: a project presentation table for each team's own project (within the teams), a peer-assessment table evaluating the other projects (within the teams), and a self-assessment table (individual work). (See Appendix 1). During the first meeting, students also responded to a short survey on their self-perceived competencies, level of English, and expectations about the course content and requirements.

Results and discussion

The selection of the questions in the self-assessment table enabled students to recognise the major gains at the end of the semester and, through guided self-reflection, to adjust theie inflated positive self-image I had anticipated. Self-assessment is a valuable indicator of how students construct self-image, and is also a key element in formative assessment, in which learners' feedback is indispensable. Feedback on an individual's learning process is built, as Black and Wiliam noted, on the desired goal, the evidence about their present position, and some understanding of a way to close the gap between the two (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 6).

The analysis of the initial survey revealed students' generally positive self-images about their competencies, as 75% declared they could communicate in English fluently enough to express their opinions and knowledge, 82% felt they could make a professional *PowerPoint* presentation (only 20% were familiar with *Prezi* software), and 98% reported they could efficiently carry out a research project individually or in a team. Only one student (S16) declared that team work had not been gratifying "because it is hard to gather the team for working together, to motivate them and to bring them to the same standard." My initial assumption about students' tendency to overvalue themselves was consistent with the results of Deloitte's large scale survey *First steps into the labour market: International survey of students and graduates* (Deloitte Central Europe, 2013) that researched students' and recent graduates' experience, competencies and attitudes to work. The results indicated that more than 80% of the Romanian students overrated their transferable/ non-technical competencies (analytical, communication, interpersonal, problem-solving, learning and team-work skills) and 79% considered they offered "high" or "quite high" value to their current and future employers (Deloitte Central Europe, 2013, p. 101). Based on the findings corroborated by their extensive graduate recruitment experience, Deloitte's survey maintained that:

> ... students preparing to enter the job market are significantly biased towards positive self-perception. Specifically, students may tend to over-estimate themselves, potentially opening themselves up to the threat of disappointment in real life when they find that not all employers share their positive views - either during the selection process or, once hired, when their performance is first assessed (Deloitte Central Europe, 2013, p. 101).

In my view, introducing and practising self-assessment, together with other self-reflective tasks, may contribute to achieving the beneficial adjustments students need to make to close the gap between inflated self-perception and actual status. For example, oral presentations and the activities that accompany them are more demanding than students believe in the initial stages, especially if they are not trained to evaluate the complexity of an assignment before starting on it. This probably happens because in the course of their formal instruction students are mostly faced with easier jobs that build their over-positive self-image, while the task of creating and delivering a presentation in a foreign language in front of an audience of assessors exceeds the difficulty of previous requirements. Moore and Kim actually suggested that the easier the tasks, the more positive the image of the self, and claimed that challenging tasks increase individuals' pessimism regarding their relative position (Chevalier, Gibbons, Thorpe, Snell & Hoskins, 2007, p. 5). The presence of the negative comments in the end-of-term assessments counterbalances the absence of self-criticism in the initial questionnaire and is an indicator of the 'pessimism' noted by the authors above.

The main difference from similar activities in the subjects MAs study in Romanian is that in *English for tourism* the in-class and follow-up activities additionally pose a set of linguistic demands which assume a certain EFL proficiency level. In the initial survey, in regard to their level of English, 85% of students admitted they have problems with grammar (which, in their view, did not impede on communication) and would like to know it better, but not by practising on grammar-oriented tasks. All respondents considered that individual assignments (the traditional homework) were inappropriate for MA students. A large proportion (92%) declared an interest for learning new specialised vocabulary, which in their view would be valuable in their future career. The numerous language mistakes in the students' responses (which, for obvious reasons, are rendered in their original form, with no corrections), indicate the bias towards positive self-perception of the level of English, apparent in the following selection of language-related comments:

> S2:   Among the strongest points I could enumerate: the skill to spoke and wrote in English, the ability to held an open discussion in English and so on.
> S14: Consider an evolution that I presented and participated in creating this project, and that I did my best to present in English as good as my team mates.
> S57: Even I don't have a perfect English, I can manage to have a conversation.

Because the rubrics asked them to use grades to assess their own performance and to subsequently explain the scores, students came up with diverse explanations. Several respondents related language problems mainly to pronunciation, seen as the main reason that had hindered success. However, as in the case of S32 ("For the presentation I considered 9.75 a right mark for me because I made some pronunciation mistakes and I was not as dynamic as I should have been") the awarded grade was only slightly decreased for that reason. Others pointed to anxiety as the factor that negatively affected their oral performance, for example, S40: "I didn't expressed clearly all the words because I had emotions" (she actually meant to say "I didn't pronounce/utter all the words clearly enough because I was nervous").

Conversely, students' answers valued pronunciation and accent over correctness and accuracy, a preference proven by the numerous mistakes in the grids they could have avoided by simply using the MS *Word* spellcheck tool, or by reviewing their productions before handing them in. The example below serves my purpose quite well, since its author, while openly boasting of his performance during the oral presentation, heedlessly made punctuation, syntactic, lexical and stylistic mistakes, all in one single sentence.

> S14:   Considering the presentation stage I consider that I had an acceptable diction, and a good presentation at the presentation of the project, with a satisfactory pronunciation and a good accent.

A few of the students who made negative comments about their own performance during the oral presentation (slightly over 30%) identified insufficient knowledge of English as the root of the problem, while the others attributed it to organisational matters, allotted time, nervousness and other psychological issues.

> S14:   My part of presentation wasn't organized in the way I planned to be. Maybe because I usually hurry to finish quick the speech. The audience might be bothered if an exposure become too long, that's why I am hurrying involuntary;
>
> S41:   The most difficult part was the presentation in front of our class, because the emotions kicked in, but also because we, as members of the team, didn't relied on our English skills very well, and perhaps because of all of this we have not managed to present our project ideas as it he should have been done;
>
> S13:   my voice was trembling because of emotions and the audience could hear this;
>
> S18:   The presentation was not perfect due to the timing and the emotions that made me a little unsecure).

Significantly, very few respondents proposed amendments for their future performance:

> S36:   The presentation was not very good but I learn some things like: a presentation is made without paper, the nervousness must be controlled and I must to be focused only on my speech. In my near future I will try to do another presentation much better like this.

The three responses below are very much the exception rather than the rule, as they express dissatisfaction with the errors produced and their admitted deficient language level, and consequently proposed somewhat lower grades for their own performance.

> S7:   I gave myself 7 grade for presentation because I did not speak freely and I don't have sufficient knowledge of English.
>
> S9:   My English level is not really advanced and I made some mistakes and also, another thing is that I couldn't express everything I wanted, because I didn't know all the right word. (Grade proposed, 8)
>
> S33:   The weakest point was the English pronunciation with some errors which can be caused by the nervousness but also another cause can be the the lower level of English study (The grade she proposed for her own presentation was 8.)

The gap between the two self-images as seen in the initial survey and in the final self-assessment can be elucidated by Hacker *et al.*'s claim that less competent students tend to

have poorer judgment due to the fact that "similar skills are needed to succeed at the test and to judge own performance" (Hacker *et al.,* 2000 in Chevalier, Gibbons, Thorpe, Snell, & Hoskins, 2007, p. 5). However, the end-of-term grids contain several examples of adjustment, which shows that my objective of having students reflect on their achievement was attained. Thus, after participating in the follow-up discussions and practising on peer- and self-assessment over the semester, respondents manifested an increased ability to identify the nature of the difficulties they had encountered while working on the project. Such comments expressed the students' dissatisfaction with their own performance, and some of their answers explicitly related poor outcomes to limited L2 competence or to their previous unrealistic level of expectation.

> S17:   Trying to speak without using the written part, my English was not as good as I
>   had expected.
> S 23:   Due to our insufficient level of training in english we probably could not transmit
>   what we have proposed, this being the weak point of the project and
>   presentation.
> S36:   My oral presentation wasn't as good as I wanted because I couldn't expose all the
>   details orally, I made some pronunciation mistakes and I couldn't answer to many
>   questions because I didn't know how to express my thoughts.

One entry asked students to identify the 'most important gain' at the end of the course and was meant to make them aware of what they could do that previously they had not been able to. The students' language-related positive perceptions of achievement referred in more than 60% of the responses to the specialised vocabulary they felt they had learned over the semester:

> S10:   The fact that I made a new piece of information about a country less known for
>   tourism and culture, while learning and new geographical terms in English;
> S12:   … the most important gain is that I improved my language skills in the tourism
>   field. Even if you know Engish quite well, there are words or expressions that is
>   good to know when you graduate, about the field you have studied.

Based on the above-mentioned complaint Romanian students constantly made about the presence of excessive theoretical material in the academic curricula, I would have expected them to point to better presentational, communicative and team-work competencies instead of newly acquired vocabulary. Nevertheless, some of the responses (over 20%) mention some transferable skills, as well:

> S7:   Following this presentation, I had gained and I had developed communication
>   skills, creativity, dynamism, efficiency and team
> S9:   I've also learned working in a team, sharing opinions with the others. I learned
>   from my colleague's projects new things and I took the best from their
>   presentations but I've also learned from their mistakes.
> S22:   The debates after the presentations of all my colleagues have been very helpful
>   because they have given me the opportunity to learn from their mistakes but also
>   from mine.
> S33:   First of all, I consider I have improved my English level and I had the
>   opportunity to communicate and to argue about different subjects.

By bringing up the team mates and/or the audience seen as an indicator of success, several of the responses showed that students understood the importance of establishing interpersonal relationships inside and outside the team:

> S11: I believe that this kind of project helps us to develop our team spirit and in this way we know how to behave in a group
> S41: I consider that such projects develop our fair-play and make us know each other better and it is a good opportunity to learn how to respect other's opinions.

Not surprisingly, although in the initial survey 90% of students reported their presentational skills as being average or above average, the presenters who - based on their prior experience with the *PowerPoint* or *Prezi* apps - rated the task as easy, performed poorly and tended to be less observant in their comments. Moreover, because of overconfidence, these students admittedly allotted insufficient resources to the preparation stage. The first response below, for example, lays it on the line by declaring that making a presentation posed no problems in itself, and only its oral delivery would need amendments, while the second and especially the third are better at identifying *PowerPoint*-related issues (at this point the respondents were asked whether they would change anything if they were to prepare the presentation again).

> S14: Not because I know the rules of making a powerpoint. I would work harder to free speech. (He meant to say 'No, because I know the rules of making a *PowerPoint* presentation. I would work harder to be able to speak freely').
> S8: I would also focus more on power-point because I tried to use the information as good and correct possible and I left at the final the organisation of the power-point.
> S41: I would make sure that the material I use for the project is very well done and pertinent. I would work harder for my PowerPoint, trying not to repeat the mistakes I have done (like too much bullets, reading what was on the slides and so on).

Overall, most students preserved their initial over-estimated ability with the use of *PowerPoint*, and even though during the follow-up discussions there was an amount of criticism related to the organisation of the slides (comments described own and others' slides as "too crowded", "wordy", "used as prompters", "too many of slides in one presentation", etc.), only some 30% said anything about the necessity to improve them in the future. The answers below, however, indicate their authors' belief that they had achieved better skills at making a *PowerPoint* presentation.

> S5: I have learnt important things regarding Ppt presentations.
> S24: I learned how a good powerpoint presentation should be, and I think I gained some more experience in what concerns speaking in front of an audience and working in a team.
> S50: At the end of this seminar I learn new words, what to do a presentation power point, I learn what to pronounce some words.

This perception of improvement actually associated presentational skills and level of English in over 60% of the respondents, although some of them did not mention the foreign language explicitly.

S7:   … the most important personal gain was the fact that I was able to present a project in English in front of my collegues and the fact that the critics were fair and because of that now I know what to do, what to improve;

S32:   I believe in the future I will be able to make a better PowerPoint presentation and also I gained experience in presenting orally a project and bringing arguments about a certain subject;

S11:   I also learned how important a good power-point presentation was in the success of a project).

There were students who also pointed to the achievement of content knowledge, identified as "information", "acquisitions" or "concepts".

S8:   There were information that I did not knew it, and this seminar had helped me to acquire it, through the courses that were presented to me and through the presentations made by me and my colleagues. It was an interesting seminar through you could remain with more acquisitions, if you wanted this;

S42:   I think that at the end of this seminar I won several tourism concepts in English and I have also seen that it is not so difficult to learn English language.

With several respondents, self-perception of current abilities is correlated with expectations of success in future academic work or career, success in which English proficiency has a crucial role in their view.

S29:   We have noticed along this seminar, through the various conversations, that it is necessary that I improve my English skills, both talking and writing, although it is not my specialisation, is an important point for a resume, especially in the tourism field;

S34:   The seminar, English for tourism, will have a special place in my career development in tourism. I affirm all this because always the English, this international language, will represent an important element in the career of a future employed in tourism).

This perception often came with declared resolutions of learning English better:

S36:   I consider that the most important personal gain at the end of this seminar was to take the decision to learn English language;

S42:   … the most important personal gain is the determination to learn better English.

One student (S7) declared explicitly that she had enjoyed her role as teacher, which involved being presenter, as well as assessor. The respondent's major achievement, in her own words, was "the fact that I transposed myself in the teacher's role and I played it as it was real". Nevertheless, some 60% suggested that by participating in the assessment process and the follow-up discussions they had become better presenters.

S4:   I learned how a good powerpoint presentation should be, and I think I gained some more experience in what concerns speaking in front of an audience and working in a team;

S6:   That we learned how to make a better presentation in PowerPoint;

S43:   Before this presentation I had so few projects with presentation in English, and this time I learned how to make a better one!

Since no respondents indicated that they would have been more comfortable as presenters and evaluators with more consistent preparation, it can be inferred that the assessment grids were satisfyingly well-structured and that the time allotted for feedback was adequate.

Conclusions

Because *English for tourism* is a course at MA level, I chose to focus on the skills and content that might boost students' communicative competence and autonomy and thus contribute to a smoother transition to the requirements of their future jobs. The labour market and the students themselves expect university programs to provide more than the theoretical knowledge in sets of subjects, so the activities proposed to the students over the semester mimicked authentic occupational frameworks and proposed relevant learning tasks and content.

The consideration of students' perception of achievement expressed in activities that facilitate reflection (self-assessment, follow-up discussions, responding to criticism, etc.) offered valuable information about students' knowledge and skills to two categories of recipients - teachers and students themselves. Based on their responses, the study showed that students have different ways of measuring and understanding academic success, but reflective peer- and self-assessment may serve as a unifying factor and thus contribute to the construction of a more realistic profile of students' abilities.

The analysis of the end-of-term assessment grids revealed the persistence of the inconsistency between students' self-perceived competencies and the actual status quo. At the end of the semester, however, the gap between the two was narrower than in the initial survey, as the great majority of the respondents had made significant adjustments to the positive self-image they had originally promoted, by admitting either to having made certain mistakes or to having learned something from the in-class and follow-up work. Even if most students still did poorly in measuring their own EFL proficiency, their answers proved that they had raised their ability to evaluate their performance and that they had started considering issues such as audience response, responsibility within a team and language skills.

Overall findings related to the respondents' perceptions of achievement in this particular course gave evidence of the present state of their language proficiency, presentational skills and desired goals of short-term and long term career development:

    S27:   I consider that all the classes of this seminar had an educational part. All the
            discussions focused on realising which is the role that we will have in the future in
            society;
    S7:   I also enjoyed working on this project because I want in the future to work in this
            sector of tourism industry.

The negative perceptions mostly concerned the major difficulties students encountered during the semester's assignments. The students seemed to have overall positive perceptions of the way they and their peers performed in the project presentation

sessions. Most of them pointed to the benefits of group support as a factor that fostered learning and mentioned that they had benefited from group activities, with a focus on their participatory role in the team during both the preparation and the delivery of the presentations:

> S41: Yes, I enjoyed working on the project because we had the liberty of self-expressing and we weren't constrained by any rule. We had the chance to express ourselves freely, so we worked with commitment. I also liked working with X and Y because I had a lot to learn from each other;
> S44: I enjoyed working in a team with my colleagues because we divided our tasks really well;
> S18: I really enjoyed working on this project because my teammates are nice people and we had a fruitful collaboration, as you can see on the presentation.

Although the present article only dealt with tourism MA students, the findings are likely to have relevance to professionals teaching in other career and technical programs as well. An important pedagogical implication that can be drawn from this study is that, as students are receptive to such a course format, it can be replicated and teachers can use it to help learners develop self-reflective skills, as well as to build a supportive community for those who feel insecure about working in a team and speaking in front of an audience in a foreign language.

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Appendix 1: Self-assessment questionnaire

1. Did you enjoy working on the project? Why?
2. Describe your most relevant contribution to the success of the project.
3. What was the most difficult stage of this assignment?
4. Is there anything you would not do again while working on a project?
5. What do you consider to be the most important personal gain at the end of this seminar?
6. Analyse your own performance during the presentation (the strongest and weakest points).
7. Propose 2 marks for your own performance, one taking into account the research stage and the other one the presentation. Briefly explain.

Appendix 2: List of topics

1. Exchange students	Plan an information guide for foreign students coming to your university. Include useful tips and information to help them to survive. Design at least three activities (e.g. a reception meeting) and include them in a program leaflet.
2. Eco tourism	Too many tourists in one place can damage the environment. As people understand more about this, they want to travel in different ways, which do not encourage global warming. They look for souvenirs that help the local economy and use natural forms of energy when it is possible. Design a trip in which you try to find a balance between having a good time and protecting the planet. Propose your own tourist materials.
3. Rural tourism	Some regions in Romania have chosen to develop rural tourism. Asses the quality of the online materials, using both your specialised and personal knowledge. Propose strategies and materials to enhance the effectiveness of the web pages you evaluate.
4. Local tourism 1	Visit your local Tourist Office. What free information do they have? Is it good? Asses the quality of the materials, using both your specialised and personal knowledge. Propose strategies and materials to enhance the effectiveness of their impact on the market.
5. Local tourism 2	Choose a place you know well. What do guidebooks or travel books say about it? Assess the quality of the materials, using both your specialised and personal knowledge. Propose strategies and materials to enhance the region's exposure.

6. Local tourism 3	Go to your local Tourist Office. Look at the information they give to tourists about your town or region. Are there more positive or negative things about it for the people who live there? Decide what is good for people like you, and then design your own tourist material.
7. Planning a trip	Plan the ideal trip, then design your own tourist material and an advertisement to sell it to other people.
8. Local transport	Choose a region you know well. Evaluate its transport system and plan a route for a group of foreign tourists after having decided what is best for them. Design a tourist material to sell it. Propose at least three forms of transport.

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