

論文

Self-Inflation: Examining the Accuracy of Teacher Self-Assessment

SWANSON, Mark
Faculty of Intercultural Studies
Yamaguchi Prefectural University

DAVIS, Rian
Language Center
Kwansei Gakuin University

Abstract

Teacher self-assessment can be implemented both as a tool to assess teaching efficacy and to encourage teacher self-reflection. This paper investigates the accuracy of teacher self-assessment and discusses the implications for teachers and educational institutions. It expands on previous research regarding self-inflation and the Better Than Average (BTA) effect, including the work of Jonathan D. Brown (2011), whose findings support the claim that people tend to believe they are better than others, especially for characteristics and skills that are important to them. This study specifically sought to examine whether or not the self-inflation effects that Brown observed in student cases could also be observed in teachers. The tendency of self-inflation stems from a desire to feel good about oneself, as well as cognitive (Brown, 2011) and perhaps evolutionary reasons (Trivers, 2011). Self-inflation effects may have implications for Professional Development (PD), such as making teachers less receptive to adopting new or different approaches to their current teaching practices. For this reason, as well as others, it may be useful for teachers to be aware of the pervasiveness of self-inflation. The main findings of this study were previously published in the Hawaii International Conference on Education (HICE) Conference Proceedings in 2017, and this paper includes a broadened analysis of the results.

Introduction

Teacher evaluations can figure prominently in the careers of educators, and can include Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) surveys, classroom observations and teacher self-assessment. Each has advantages and disadvantages, which depend partly on the specific aims of administering teacher evaluations, and schools and universities may deploy a combination of approaches. To determine which form of teacher evaluation is most suitable for a specific situation, it is necessary to understand the strengths and limitations of each. This study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion of teacher evaluations by investigating the accuracy of teacher self-assessment.

There are doubts regarding the validity of teacher self-assessment (Borg and Edmett, 2018), as teachers may have a propensity to rate themselves in overly positive terms. If true, that would not necessarily nullify the usefulness of teacher self-assessment, but at minimum is a factor to be taken into account when implementing teacher self-assessment and analyzing the results. Furthermore, self-inflation effects could have implications for teachers' professional development. If there are teachers who are unduly confident in their own abilities, they may be less vigilant about oversights in their teaching methods, as well as perhaps less motivated to improve their teaching and engage in professional development activities. This study investigates self-inflation in the context of EFL teachers at Japanese

universities. First it seeks to determine whether or not self-inflation effects can be observed, and secondly, it analyzes one possible determining factor of self-inflation: the number of years of teaching experience in the relevant field. Here, ‘relevant field’ refers to one’s teaching experience at the current level of education. For example, a teacher with two years at high school-level but currently employed as a university instructor for five years would only be considered to have five years of experience in the relevant field.

Theoretical Background of Self-Inflation

Traditional views in psychology held that it was beneficial for individuals to possess accurate self-perceptions, yet subsequent research has suggested that overly-positive self-evaluations are normal and may be advantageous (Taylor and Brown, 1988). Most people tend to view themselves as unique rather than common and believe themselves to be more talented, capable, competent, honorable, moral, compassionate and sympathetic than others (Brown, 2011). Moreover, the tendency to self-inflate is heightened for characteristics and abilities that the individual regards as important (Brown, 2011).

There are various explanations to account for self-inflation. It may derive mainly from self-enhancement needs – the desire to feel good about oneself – and may at times be solely produced by cognitive factors, such as an asymmetry of knowledge and the tendency to focus on oneself when making comparative judgments (Brown, 2011). Moreover, some argue that its origin may be traced to the forces of natural selection. When competing for resources and mates, there is a selection advantage in inflating one’s worth (Varki & Brower, 2013), and evolutionary psychologist Robert Trivers (2011) argues that self-deception evolved in the service of deception of others, since a self-deceived liar can more easily escape detection. Furthermore, Trivers believes there is a “systematic deformation of the truth at each stage of the psychological process.” He adds, “from its biased arrival, to its biased encoding...to misremembering and then misrepresenting it to others, the mind continually acts to distort information flow in favor of the usual good goal

of appearing better than one really is” (p. 139).

Method of Research

A ten-question survey was created via SurveyMonkey. To collect the opinions of non-Japanese teachers at the tertiary level in Japan, the survey was distributed through email and announcements on social media such as Facebook. 102 teachers participated in the study and of these, 4 were excluded from the data analysis due to incomplete answers.

Demographic Data of the Participants

The survey participants were non-Japanese, mostly male, and represented a wide range in age. Of the 98 participants, 73 were male and 25 were female (figure 1). The youngest age range represented was 25 to 34 years old and the oldest was 75 years old or over (figure 2). There were no participants under 25 years old.

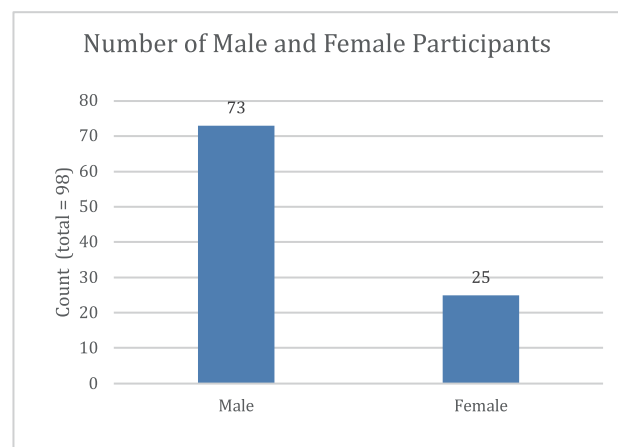


Figure 1: Male and Female Distribution

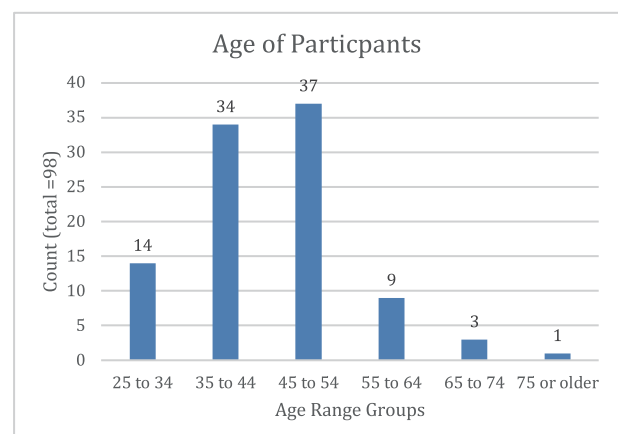


Figure 2: Age of the Participants

Results

The following findings will be discussed: Firstly, the vast majority of participants rated their own teaching skills better than average; Secondly, participants rated their teaching skills compared to their present and former colleagues more highly than they rated their computer literacy skills compared to present and former colleagues; Thirdly, the majority of participants answered that they are less likely than other teachers to overrate their own teaching ability; Finally, there is a correlation between teacher self-rating scores and years of teaching experience in the relevant field.

Participants were asked to rate their own teaching ability on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being extremely poor and 10 being superb). Most participants rated themselves highly (figure 3). The average self-rating was approximately 7.7 (table 1). Four participants rated themselves as a 10. Only one participant rated himself as less than 5, and notably this participant was still in his first year of university teaching.

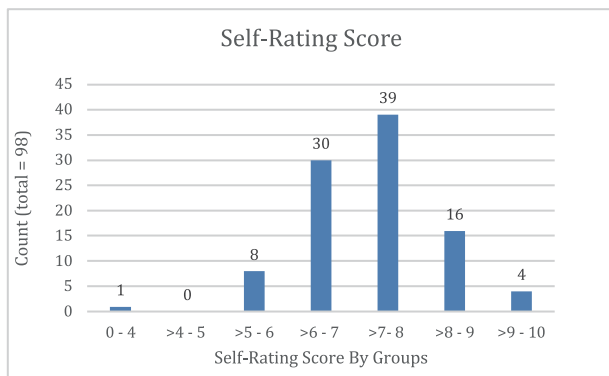


Figure 3: How Participants Rate Their Teaching Ability on a Scale of 1 to 10

Mean	7.698969	Skewness	-0.6852
Standard Error	0.108563	Range	7
Median	8	Minimum	3
Mode	8	Maximum	10
Standard Deviation	1.069218	Count	98
Sample Variance	1.143228		
Kurtosis	3.072634		

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Self-Rating Scores

Next, participants were asked to compare their teaching ability to current and former non-Japanese colleagues. Only 2 of the 98 participants rated themselves as below average (figure 4). Of these, one teacher had only been teaching at university for two-and-a-half years and

the other teacher only for one year. In theory an even distribution of answers above and below average may be expected, yet the distribution is highly skewed towards a positive self-rating (figure 4). These results are consistent with Brown's (2011) claim that most people tend to view themselves as above average when comparing their own skills to that of others.

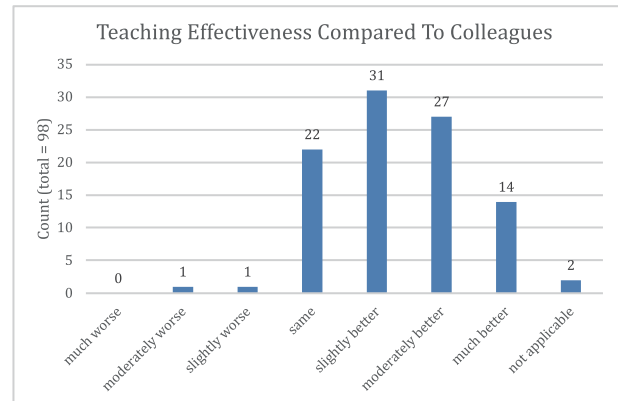


Figure 4: Participants Rated Their Teaching Compared to Colleagues

Next, participants were asked to rate their computer literacy skills in comparison to current and former non-Japanese colleagues. The purpose of this question was to test Brown's claim (2011) that self-inflation effects are heightened for skills and characteristics that the individual views as important. It would seem likely that the majority of teachers would regard their teaching skills as more important to their professional identity and self-esteem than their computer literacy skills, and thus a higher self-rating may be expected. As can be seen, the results are consistent with Brown's claim as the average rating for computer literacy skills is comparatively lower and there is a higher number of teachers who rated their computer literacy skills as below average (figure 5).

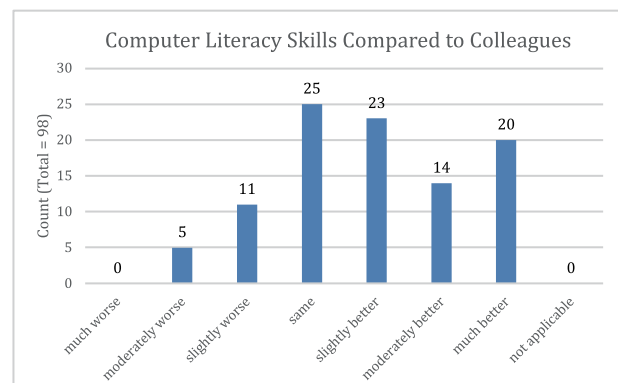


Figure 5: Participants Rated Their Computer Literacy Skills Compared to Colleagues

Next, participants were asked if they think they are most likely to overrate, accurately rate, or underrate their own teaching ability (figure 6). Of the 98 participants, 60 answered that they are most likely to accurately rate, 20 answered that they are most likely to underrate, and 18 answered that they are most likely to overrate their own teaching ability. Next, participants were asked if they think other teachers are most likely to overrate, accurately rate, or underrate their own teaching ability (figure 7). Of the 98 participants, 51 answered that other teachers are most likely to overrate, 31 answered that other teachers are most likely to accurately rate, and 16 answered that other teachers are most likely to underrate their own teaching ability. There is a significant contrast between the answers to these two questions. The majority of participants believe that they would be most likely to accurately rate their own teaching ability, yet a majority also believe that other teachers would most likely overrate their own teaching abilities. Furthermore, there was only a single participant, a female, who thought that she would both overrate her own teaching ability and other teachers would underrate their own teaching abilities. These results seem to suggest that teachers are more skeptical of other teachers than they are of themselves when it comes to the perceived accuracy of self-evaluation.

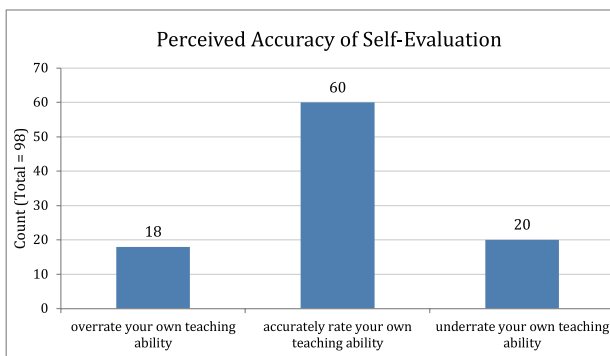


Figure 6: Participants' Perceived Accuracy of Rating Their Own Teaching Ability

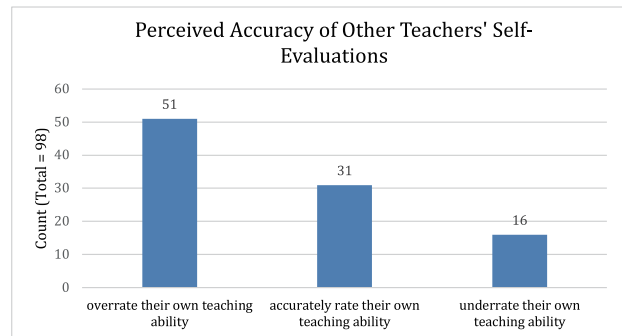


Figure 7: Participants' Perceived Accuracy of Other Teachers' Self-Evaluations

Lastly, the data shows that there is a broad range of teaching experience in the relevant field among the participants (figure 8). Furthermore, there is a correlation between teaching experience and the self-rating scores (figure 9). As can be seen, there is a slight curve in the trendline between the two variables. Teachers who rate themselves lower tend to have less teaching experience. The correlation coefficient between the two factors is .4, which indicates a relatively strong correlation. Therefore, it is consistent with the data to conclude that teachers with more experience may tend to self-rate themselves higher than teachers with less experience. If it is true that teachers with more experience tend to rate themselves more highly, this could be a consequence of experienced teachers being more susceptible to self-inflation. Or, perhaps it could simply be that teachers with more experience are indeed more effective teachers on average and their higher self-ratings reflect this fact.

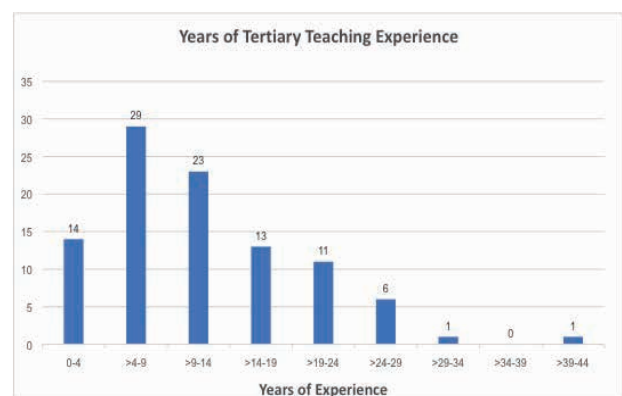


Figure 8: Years of Teaching Experience at the Tertiary Level

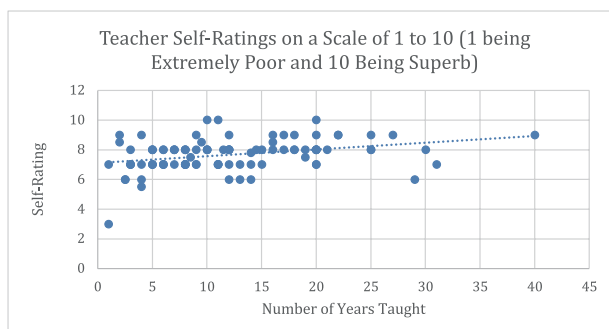


Figure 9: Scatterplot of self-ratings and years of teaching experience with trendline

Conclusion

The results of the survey seem to suggest a likelihood of self-inflation when educators are asked to self-rate their teaching, especially in the context of comparing their own teaching effectiveness to that of their colleagues. However, additional studies with higher numbers of participants would be recommended to ensure that the results of this study are accurate and reliable. Having a high opinion of one's own teaching may be justified and even beneficial in various ways. However, it is also possible that possessing an overly high opinion of one's teaching could lead to complacency and undercut motivation for educators to improve their teaching. Moreover, perhaps self-inflation tendencies could result in teachers being less willing to adopt alternative teaching methods if they have undue confidence in their current ones. Ideally, raising awareness about the pervasiveness of self-inflation may encourage educators to engage in more self-reflection and obtain more feedback on one's teaching practices from colleagues and students.

Further Analysis and Research

This paper focused only on certain aspects of the data. However, there were other aspects that may have merited analysis. Firstly, there may have been a distinction between male and female participants' answers to some of the questions. Secondly, it may be worthwhile to expand this study to different levels of education, rather than limited to university teachers, to see if the results would hold. Finally, it could be expanded to a cross-cultural study in order to determine to what degree self-

inflation may be a culturally-based phenomenon.

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