

SHOULD WE INVOLVE OUR LEARNERS IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

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Abstract: Language learners must be fully involved in the teaching and assessment process so that they can benefit from its outcomes. To reach this aim, learners' reflective journals were used to collect qualitative data from five students working on a two-week group project in order to investigate whether they would experience shared, sustained flow. The factors that sustained these participants' intense engagement were also examined. A content analysis of the data revealed that the learners' intense engagement was not totally shared, sustained flow although they were exceptionally highly motivated. The following conditions: group as one entity, an inspiring group leader, autonomy, clear project goals, and authenticity that were ensured before the project work started explained why the participants were determined to achieve the goals set for the project at all costs. To value the results of this study, self-assessment can be used as an alternative in assessment in order to boost English language learners' motivation during an assessment time. However, further studies are needed to explore the purposeful generation of motivational flows with other self-assessment instruments and motivation questionnaires.

Keywords: self-assessment, shared, sustained flow, intense engagement, project

Résumé : Les apprenants en langues doivent être pleinement impliqués dans le processus d'enseignement et d'évaluation afin de pouvoir bénéficier de ses résultats. Pour atteindre cet objectif, des journaux de réflexion des apprenants ont été utilisés pour collecter des données qualitatives auprès de cinq étudiants travaillant en groupe afin de déterminer s'ils vivraient un flux motivationnel partagé et soutenu au cours d'un travail de projet de deux semaines. Les facteurs qui soutiendraient l'engagement intensif de ces participants ont également été examinés. Une analyse textuelle des données a révélé que l'engagement intense des apprenants n'était pas totalement partagé et soutenu, bien qu'ils aient été extrêmement motivés. Les conditions suivantes: groupe comme une seule entité, un chef de groupe inspirant, autonomie, des objectifs clairs du projet et l'authenticité qui ont été assurés avant le début du travail de projet pourraient expliquer pourquoi les participants étaient déterminés à atteindre à tout prix les objectifs fixés pour leur travail de projet. Pour valoriser les résultats de cette étude, l'auto-évaluation peut être utilisée comme une alternative à l'évaluation traditionnelle afin de stimuler la motivation des apprenants de la langue anglaise pendant la période d'évaluation. Cependant, d'autres études sont nécessaires pour explorer la génération ciblée de flux motivationnels avec d'autres instruments d'auto-évaluation et des questionnaires de motivation.

Mots-clés : Auto-évaluation, flux motivationnels partagés et soutenus, engagement intense, projet

Introduction

Language assessment should involve all the stakeholders, including the language learners. However, in some teaching contexts an assessment is usually organized by the teachers and the school administration to make administrative decisions. In such a situation learners and teachers do not use the outcomes of an assessment in order to improve the processes of language learning and teaching. According to Pena-Florida (2002), such an assessment becomes the property of the teacher and the school administration and it excludes language learners whose future is determined by its results. Other specialists such as Darling-Hammond (1994) views an assessment as a chance to promote a successful second language (L2) learning instead of fostering social inequity or promoting the best learners at the expense of those learners who are struggling to achieve the goals that they had set for learning an L2 at all costs. Thus, each individual learner regardless of their academic results should be allowed to self-assess or to assess the contents of a teaching unit. Additionally, a teacher's role may not be limited to design tests and assign grades to their learners. Learners should be involved in the process of assessment by providing them with the appropriate tools designed for this specific purpose. These tools may range from the checklists, rating scales, rubrics, reflection forms, to the questionnaires. These instruments allow a learner to think about their own performance in order to decide on the next step in their L2 learning (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). However, this does not mean that an L2 learner should design their own assessment materials and assign themselves grades. They should be taught how to self-assess or how to assess their peers. In this case, self-assessment becomes a subject like grammar or composition. When a learner is trained to self-assess or to reflect on their own learning process during an assessment period, their interest in the assessment instrument increases. Consequently, they devote all their attention and effort to it.

Self-and-peer assessment aims to give language learners an opportunity to reflect on teaching and learning processes so that they can decide on their future learning goals (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). It additionally requires them to evaluate a teaching content or to give constructive comments to a classmate. For example, peer-review is an example of peer-assessment. It can reinforce an L2 writer's writing abilities and equip them with skills that can help them improve their draft before it reaches the phase of submission.

In spite of the benefits related to self-and peer-assessment, learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Mali are not given any possibilities to assess teaching and learning processes in order to improve their future learning. Additionally, studies related to the Malian EFL context are scarce. It has been hypothesized that providing language learners with opportunities to evaluate or to reflect on their learning experiences during a group project work might increase their motivational level and help them experience an intense motivational state that could be identical

to shared, sustained flow. To reach this aim, a qualitative method research study investigates the occurrence of shared, sustained flow and the factors that maintain it during a project work. The rationale for the study has been explained in the introduction that is followed by the literature review section emphasizing the positive impacts of self-and peer-assessment and a thorough description of shared, sustained flow. The article continues with the research methods that highlight the participants and the data collection instruments. The findings and their discussions lead to some recommendations for EFL teachers who might be interested in involving their students in teaching and assessment processes.

1. Literature Review

1.1 *Positive Impacts of Self-and Peer-assessment on Second Language Learning*

Previous studies related to the self-and peer-assessment indicated that this type of assessment has the potential to boost learners' motivational level and push them to review or improve their ongoing work. For example, in a study conducted by Birjandi and Tamjid (2010) with 60 Iranian EFL students about the effect of self-assessment on their motivation, it has been revealed that journal writing had a positive impact on these students' motivation in writing classes. Journal writing transforms writing into a moment of joy, pleasure, confidence, and interaction. In this way, the writing piece becomes the property of the learner who decides to share it with the teacher and sometimes the classmates depending on the criteria set for the journal writing (Quirke, 2001). Similarly, the studies by Chen (2008) and Min (2006) showed that self-assessment might have a positive impact on students' writing abilities and also their overall learning if they were trained to use the self-assessment tools such as checklists, rubrics, and reflection forms. These results further support Charvade, Jahandar, and Khodabandehlou (2012) and Sajedi's (2014) findings showing that portfolio assessment had a positive impact on EFL learners' motivation to learn English. It helped them set their learning goals and know about their strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, self-assessment promotes a learner's autonomy (Pena-Florida, 2002). Once language learners are trained to self-assess, their autonomy increases and the anxiety related to the assessment may decrease. Brown (2007) also noted a learner's autonomy as one of the 12 principles of L2 learning and teaching. Based on these positive results, it would be necessary to use self-and peer-assessment with the Malian EFL learners in order to boost their motivational level during an assessment period.

Another activity that may favor the development of learners' autonomy and push them to do something authentic with the language is an intensive project work. During project work learners interact with their group peers in order to negotiate the form and the meaning of a language (Kobayashi, 2003). Therefore, shared, sustained flow, a form of group motivational current can be applied in a language classroom to guarantee a successful project work and language learning although it

is not an everyday motivational phenomenon that can be planned like a regular language course (Ibrahim & AL-Hoorie, 2019).

1.2 Shared, Sustained Flow

Shared, sustained flow (SSF), a motivational concept used by Ibrahim and Al-Hoorie (2019) to refer to the directed motivational currents can be described as a sequence of collective motivational peaks that engage a group of language learners in an exceptional effort investment to achieve a valuable learning goal at all costs (Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie, 2019). It is characterized by a productivity out of expectation, an intense engagement, a group identity, group cohesiveness with positive group norms, and autonomy (Ibrahim & Al-Hoorie, 2019). However, it is worth mentioning that little empirical evidence is available to lend support to these characteristics except for Ibrahim and Al-Hoorie's (2019) study. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a classroom intervention study framed within a SSF perspective and under the assumption that self-and peer-assessment, namely reflective journals would help EFL learners experience series of heightened motivational flows that would allow them to enjoy their project work and that would induce successful learning. Knowing about their strengths and weaknesses during an assessment time may help a language learner focus their effort on the areas that need to be improved instead of concentrating their attention on all of the aspects of a language. To reach this purpose, the following research questions will be addressed:

Research Questions

1. Will EFL learners experience SSF while reflective journals are used along with an intensive project work to assess them?
2. What are the features that will maintain the learners' intense engagement?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative research methodology was used to design this study in order to capture all the details that would explain or affect learners' motivational levels. Therefore, learners' reflective journals were used to allow the researcher to get an insight into the learners' learning experiences and understand how reflecting on these experiences would affect their intense engagement while working on a group project. Learners' reflective journal would be used as a learning and a data collection tool.

2.2 Participants

The teacher-researcher was teaching business English to the class that the participants were attending at Ecole Normale d'Enseignement Technique et Professionnel in Bamako, Mali. The class was composed of 44 sophomores and they

were majoring in accountancy and finance management. Each semester they take 45-hour English course as a requirement toward their Master's degree completion in accountancy and finance management. The class met twice a week and each class lasted three hours with a 30-minute break. They were working in small groups of five students each except for one group of four students. All the groups were highly motivated with remarkable motivational changes such as coming to the class regularly and setting routines that allowed them to reach their project goals, but it has been noticed that their high motivational currents were not identical to the shared, sustained flow experiences because they did not talk about their feelings of enjoyment or enthusiasm although they had set clear goals for their project work. This decision has been motivated by Ibrahim's (2020) findings which indicated that the energized motivational experiences were not only fueled by a clear vision or goal, but they were also sustained by a positive affect such as satisfaction. Therefore, the five students whose experiences seemed to be sustained by a positive affect and clear goals were selected to be the participants of the present study so as to explore if their motivational experiences were totally SSF. A pseudonym was given to each of them to keep them anonymous as seen in table 1 that illustrates the participants' biographic profiles.

Names	Gender	Age	Proficiency Level	First Language	Goals for English learning
Husseïni	male	19	Intermediate	Bambara	Wanted to reach an advanced level in English in order to work for an international bank
Issa	male	19	intermediate	Songhay	Wanted to reach an advanced level in English and carry on his studies in the USA
Jean	male	18	Intermediate	Dogon	Wanted to work for ASECNA and English is a required language to get access to this enterprise
Sally	female	19	Intermediate	Bambara	Wanted to reach an advanced level in English and apply for a Norwegian scholarship called "NORAD"
Zeinab	female	18	Intermediate	Fulfulde	Wanted to immigrate to Canada and major in Business Administration

Table 1. Participants' Biographic Information and English Learning Goals

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

-Project

Data were collected when the participants were preparing a two-week written report about the strategies that could be used to give a boost to the Malian economy. It is worth mentioning that the teacher-researcher gave a checklist to the participants so that they could assess their writing piece before it reached the final stage of submission. They submitted their report to a jury of assessors composed of three teachers whose field is accountancy and finance. These assessors were chosen based on their field of expertise and their fluency in the English language.

-Reflective journals

A reflective journal provides an L2 learner with opportunities to reflect on their learning experiences in order to decide on their future learning goals. In other terms, it gave them a voice (Bashan & Holsblat, 2017). The five participants made reflective entries in which they described their own motivational feelings, their group motivational experiences, and the project work experiences. They additionally explained how their motivational state affected or maintained their engagement. The teacher-researcher did not give them any specific writing instructions. This was decided to increase the validity of the data, but also to enhance learners' ownership of their reflective journals. They were only required to reflect on their motivational feelings and any related-project experiences that they considered significant and worth being shared. To have a better insight about the participants' reflective comments, the teacher-researcher discussed the various comments with them during a classroom conference organized at their convenience. Each week they made an entry in their reflective journals. As the project lasted two weeks, each participant made two entries for a total of 10 for the five participants.

2.4 Data Analysis

A content analysis as explained by Harding and Whitehead (2013) and Nimehchisalem (2018) was used in order to capture all the details that would contribute to a better understanding of the participants' motivational experiences and the situations that would maintain their motivational flows so that a successful language learning could occur. Harding and Whitehead (2013) noted that a content analysis allows a researcher to count and report the frequency of the phenomenon or concept that they are trying to figure out. Dörnyei and Tagushi (2010) additionally argued that an analysis based on the number of references to a theme or concept helps a researcher to reliably report what was said by the participants. The researcher read the learners' reflective accounts many times in order to comprehend them. After this iterative process all the ideas or concepts that were useful to understand the learners' motivational surges and the parameters that would sustain them were selected and counted based on their number of references by the participants directly or indirectly. As shown in the following student sample

comment: “My group was motivated to do the best report and propose a good strategy. For example, we came to school before everybody and we went home after everybody”. The theme group as one entity would count as three because this participant used ‘we’ and ‘my’ three times to refer to his group. Behavioral routines such as coming to school before everybody or leaving after everybody would count as two.

3. Results

A content analysis of the data extracted from the learners’ written accounts was done in order to capture all the concepts that explained the learners’ motivational peaks and the factors that were susceptible to maintain them. The findings revealed that the participants mentioned group as one entity, inspiring leader, autonomy, authenticity, and clear goals as situations favoring their intense engagement as can be seen in table 2 that illustrates the various themes and the number of references to these themes by the participants. Two student sample comments will be displayed to illustrate each theme. However, it is important to mention that all the comments were taken into account while selecting a theme although only two comments will be shown to illustrate each theme. The choice of these student samples was motivated by their clarity and relevance to a theme.

Themes and Number of References	Student Sample Comments
Group as one entity (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My group worked together easily and efficiently the third day when we started to be like a good family. We all considered ourselves as members of the group at that time and we were motivated to work hard for its success.” • “My group members are united now by a link of friendship and we worked hard to protect it and present a good report in order to win the prize for the honor of the group. I am sometimes tired but I can’t stop and be the cause of my group failure. It is like a family and when one fails we will all feel it.”
Inspiring leader (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To tell the truth, my group was not engaged at the beginning but my group chef is this sort of motivated student and she did not stop even if everybody was tired. At the end her courage contaminated all the members and we decided to set a plan and work for our group. She was an excellent leader and she knows how to encourage people. For example, she will make tea or popcorn for us. Due to her another girl in my group started to cook and bring it on campus when we were working after the courses.” • “My group had a good leader and she helped a lot. She worked hard and this motivated the other members to follow. She was also a leader of consensus and everybody respected her. She imposed herself

	<p>when a member tried to talk or create disorder when we worked. With her there was not any place for talk or telephone games.”</p>
Autonomy (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I can say without doubt that my group worked hard when we could organize our things by ourselves and share the work. We also used the checklist correctly and worked on the parts that were not good. We also decided to work everyday after the class and we worked in my mother’s office because it has internet connection and fresh air is available. This helped us a lot with research.” • “We progressed rapidly when we were capable to use the checklist correctly and we decide on the things we must do. We also worked after the class in order to finish before the date.”
Authenticity (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The project augmented my interest in English. It was about my branch and this made the project easy even if the report was in English. The checklist helped my group to be in the topic and it also diminished the sign of red pen in our copy. We concentrate only on the parts that were in the checklist and it was these parts that were corrected. I really like this sort of test and we learned a lot even if discussions can be hot in the group.” • “The project is interesting because we worked in a group on our domain like real experts. We practice English even if we also speak French and Bambara [a local language that is spoken by the majority of the learners as their first language]. But without the project we will not speak any English after the course. Group work can be noisy but we learn in this noise and we practice the language. We also have time to ameliorate our work and learn new things during each meeting. I prefer this to 2 or 3 hours test and you do not have any good grade.”
Clear Goals (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The teacher explained the project and we know what to do. When we begin it was very difficult but after we really progressed because we had to respond to many questions and present a very good strategy for Mali. The objectives were also clear for us and we know what to do due to the checklist and we could verify. We really like it and we could see our progress and decide by ourselves. For this project, we only see the final goal and we worked very very hard to attain it.” • “We know what to do since the beginning and the checklist helped us to know what to do. My objective was to practice and I could do this with my group even if we speak French or Bambara form time to time. It was a written work but we communicate to find a consensus.”

Table 2. Common Themes

In summary, the data analysis indicated that the participants were intensely engaged in their project work. Their motivational peaks were stabilized when the group members considered their group as one entity and worked together for its

success. This sense of belonging to the group and refer to it as 'we' increased learners' autonomy to function as a group outside of the classroom. Autonomy can additionally be explained by the learners' capacity to reflect independently on their ongoing work and set new goals for their learning. As the teacher was a facilitator, it was necessary to have a group leader who could play the role of a teacher and motivate their group peers to work efficiently. Once this role was fully assumed by the group leader, the group started producing beyond expectations and progressing smoothly. Another factor that maintained learners' engagement is the high authenticity that characterized the project. These learners were determined to deal with a topic that was congruent with their lives after school. They were also doing a task that is usually done by the teachers, that means assessing their own work by reflecting on what they did.

4. Discussion

Although most of the criteria that were necessary for an efficient intensive project work were successfully established, the findings did not clearly indicate that the five participants' high motivational level was totally SSF experiences. What is interesting is that the fact of being able to self-assess by reflecting on their own performance and that of their group members in order to decide on their future learning goals might have boosted these participants' motivational level and pushed them to set behavioral routines in order to achieve their project work goals. This heightened motivational level could have favored a successful project work that could have induced engagement and enjoyment although they had not completely experienced SSF.

The findings additionally imply that the five learners' intense engagement during the project work was sustained by the following conditions: group as one entity, an inspiring leader, autonomy, authenticity, and clear goals. These participants' determination was fueled by the closeness that existed between their group members. They all identified themselves with the group and were ready to guarantee its success at all costs. This close relationship was also protected by an inspiring leader who was able to ensure a safe project work for each of her group peers because of her hard work and engagement. The group cohesion therefore facilitated the role shift which is considered as a requirement by certain specialists such as Dörnyei, Henry, and Muir (2016) so that a successful project work can occur. It guarantees learners' autonomy and increases their ability to function as a group inside and outside of the classroom. These results lend support to Ibrahim and Al-Hoorie's (2019) findings stating that partial autonomy and group identity facilitated the operation of small groups outside the classroom. The presence of positive group work dynamics increased the participants' motivational level, but they did not generate SSF experiences although they were supposed to favor the occurrence of motivational currents as theorized by Dörnyei et al. (2016). What is interesting is that

the five participants' motivational surges were sufficient to support their project work goal achievement although their experiences were not totally SSF.

Another important finding related to this study is the project clear goals that were susceptible to sustain these participants motivated behavior until they achieved their project work goals. For example, knowing the areas that they should emphasize while drafting their report might have increased and maintained their intense concentration because it allowed them to focus their attention and effort on some specific questions instead of addressing multiples issues in their writing piece. According to Crusan (2014) "students appreciate the freedom to focus on one feature in their writing to the exclusion of others as it frees them from worry and raises awareness of that one issue and ways to combat it" (p. 211). This might explain why these participants thought that the project work clear goals helped them to fully concentrate on it. The five participants further explained that the authenticity that characterized the project boosted their interest in it and pushed up their motivational level. They all appreciated the opportunity that allowed them to carry out a task (self-and peer-assessment) that is normally accomplished by the classroom teacher.

Based on the results of this present study, it can be deduced that the reflective journals used along with an intensive project work can be considered as an alternative to other types of traditional assessments in order to induce engagement and productivity. For example, they can increase learners' autonomy and motivation which are considered by Brown (2007) and Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) as some of the 12 principles of assessment, teaching, and learning. The high authenticity that characterizes this type of assessment may also facilitate its use as an alternative assessment that can engender interest and engagement. It also offers a language teacher an opportunity to offer quality feedback that can be conducive to a successful language learning.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, language learners should be considered as the most significant stakeholders in the process of teaching, learning, and assessing. Their responsibility should not be limited only to that of a test-taker. One of the most important findings related to this present study implies that the participants were intensively engaged in their project work because they were given opportunities to reflect on their learning and assessment processes. This exceptional engagement could be justified by the following conditions that were successfully established with learners' help: group as one entity, an inspiring leader, autonomy, authenticity, and clear project goals. Therefore, an EFL teacher should secure these parameters before implementing an intensive project work. Once learners' intense engagement is maintained, they can produce beyond expectations in order to reach the goals set for their language learning. However, it is worth mentioning that it is difficult to provide L2 or EFL teachers with a lesson plan that can be used to prepare

SSF courses because of the particularities that characterize each teaching and learning context. What is interesting is that the conditions that are susceptible to facilitate SSF experiences are known and they can be adapted to various contexts in order to transform language learners' learning experiences, including assessment into a moment of learning and engagement.

One limitation of this study can be related to the data collection instrument that did not include SSF questionnaires. Consequently, further research should use SSF motivation questionnaires along with the learners' reflective journals to collect qualitative and quantitative data in order to measure the participants' motivational responses to self-and peer-assessment during an intensive project work.

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