

## **Self-Assessment and Learner Autonomy: A Case of a Japanese Summer Immersion Program for High School Students**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates how high school students use and perceive self-assessment in a Japanese immersion program. Using a framework of learner autonomy (Holec, 1981), and through surveys and interviews, the study finds that students with previous self-assessment experience and higher metacognitive awareness about learning more frequently use self-assessment to track their progress and set up goals. Moreover, students with limited self-assessment experience and lower metacognitive awareness start to take more active roles in learning as they engage in self-assessment activities. The study results demonstrate that engagement in self-assessment can promote learner autonomy and confirm the benefits of self-assessment argued for in previous literature. Students in this study, for instance, felt accomplished, confident, and motivated as a result of self-assessment, suggesting it can help create a more learner-centered learning environment. This study also identified some issues regarding the implementation of self-assessment in the program, in that both teachers and students seem to have limited understanding of self-assessment. Overall, the study findings suggest that the program should address teacher and student training, and alignment of the curriculum and self-assessment for a more autonomy-supportive learning environment. Lastly, this paper discusses implications for future self-assessment practice and research in L2 programs.

**Key words:** self-assessment, can-do statements, autonomy, Japanese, secondary

### **1 Introduction**

Recently, the European Language Portfolio (ELP) and LinguaFolio (LF) are drawing educators' attention as portfolio assessment tools to facilitate autonomy (González, 2009; Sisamakris, 2006; Yılmaz & Akcan; Ziegler, 2014) and foreign language (L2) learning (Moeller, Theiler, & Wu, 2012; Ziegler & Moeller, 2012) through repeated involvement in goal-setting, self-assessment, and reflection. Against this backdrop, the present study focuses on self-assessment.

The benefits of self-assessment have been argued since the late 1980s (Blanche & Marino, 1989; Oscarson, 1989) but self-assessment has not been a common practice in L2 classrooms because teachers feel skeptical of the validity of learners' self-assessments (Little, 2002, 2005, 2009). While previous studies found that students' positive attitude and their active engagement in self-assessment are crucial for the development of learner autonomy, many focused on teacher's perspectives (Bullock, 2011; Cote Parra, 2009; Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith, & Crowley, 2011; Sahinkarakas, Yumru, & Inozu, 2010) rather than students' perspectives (Kato, 2009; Schärer, 2000; Ziegler, 2014). Moreover, few studies took students' individual differences into account. In addition, no self-assessment study has been conducted with younger learners of Japanese. The present study attempts to fill these gaps by examining how high-school-level students in one Japanese program experience self-assessment using surveys and interviews. It discusses how self-assessment facilitates their autonomy. This paper also identifies issues that programs should address to better benefit from self-assessment.

## **2 Formative Use of Self-Assessment**

### **2.1 Paradigm Shift**

Many earlier studies treated self-assessment as summative assessment and investigated its validity through one-shot quantitative studies. They found the following factors influence students' self-assessment outcomes: L2 domains to evaluate (Ross, 1998), learners' individual characteristics such as proficiency level and amount of previous experience with self-assessment (Blanche & Marino, 1989; Butler & Lee, 2010; Chen 2008; Harris, 1997; Janssen-van Dieten, 1989), format of self-assessment instruments and wording of descriptors (Heilenman, 1990), and the context and timing of self-assessment (Butler & Lee, 2006; Little, 2002; Peirce, Swain, & Hart, 1993). Meanwhile, other researchers argued that self-assessment should be conceptualized as formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Carless, 2007; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; De Saint Léger, 2009).

### **2.2 Benefits**

Formative self-assessment has many benefits. It helps students better understand their learning objectives (Assessment Reform Group, 2002), and have clearer plans to achieve goals (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2006). It can also positively impact students' motivation (Ziegler & Moeller, 2012) and self-efficacy (Schunk, 1996). Furthermore, ongoing self-assessment can provide students opportunities to reflect on their learning objectives, strategies, and outcomes in their learning processes, allowing them to make adjustments for further improvement. In this sense, such self-assessment can orient students' attention to the learning process (Oscarson, 1989). Since students can experience a sense of progress and achievement, process-oriented goals can also lead to improved learning attitude (Sisamakias, 2006; Ushioda & Ridley, 2002; Ziegler & Moeller, 2012) and performance (Moeller, Theiler, & Wu, 2012; Oscarson, 1989). Moreover, a notion of self-assessment challenges the dichotomy created in a conventional learning context where teachers are evaluators and learners are evaluatees. Having learners take a role of evaluator can create a more learner-centered learning environment (Little, 2005), which can encourage students to become more active participants in their own learning, supporting learner autonomy (González, 2009; Holec, 1981; Sisamakias, 2006; Yilmaz & Akcan, 2012; Ziegler, 2014).

### **2.3 Portfolios with Self-Assessment Component**

Drawing upon the concepts of learner-centered learning, assessment for learning, and learner autonomy, the Council of Europe developed the ELP in 2001 (Little & Perclová, 2001). Following this movement, the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) in the U.S. developed LF, based on the ELP, in 2003 (Van Houten, 2004, 2007). Both the ELP and LF include three pedagogical components: goal-setting, self-assessment, and reflection. The self-assessment section consists of can-do statements based on language proficiency standards such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. In 2006, Concordia Language Villages, the host organization of the Japanese program for the present study, developed The CLVisa, based on the ELP and LF, and introduced it to their programs (Van Houten, 2007).

## 2.4 Challenges

Self-assessment has some challenges. The first challenge is the difficulty in shifting from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered learning environment. Teachers have difficulty with sharing the responsibility of learning with their students (Dam, 2011). In addition, it takes a significant amount of time for students to get used to a learner-centered learning environment and to take responsibility for their own L2 learning (Cote Parra, 2009; Dam, 1995).

The second challenge is self-assessment training (Harris, 1997; Oscarson, 1989). Janssen-van Dielen (1989) argues that lack of learner training is one of the main reasons for the low correlation between learners' self-assessment and external evaluation. Lack of "teacher know-how" (Little, 2009, p.224) is another issue. Sufficient teacher training is essential to their ability to integrate self-assessment regularly into their classrooms (Bullock, 2011; Little, 2002; Schärer, 2000).

## 2 The Present Study

This study reports on one Japanese summer immersion program for high school students in the U.S. that actively strives to implement self-assessment. This research is unique since no self-assessment study has been conducted with young learners of Japanese language. Unlike previous studies that left out students' perspectives, the present study examines both students' and teachers' perspectives.

The data was obtained using surveys, interviews, and observations. Complementing quantitative methods with qualitative methods, this study scrutinizes what students do with self-assessment and also what they struggle with. The study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) How do students use and perceive self-assessment in the program?
- (2) What are the benefits of, and problem with, self-assessment in the program?
- (3) How can the program increase the effectiveness of self-assessment?

The study findings document students' individual differences in their perceptions towards self-assessment and signs of learner autonomy when students engage in self-assessment. The results also illustrate to what extent self-assessment is used as intended and what needs to be improved.

## 2.1 Methodology

The data were collected in a Japanese summer immersion camp in the Midwest region of the U.S. in 2014. The CLVisa used in this immersion program included two types of can-do lists: The Global Self-Assessment Grid and the Top Ten Communication Skills. However, as neither of them is language-specific, Japanese program facilitators developed an additional language-specific can-do list.

On Day 1, students received a brief introduction to the CLVisa. They were instructed to refer to the two non-language specific can-do lists throughout the four-week program. At the beginning, middle, and end of the program, the camp hosted self-assessment sessions using the language-specific can-do list. At the end of Week 2, students also wrote a reflection and set goals for the second half of the program. The CLVisa constituted 5% of the final grade.

## 2.2 Participants

### 2.2.1 Students

Twenty four out of 37 enrolled students (65%) participated in this study, including eight males and sixteen females. Students' ages ranged from 14 to 18 ( $M = 15.8$ ). Fourteen students (58%) had attended the camp before. There were four language levels, with Level 1 as the least proficient class and Level 4 as the most proficient class. Eight students (33%) were from Level 1, two students (8%) were from Level 2, four students (17%) were from Level 3, and ten students (42%) were from Level 4.

### 2.2.2 Teachers

Four teachers and one program facilitator participated in the research. Table 1 shows their demographic information. Their age ranged from 22 to 30 ( $M = 26$ ).

**Table 1: Teacher Demographics**

	Age	Level	Years	Occupation	Teaching experience
T1	27	1	2	substitute teacher	Japanese and ESL for K–12 students and adults
T2	30	2	1	Spanish, ESL teacher	Grades 7–12 for 4 years
T3	22	3	5	college student	1 summer as a high-school credit teacher, 4 summers as a camp counselor
T4	24	4	1	Japanese teacher	At a college-level for 1 year
PF	27	-	9	a manager of a theater	4 summers as a program facilitator, 1 summer as a high-school credit teacher, 4 times as a camp counselor

*Note.* PF = program facilitator; Level = the level of assigned class at the program; Years = the number of summers as a camp staff; Occupation = occupation outside of the summer program.

## 2.3 Instruments and Procedure

The present study triangulates data sources and methods using student surveys and interviews, teacher interviews, class/program observation, and document analysis. Table 2 summarizes the schedule and type of instruments.

**Table 2: Summary of the Schedule and Instruments**

Timeline	Students	Teachers
Day 1	Background Information Survey	Background information Survey
End of Week 2	Semi-Structured Interview 1	Semi-Structured Interview 1
End of Week 4	Semi-Structured Interview 2	Semi-Structured Interview 2
	Exit Survey	

The semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one with all the participants at the end of Week 2 and Week 4. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for content analysis. In order to gain an emic perspective, the researcher also worked as a volunteer and conducted participant observations throughout the four weeks. The exit survey targets two constructs: students' use of self-assessment and their perception of self-assessment. Survey items are on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from never (−2 points) to always (2 points) for the frequency of self-assessment and from strongly disagree (−2 points) to strongly agree (2 points) for students' perception.

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 General Trends in Student Responses

In order to examine the exit survey and the relationship between students' use of self-assessment (Items 1–19<sup>1</sup>) and their perception of self-assessment (Items 21–37), a scatterplot was examined (see Figure 1 in Appendix A) and Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated using mean scores for these two constructs for each student. Scores for Items 8, 21, 22, and 26–30 were inverted to calculate the means since negative wording is used. The two constructs have a moderately positive linear relationship,  $r(22) = .56, p < .01$ . Students' positive perception towards self-assessment is moderately associated with more ideal use of self-assessment. Students' negative perception is moderately associated with its less ideal use.

#### 3.2 Students' Reported Use of Self-Assessment

Items 1–20 of the exit survey investigate the frequency of self-assessment and the results are presented in Table 3 (see Appendix B). It shows survey items, means ( $M$ ), standard deviations ( $SD$ ), and the number of responses for each category: never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, and always. Items 1–8 asked if students evaluated their own Japanese skills during the program. Means for Items 1–6 are moderately high and those for Items 7 and 8 are low, all with relatively large standard deviations. These suggest that most students engaged in self-assessment occasionally inside and outside of class at some point after learning activities, though there was considerable individual variation. Items 9–15 asked if students referred to any one of the forms of can-do checklists or added their own can-do statements. All show low means: students generally did not refer to the can-do checklists provided nor create their own can-do statements. Items 16–17 asked what students did based on what the information from self-assessment. Relatively small means with very large standard deviations suggest substantial differences among individuals regarding whether they set learning goals and modified their learning strategies after self-assessment. Items 18–20 asked if there was any in-class self-assessment or reflection practice or activities. Low mean scores indicate that such activities were rare: this is confirmed by both student and teacher interviews.

#### 3.3 Students' Perceptions of Self-Assessment Tools and Activity

Items 21–37 of the exit survey are related to students' perception of self-assessment and the results are presented in Table 4 (see Appendix C). It shows survey items, means ( $M$ ), standard deviations ( $SD$ ), and the number of responses for strongly disagree ( $SD$ ), disagree ( $D$ ), neutral ( $NT$ ), agree

(A), and strongly agree (SA). Items 21–26 are about students’ emotional reaction towards self-assessment. Items 21, 22, and 26 have low means with large standard deviations, while Items 23–25 have moderately high means. Note that Items 21, 22, and 26 are negatively worded. These indicate that students had relatively positive perception towards self-assessment and that they felt that they had some control over their L2 learning in this program, although considerable individual variation exists. Items 27–30 are about students’ perceived difficulty of self-assessment. Low means with large standard deviations suggest that students generally did not find self-assessment difficult; yet again there is substantial variation.

Items 31 and 32 were about the effect of self-assessment for goal setting. Positive mean values with large standard deviations indicate that the self-assessment activity helped some students identify skills to be improved; although substantial individual variation is evident. Items 33–37 are about students’ perception of L2 self-assessment tools. Item 33 has a low mean with a large standard deviation: students generally did not perceive self-assessment as a useful tool for L2 learning, although their opinions vary substantially among individuals. This sounds discouraging; however the result needs to be interpreted with caution due to possible ambiguity of the question. Close analysis of student interview responses revealed that not all students interpreted Item 33 in the intended way. Some students seem to interpret “a useful tool for my Japanese learning” as “a useful tool to learn Japanese vocabulary, grammar, etc.” Thus, the quantitative results related to Item 33 need to be carefully interpreted in conjunction with students’ interview responses. Item 34 asked if the skills described in the can-do checklist matched classroom instruction, and has a low mean. The distribution of the responses show that approximately 38% of students found a mismatch between the skills listed in the can-do checklist and the skills they worked on in class. Items 35–37 are about the quality of the can-do statements, and have positive means values. The score distribution shows that 42% of students reported that the can-do statements include relevant skills, 58% of students reported that the skills described in the can-do statements were feasible to attain, and 67% of students reported that the can-do statements were clear. Students generally agreed that the quality of the existing can-do statements was not an issue.

### **3.4 Group Trends of Student Responses**

Based on the mean scores of self-assessment use (Items 1–19) and perception (Items 21–37) in the exit survey, each student was plotted on a quadrant graph, shown in Figure 1. No student falls on the top left plane (+ use, – perception). This indicates that no student reported ideal use of self-assessment while having negative perception. Most students fell in Group 1 (+ use, + perception), Group 2 (–use, + perception), or Group 3 (–use, – perception). Four students who fell on the y-axis or x-axis were excluded from this group trend analysis so that categorization of these students would not impact subsequent analysis. Tables 5 and 6 (see Appendices D and E) show means and standard deviations of each survey item by group.

#### **3.4.1 Group 1**

Group 1 ( $n = 7$ ) reported ideal use and positive perception. They had some previous experience with self-assessment both in L2 class and other subjects’ classes. Strikingly high mean scores for Items 1–6 indicate students’ frequent engagement in self-assessment. Furthermore, high mean scores for Items 16–17 suggest that Group 1 students frequently set goals and adjusted their

learning strategies based on what they found through self-assessment. This finding was confirmed by their interview responses, such as the following:

- (4) ((Asked if self-assessment was helpful for his Japanese learning)) Definitely so. Because when I first started, I was just checking off things that I already know. When I reached the midpoint, I check on the things I've improved on. And then look back on how I can compare to the beginning, seeing where do I still need to improve on. I noticed that in my listening and reading need a bit more tune up. So, I concentrated my focus on that for the last two weeks. (Student 9-2)
- (5) ((Asked how she used the can-do lists)) I filled out then I looked at what I had. And I incorporated in into my goals. And I look at my goal sheet every once in a while and see what I still need to work on. And then I look back and see if I could check anything else to check off. ... So I check it every once in a while and see what my goals should change to be. ... I did it like 3 or 4 times [during the last two weeks] (Student 21-2).

Group 1 students had high metacognitive awareness about the benefits of self-assessment from early on in the program. They started to take advantage of the information from self-assessment and actually set up or adjust their goals during the second half of the program. Despite these positive results, low mean scores for Items 9-14 reveals that even students who reported ideal use of self-assessment did not refer to the can-do checklists provided by the program much. The researcher did not observe any in-class activity that encouraged students to refer to the can-do lists either.

Items 21–30 are about students' affective responses to self-assessment. Items 21, 22, 27-30 with negative wording have low means and Items 23-25 have high means. This indicates that Group 1 students strongly felt encouraged, confident, and accomplished by conducting self-assessment. Group 1 students maintained this positive affective profile throughout 4 weeks.

- (6) Being able to see I couldn't do this before but I can check it off now like oh! I'm actually learning something (Student 24-1).
- (7) ((Being asked if self-assessment was helpful for his Japanese learning)) Maybe in a sort of self-confidence way. But not necessarily learning Japanese from it. But like a way to boost motivation to learn Japanese (Student 3-2).

In addition, Group 1 students felt that they were in control of their learning. They generally did not find self-assessment difficult; yet large standard deviations indicate that some did find it difficult. During the interviews, three out of seven students shared their concern about the accuracy of self-assessment. Items 31–37, which are related to self-assessment tools and activities, generally have high means except Item 34: most students in Group 1 strongly agree that self-assessment helped them identify things to improve and they generally think that the can-do checklist was a useful tool for their L2 learning, although skills covered in the can-do list did not necessarily match their classroom instruction.

### 3.4.2 Group 2

Group 2 ( $n = 8$ ) reported less-than-ideal use, but a positive perception. They had rather limited experience with self-assessment in L2 classes and in other subject classes. Positive mean scores for Items 1–6 suggests that Group 2 students sometimes engaged in self-assessment, but not as frequently as Group 1 students. Extremely low means for Items 9–14 indicate that Group 2 students hardly referred to the can-do statements provided by the program. Items 16 and 17 also have low means with large standard deviations, suggesting that although these students conducted self-assessment, many of them did not take advantage of the self-assessment results to set their goals and adjust learning strategies. Student interview responses also confirmed that most Group 2 students checked their L2 levels and tracked their learning progress only occasionally. Although some Group 2 students at the end of Week 2 were aware that self-assessment using the can-do statements could be useful for their learning, only a few of these students at the end of Week 4 reported that they actually set goals or adjusted their learning strategies based on the information they obtained from self-assessment. The lack of responses regarding goal-setting alone may not be adequate evidence for their inability to utilize self-assessment for goal-setting. Nonetheless, it is clear from the interview responses that Group 2 students' level of metacognitive awareness of the benefits of self-assessment seems lower than that of Group 1 students. This seems to be one of the critical differences between students in Group 1 and Group 2.

Regarding students' affective profile, low means for Items 21 and 22 suggest that Group 2 students did not find self-assessment discouraging or frustrating. In the interviews as well, no students mentioned that engaging in self-assessment caused negative feelings. On the other hand, slightly positive means for Items 23 and 24 show that self-assessment helped Group 2 students feel confident or accomplished slightly. Five out of eight students commented on self-assessment as a source of motivation, encouragement, and sense of accomplishment. Meanwhile, Student 20 from Level 4 reported that when his Japanese proficiency was low, self-assessment was more motivating because he could see his growth immediately. However, as he got more proficient he felt less accomplished and satisfied because he could not see obvious improvement as much as when he had lower proficiency.

Regarding students' perceived difficulty of self-assessment, low means for Items 28–30 indicate that Group 2 students generally did not find self-assessment difficult; however during the interviews, some students shared their concerns about the accuracy of self-assessment, similar to Group 1. A strikingly low mean for Item 33 suggests that Group 2 students did not perceive the can-do lists as particularly useful for their L2 learning. Students' negative perceptions towards the usefulness of can-do statements were evident in their interviews. For instance, Student 20 shared his negative perception towards self-assessment many times during both his first and second interviews.

- (8) Usually what these like checkmarks only do is like we just like checkmark them. And that's it. And I don't know what else they want us to do with that. ... I don't really see the point of the checklist (Student 20-1).
- (9) When I did the final self-evaluation, I was able to check mark all the boxes [on the language specific checklist], ... and I feel sad. ... I don't think that more boxes is the solution. I think the solution might be teacher recommendation (Student 20-2).



Student 20 shared his frustration about not knowing what he was expected to do with the can-do statements other than mark them off.

### 3.4.3 Group 3

Group 3 ( $n = 5$ ) reported less-than-ideal use and negative perceptions. They had rarely conducted self-assessment in L2 classes and only occasionally in other subject area classes. Items 1–6 on the frequency of self-assessment have much lower mean scores compared to Groups 1 and 2: generally speaking, self-assessment did not seem to be a priority for Group 3 students. This was evident from student interview responses. Four out of five students reported that they did not closely look at the list at the end of Week 2. Even at the end of Week 4, two students reported that they hardly looked at the checklist. In addition, low means for Items 16–17 suggest that students in this group generally did not use the results of self-assessment to set new learning goals or to adjust their learning strategies. This was confirmed in their interviews. However, the interviews also confirmed individual variations as the large standard deviation suggests. During the first interview Students 1 and 2 commented on the potential benefits of self-assessment. At the end of Week 4, the same two students mentioned that they used the can-do checklists to track their progress, while two others (Student 5 and 10) commented on the potential benefits of self-assessment. Also at the end of Week 4, Students 1 and 5 reported that they even set goals based on self-assessment. These interview responses show that Group 3 students initially did not think of or use self-assessment, even as a progress tracker, unlike students in Groups 1 and 2. However, as they engaged in the program-wide self-assessment, reflection, and goal-setting activity, they started to notice that self-assessment could inform them of their own learning progress. Moreover, a few students seemed to start setting goals based on the results of their self-assessment.

With respect to students' emotional reaction, low means for Items 21–24 suggest that self-assessment did not have a particularly positive or negative impact on Group 3 students' affective profile. In the interviews, four out of the five students commented that self-assessment made them feel neither encouraged nor discouraged and that it did not contribute to their confidence. Regarding the locus of control, Item 25 has a much smaller mean, whereas Item 26 has a much larger mean than the two other groups. These suggest that more Group 3 students felt that teachers rather than students themselves are in charge of their learning. However, Group 3 students did not mention anything related to these points during the interviews. Items 27–30 have small means: students felt that self-assessment, especially of speaking and listening, was somewhat difficult. However, during the interview, students did not provide possible reasons behind the difficulty, except for Students 2 and 22. Student 2's concern was about the accuracy of her self-assessment, which is similar to students in other groups. Student 22 who was in Level 4, on the other hand, shared different concerns.

- (10) I guess within the four weeks, I don't know if I've really improved enough to like put like new things like say I was at this checkbox and now I am at this checkbox. I haven't really learned enough to do that (Student 22-2).
- (11) I think was a little hard. I can understand the story lines of television shows, movies, and podcasts. But I haven't tried to really do that yet (Student 22-2).

Student 22 seemed to believe that four weeks was not long enough to recognize obvious improvements in her Japanese language skills. She was one of the most proficient students in the program and wrote “I want to work on learning and perfecting grammar” as her goal at the midterm point. Considering her language level, it is not difficult to imagine that she was pursuing more difficult skills than other students in the program and thus might have believed that frequent self-assessment within a span of 4 weeks might not be an appropriate approach. Another reason that Student 22 mentioned was that she could not assess whether she had the ability to do some of the things listed in the checklist because she could not try those activities in the camp. Two teachers made similar comments to Student 22’s. These comments suggest that while the can-do statements were phrased clearly, not all the can-do statements were suitable and applicable to the summer camp environment where students had extremely limited access to resources.

Items 33–37 on students’ opinion on the self-assessment tools and activities all have low means. In particular, the result for Item 33 suggests that students thought the can-do checklist was not so useful. When Group 3 students were asked if self-assessment was useful for their Japanese learning at the end of the program, two students answered ‘yes’ and explicitly commented on the benefits of self-assessment. Three students started their responses saying ‘no’. However, two of them continued saying that self-assessment helped them identify what they need to work on more. Their responses again point out that Item 33 was probably interpreted differently from what the researcher intended. Table 6 shows that Group 3 generally has lower mean scores compared to the other two groups. However, their individual mean scores plotted on Figure 1 are all below  $-0.50$ . Therefore, their perceptions may not have been very negative, though they were not very positive either.

A Group 3 mean score for Item 34 is the lowest among the three groups: Group 3 students seem to think that there was a gap between the skills described in the can-do list and those in classroom instructions. However, none of them mentioned this in the interview. For Item 34, Students 10 (Level 3) and 22 (Level 4) selected “neutral” and Students 1, 2, and 5, who are all students in Level 1 having no background with Japanese language, selected either “disagree” or “strongly disagree. Perhaps these three students saw a wide level range of can-do statements in the checklists, but what they learned in Level 1 class was represented by only a small number of can-do statements in the checklist.

### **3.5 Teacher Interviews**

#### **3.5.1 Use of Self-Assessment**

Teachers ( $N = 5$ ) were asked how they used the can-do statements. Teachers 2 and 3 mentioned that they used the can-do statements for their lesson planning. Despite this, neither of them shared the can-do statements as learning objectives with their students. Moreover, no teacher reported that they planned or adjusted their lessons based on students’ midterm self-assessment, reflection, and goal-setting. In fact, teachers did not look at their self-assessment, reflection, and goal-setting sheets until the end of the program. With respect to class activities, no teacher reported that they looked at the can-do statements together with students in class. Teachers 1 and 3 mentioned that they had a few reflection and goal-setting activities. These responses reveal teachers’ limited use of can-do statements and self-assessment activity.

### 3.5.2 Perception of Self-Assessment

Teachers were asked about their opinions about self-assessment tools and activities. All the teachers responded that self-assessment was useful for students. However, they did not explain reasons behind their opinions, except Teacher 3 who briefly mentioned that students used self-assessment as an opportunity to ask themselves where to focus their energies. The only person who explained reasons elaborately was the program facilitator.

Regarding students' capabilities of self-assessment, all teachers except the program facilitator shared concerns about either the accuracy of self-assessment and/or students' willingness to self-assess. Teachers 1 and 4 were concerned about the accuracy of students' self-assessment. In particular, Teacher 4 emphasized that accurate self-assessment would be very difficult in an environment like the program in this study where there were no tests or quizzes. Another concern was students' attitudes towards self-assessment. Teachers 2, 3, and 4 showed some skepticism about students' commitment to self-assessment.

With respect to the implementation, teachers pointed out four major issues. First, this program handed out three types of can-do lists to students. Teacher 1 reported that the Global Self-Assessment Grid and Top Ten Communication Skills were not well connected with the language-specific checklist. As Teacher 1 pointed out, the lack of clear connection between these checklists made them look like they are three totally separate self-assessment tools. This could confuse students about what to do with all these different tools. Furthermore, this could make self-assessment look like a lot of work.

The second issue was the relationship between self-assessment and class instruction. As discussed earlier in this section, none of the teachers referred to the can-do lists in class. Therefore the class instruction and the self-assessment activities were separated from each other. Teachers 2 and 3 commented that self-assessment activities need to be tied with classroom activity in order to integrate them into instruction. The program facilitator shared a similar comment from a curricular perspective. These responses indicate that there is still huge room for improvement regarding how to link can-do statements and classroom activities. Moreover, this link between the can-do statements and the activities needs to be explicitly communicated to students in order to help students be aware of the learning objectives.

The third issue regards support for students in the process of self-assessment. Teacher 2 reported that teachers need to be there with students when the students conduct self-assessment. Teacher 1 emphasized that students need more step-by-step guidance and support for self-assessment and goal-setting from teachers because "it's not something that comes natural to most students". Teacher 1 also shared the following episode when her students participated in a reflection and goal-setting activity at the end of the first week.

- (12) [W]hen I did that, it was kinda like "I want to speak Japanese! I want to hold a conversation." And it was way too big. So I've been focusing on what I think they need, because they didn't know what they need themselves (T1-1).

Teacher 1 reported that she asked her students to set learning goals so that she could incorporate them into the subsequent lessons, but she ended up not doing it because students could only set up unrealistic goals. This episode clearly indicates that just telling students to reflect on their current skills and set goals is not adequate support for some students. The program facilitator shared a

similar opinion. These responses suggest that the program needs to find some way and time to provide more support to students for self-assessment and goal-setting.

The last issue is teacher training. This issue is closely related to the previous two issues because teachers cannot integrate self-assessment into their class instruction nor help their students with self-assessment without adequate knowledge and understanding of self-assessment. Teacher 2 pointed out that teachers also need support from the program regarding what they should do about self-assessment and how they can help students with self-assessment. When the program facilitator was asked how she expected the teachers to use self-assessment, she too responded that she was not quite sure how teachers should or could integrate self-assessment into their class activities and that there should be more discussion with people in the host organization who decided to implement the CLVisa. The program facilitator's responses reveal that the issue of teacher training is very complicated and that it cannot be solved solely within the Japanese program.

## **4 Discussion**

### **4.1 Students' Use and Perception of Self-Assessment**

Considerable individual differences were observed in students' use of self-assessment. It is probably because students in the program simply received the self-assessment tools, and how and how often they used those tools was left up to them. The extent students used self-assessment seems closely related to their readiness level to take on this task. For instance, Group 1 students, who had some previous experience with self-assessment prior to the program and also had high metacognitive awareness of learning strategies, took the initiative to use self-assessment for progress tracking, goal-setting, and adjustment of learning strategies. On the other hand, students in Groups 2 and 3, who had limited self-assessment experience and lower metacognitive awareness did not engage in progress tracking and goal-setting using self-assessment as often as students in Group 1. However, as they engaged in the program-wide self-assessment and goal-setting activity, more students started to notice potential benefits of self-assessment and to use self-assessment for progress tracking and goal-setting. For instance, Group 2 students initially used self-assessment primarily for progress tracking. During the second half of the program, their metacognitive awareness became higher and more of them started to set up learning goals based on self-assessment. As for Group 3, students hardly assessed their own Japanese skill at the beginning of the program. However, more students started to do so to keep track of their learning progress. A few students even set up goals based on self-assessment. This suggests that teachers should pay attention to students' readiness for self-assessment. Despite the wide individual variation, the results show that positive changes in autonomy can happen by simply providing self-assessment tools to students. This is very encouraging.

Similar to the reports by Schärer (2000), Little (2002), and Kato (2009), students in this program generally had favorable views of self-assessment. Most students did not find self-assessment difficult. Students who reported difficulty were also concerned about the accuracy of their own self-assessment. This concern was reported from students across groups. These responses show that students may be aware of potential bias in self-assessment much more than teachers expect. However, this issue needs to be investigated further in future studies.

Some students with higher proficiency shared different reasons for difficulty of self-assessment. For instance, Student 22 mentioned that four weeks was not long enough to see her

L2 development. Student 20 mentioned that as his proficiency level went up, it became harder to see improvements, and self-assessment no longer seemed appealing. These responses suggest that students with high proficiency may not be able to observe obvious improvement within only four weeks due to the nature of higher level target skills. This may be one of the reasons why some students thought self-assessment was difficult and not that useful. A similar finding is reported by Kato (2009): The majority of lower level students found self-assessment useful, but less than half of advanced level students found it useful. This suggests that self-assessment practices may need differentiation depending on proficiency levels.

Other students who had negative perceptions reported that they did not understand the purpose of self-assessment and expected actions. Students received only a brief introduction to the CLVisa, so the program's intention behind it was probably not well communicated to students, especially those with limited experience with self-assessment. However, as Ziegler (2014) reported in her study, it is possible for younger learners to understand the purpose and expectation with teachers' scaffolding over time. Considering many students had attended the camp before, they can learn to use self-assessment more effectively each summer.

Students' wide range of experience with self-assessment suggests individual learner factors need to be considered when implementing self-assessment. Despite these individual differences, the present study found a moderate positive correlation between students' use and perceptions of self-assessment in general, as in Ziegler's (2014) study. Students' use of self-assessment and their metacognitive awareness about learning seem to be in a cyclical relationship.

## 4.2 Benefits and Issues

The present study provided evidence to confirm the benefits of self-assessment claimed in previous literature. First, self-assessment can encourage students to be active participants of their learning (e.g., Little, 2005; Oscarson, 1989; Ziegler, 2014). Students under this study showed different levels of engagement with self-assessment depending on their readiness to take on more responsibility of their own learning. However, most students started to do more with self-assessment towards the end of the program. This evidence supports that self-assessment can encourage students to take a more active role in their own learning and help create a more learner-centered learning environment.

Next, self-assessment can provide students with a sense of accomplishment and increased self-efficacy (Schunk, 1996) and motivation (Ziegler & Moeller, 2012) towards learning. Most students in this study who used self-assessment reported that self-assessment made them feel accomplished and motivated for further Japanese learning. It seems that the more students used self-assessment, the stronger they felt accomplished and motivated. These results illustrate that repeated engagement with self-assessment and goal-setting can lead to increased confidence and motivation towards learning.

Lastly, self-assessment can promote learner autonomy (Dam, 1995, 2006; Ziegler, 2014; Ziegler & Moeller, 2012). Although the level of engagement with self-assessment differs group to group, the interview data showed that students started to use self-assessment in a more positive manner by Week 4. As they engaged in self-assessment, their metacognitive awareness increased and more students started to use self-assessment for goal-setting. These results are consistent with findings from previous studies that demonstrated the development of learner autonomy through self-assessment.

The present study also identified three issues. First, the can-do lists were not utilized that

much by students and teachers. The exit survey shows that students did not refer to the can-do checklists regularly. Teachers reported that they did not refer to them either during lesson planning and that they seldom incorporated self-assessment into classroom activities.

The second issue is students' and teachers' limited understanding of self-assessment. Without much teacher scaffolding, some students were not sure what to do with the CLVisa. Teachers also had limited background in self-assessment. The teacher's manual for the Japanese program included learning objectives and sample lesson plans that go along with can-do statements, but it was not utilized. Therefore, it seems that teachers did not know exactly what to do with the self-assessment tools and conducted their classes without using them. This is similar to what happened to teachers in Bullock's (2011) study.

The third issue is a mismatch between the skills described in the can-do statements and those in actual class instruction. In the exit survey, the majority of students reported this discrepancy. As discussed earlier, most teachers did not refer to the can-do statements when doing lesson planning, and self-assessment activities were not included in class activities. Therefore, it is not surprising that students noticed this discrepancy. This is an issue that had not been reported in previous studies. In addition, the teachers did not participate in the program-wide self-assessment sessions and they did not read students' self-assessment and goal-setting sheets. Therefore, they could not adjust the instruction based on students' needs. The teachers' absence from the self-assessment sessions seems to be a problem unique to this program because the sessions were solely delegated to the program facilitator.

### **4.3 Suggestions for Increasing the Effectiveness of Self-Assessment**

The present study has two suggestions. First, both students and teachers need sufficient training and support for self-assessment. This study documented that the simple introduction of self-assessment tools may positively impact students' autonomy; however, students can benefit more if they understand what can-do statements offer and what they are expected to do with them. Furthermore, even if they know the steps they are supposed to take with self-assessment, some students may not be able to set appropriate and realistic goals. In this situation, teachers' scaffolding in the process of self-assessment and goal-setting is critical. Such scaffolding would include reviewing can-do statements together (Faez et al., 2011) and comparing students' self-assessment with teachers' assessments.

Besides students, teachers also need more training and support from the program so that they can relate can-do statements with instructional objectives, classroom activities, and assessment. Moreover, teachers need training so that they can scaffold students in the process of self-assessment and goal-setting (Cote Parra, 2009; Little, 2002; Schärer, 2000). This could be done by explaining the theory and motivation behind the CLVisa with concrete examples of what kind of scaffolding is effective. This program has a teacher's manual that includes sample lesson plans aligned with the can-do statements and small self-assessment activities. Unfortunately, however, this resource was not effectively used in the present case. The program should use this resource for future teacher training.

The next suggestion is aligning curriculum with self-assessment tools. In order to help teachers connect classroom activities with the can-do statements, curriculum and self-assessment tools may need some revisions for greater alignment. Furthermore, this program required students to use three types of self-assessment tools. However, it may be better to allow students to choose one or to consolidate the tools, so that students will not perceive self-assessment via multiple tools

as just more work. If the program decides to pursue a language-specific checklist, this list needs to be revised to include items for higher proficiency levels.

## 5 Conclusion

This study featured one Japanese summer immersion program for high school students and investigated how students used and perceived self-assessment. It was found that students with previous self-assessment experience and higher metacognitive awareness about learning tend to use self-assessment more often to track their learning progress and to set up new learning goals. Students with limited experience with self-assessment and lower metacognitive awareness tend to use self-assessment less frequently. However, as they engaged in self-assessment activities, some changes were observed. Students who mainly used self-assessment for tracking their L2 improvement started to use it to set goals. Students who hardly used self-assessment at the beginning started to use it to track their learning progress. This demonstrates that engagement in self-assessment activities can foster learner autonomy. Furthermore, the present study confirmed the benefits of self-assessment argued in previous literature. Students started to take a more active role in their own learning. They also felt accomplished, confident, and motivated as a result of self-assessment. The results indicate that self-assessment can help create a more learner-centered learning environment. The present study also identified some areas for improvement. Neither students nor teachers referred to the can-do statements often, and they were not sure about how to use the self-assessment tools. Moreover, there was some mismatch between the can-do statements and classroom activities. This suggests that both students and teachers need more support with using self-assessment and that the curriculum and self-assessment tools needs to be aligned.

The results of this study provide valuable insights into what to expect when a program implements self-assessment. Documentation of concrete signs of learner autonomy and struggles can help L2 teachers foresee possible situations and issues they may encounter and prepare them to support learners when they struggle. The present study found that while some issues were identified, students benefited in different ways through self-assessment. Thus, the present paper encourages L2 teachers to take advantage of self-assessment more in their programs to promote students' autonomy and learning.

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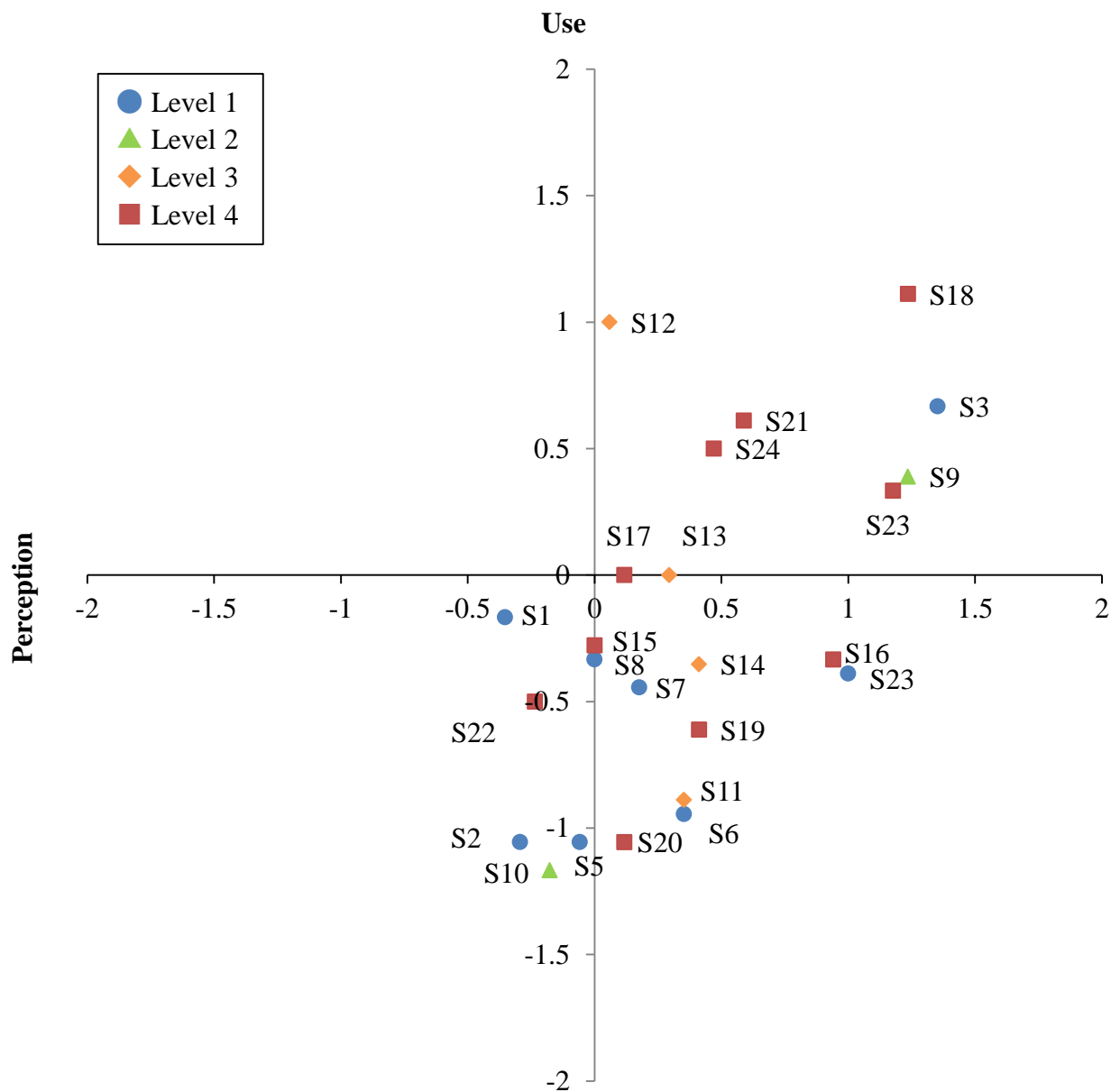
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## Appendix A

Correlation between students' use and perception of L2 self-assessment



**Figure 1: Scatterplot of students' use and perception of L2 self-assessment. Level = language level; S = student.**

## Appendix B

## Reported use of self-assessment

Table 3: Students' Reported Frequency of Self-Assessment Related Activities

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	NV	RA	SO	FR	AL
1. I evaluated my own Japanese speaking skills.	0.75	0.90	0	2	7	10	5
2. I evaluated my own Japanese listening skills.	0.88	0.99	0	3	4	10	7
3. I evaluated my own Japanese reading skills.	0.63	1.10	1	2	8	7	6
4. I evaluated my own Japanese writing skills.	0.71	1.00	0	3	7	8	6
5. I evaluated my own Japanese skills in class.	0.58	1.06	0	4	8	6	6
6. I evaluated my own Japanese skills outside of class.	0.58	1.18	1	3	8	5	7
7. I checked my Japanese skills immediately after a task or activity.	-0.71	1.33	8	8	4	1	3
8. I waited some time before I checked my Japanese skills.	-0.09	1.08	1	9	6	5	2
9. I referred to the can-do lists in class.	-1.08	0.88	9	9	5	1	0
10. I referred to the can-do lists outside of class.	-1.00	1.10	11	5	5	3	0
11. I referred to the can-do list to check my progress in speaking.	-0.83	1.01	7	9	5	3	0
12. I referred to the can-do list to check my progress in listening.	-0.79	1.02	7	8	6	3	0
13. I referred to the can-do list to check my progress in reading.	-0.96	1.00	9	7	6	2	0
14. I referred to the can-do list to check my progress in writing.	-0.92	0.97	8	8	6	2	0
15. I added my original can-do statements to the list that was provided by the teacher.	-1.50	0.83	16	5	2	1	0
16. I set goals based on what I found from the self-evaluation of my Japanese skills.	0.33	1.27	1	8	2	8	5
17. I adjusted how to study based on what I found from the self-evaluation.	0.25	1.36	3	4	7	4	6
18. My teacher explained to me how to evaluate my own Japanese skills.	-1.00	1.14	10	8	3	2	1
19. I practiced how to evaluate my own Japanese skills in class.	-0.54	1.41	9	4	4	5	2
20. My teacher helped me when I was not sure how to evaluate my own Japanese skills.	-0.54	1.35	7	8	2	5	2

Note. The number of responses is 24 except Item 8 with one missing data. NV = never; RA = rarely; SO = sometimes; AL = always.

## Appendix C

### Perception of self-assessment

**Table 4: Students' Perception of Self-Assessment**

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	SD	D	NT	A	SA
21. Self-evaluation of my own Japanese skills was discouraging.	-1.08	1.02	11	6	5	2	0
22. Self-evaluating of my own Japanese skills was frustrating.	-0.92	1.14	10	5	7	1	1
23. Self-evaluation of my own Japanese skills made me feel confident.	0.46	0.98	1	1	12	6	4
24. Self-evaluating of my own Japanese skills made me feel accomplished.	0.46	1.06	2	1	8	10	3
25. I felt that I was in charge of my own learning at this camp.	0.71	1.04	0	4	5	9	6
26. I felt that my teacher controlled my learning at this camp.	0.17	0.87	1	3	12	7	1
27. Self-evaluation of my own speaking skills was difficult.	-0.13	1.03	2	7	8	6	1
28. Self-evaluation of my own listening skills was difficult.	-0.21	1.02	2	8	8	5	1
29. Self-evaluation of my own reading skills was difficult.	-0.38	1.01	2	11	6	4	1
30. Self-evaluation of my own writing skills was difficult.	-0.42	0.97	2	11	7	3	1
31. What I should be able to do in Japanese by the end of the program was clear.	0.17	0.96	1	4	11	6	2
32. What I need to work on more to improve my Japanese became clear through self-evaluation of my own Japanese skills.	0.67	1.27	1	5	3	7	8
33. The can-do checklist was a useful tool for my Japanese learning.	-0.38	1.13	4	8	6	5	1
34. The skills described in the can-do checklist matched classroom instruction.	-0.29	1.04	3	6	12	1	2
35. The skills described in the can-do checklist were relevant to me.	0.21	1.06	2	3	9	8	2
36. What is described in the can-do checklist seemed feasible for me.	0.67	0.87	0	2	8	10	4
37. The can-do statements are phrased clearly.	0.71	1.23	2	2	4	9	7

*Note.* *N* = 24. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; NT = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree.

## Appendix D

## Use of self-assessment by group

Table 5: Students' Reported Frequency of Self-Assessment Related Activities by Group

Items	All <i>M (SD)</i> ( <i>N</i> = 24)	G1 <i>M (SD)</i> ( <i>n</i> = 7)	G2 <i>M (SD)</i> ( <i>n</i> = 8)	G3 <i>M (SD)</i> ( <i>n</i> = 5)
1. I evaluated my own Japanese speaking skills.	0.75 (0.90)	1.43 (0.53)	0.50 (0.53)	-0.20 (0.84)
2. I evaluated my own Japanese listening skills.	0.88 (0.99)	1.71 (0.49)	0.38 (0.92)	0.20 (0.84)
3. I evaluated my own Japanese reading skills.	0.63 (1.10)	1.57 (0.53)	0.25 (0.46)	-0.60 (1.14)
4. I evaluated my own Japanese writing skills.	0.71 (1.00)	1.57 (0.53)	0.25 (0.71)	-0.20 (0.84)
5. I evaluated my own Japanese skills in class.	0.58 (1.06)	1.57 (0.53)	0.13 (0.64)	-0.60 (0.55)
6. I evaluated my own Japanese skills outside of class.	0.58 (1.18)	1.57 (0.79)	0.50 (0.93)	-0.80 (0.84)
7. I checked my Japanese skills immediately after a task or activity.	-0.71 (1.33)	0.14 (1.57)	-0.75 (1.39)	-1.60 (0.55)
8. I waited some time before I checked my Japanese skills.	-0.09 (1.08)	-0.29 (1.11)	-0.14 (1.21)	0.20 (1.30)
9. I referred to the can-do lists in class.	-1.08 (0.88)	0.00 (0.58)	-1.50 (0.53)	-1.80 (0.45)
10. I referred to the can-do lists outside of class.	-1.00 (1.10)	-0.14 (1.07)	-1.63 (0.52)	-1.00 (1.41)
11. I referred to the can-do list to check my progress in speaking.	-0.83 (1.01)	0.14 (0.69)	-1.63 (0.52)	-0.80 (1.10)
12. I referred to the can-do list to check my progress in listening.	-0.79 (1.02)	0.14 (0.69)	-1.50 (0.76)	-0.80 (1.10)
13. I referred to the can-do list to check my progress in reading.	-0.96 (1.00)	0.00 (0.58)	-1.75 (0.46)	-1.00 (1.22)
14. I referred to the can-do list to check my progress in writing.	-0.92 (0.97)	0.00 (0.58)	-1.75 (0.46)	-0.80 (1.10)
15. I added my original can-do statements to the list that was provided by the teacher.	-1.50 (0.83)	-0.86 (1.21)	-1.88 (0.35)	-1.80 (0.45)
16. I set goals based on what I found from the self-evaluation of my Japanese skills.	0.33 (1.27)	1.29 (0.76)	-0.13 (1.25)	0.00 (1.41)
17. I adjusted how to study based on what I found from the self-evaluation.	0.25 (1.36)	1.29 (0.76)	-0.25 (1.39)	-0.40 (1.52)
19. I practiced how to evaluate my own Japanese skills in class.	-0.54 (1.41)	0.71 (1.38)	-0.63 (1.30)	-1.80 (0.45)

Note. G1, G2, and G3 refer to Groups 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

## Appendix E

Students' perception by group

**Table 6: Students' Perception of Self-Assessment by Group**

Items	All <i>M (SD)</i> ( <i>N</i> = 24)	G1 <i>M (SD)</i> ( <i>n</i> = 7)	G2 <i>M (SD)</i> ( <i>n</i> = 8)	G3 <i>M (SD)</i> ( <i>n</i> = 5)
21. Self-evaluation of my own Japanese skills was discouraging.	-1.08 (1.02)	-1.71 (0.49)	-1.50 (0.76)	0.20 (0.86)
22. Self-evaluating of my own Japanese skills was frustrating.	-0.92 (1.14)	-1.57 (0.53)	-1.13 (0.99)	0.20 (1.10)
23. Self-evaluation of my own Japanese skills made me feel confident.	0.46 (0.98)	1.29 (0.76)	0.38 (1.19)	-0.20 (0.45)
24. Self-evaluating of my own Japanese skills made me feel accomplished.	0.46 (1.06)	1.14 (0.69)	0.13 (1.46)	0.00 (0.71)
25. I felt that I was in charge of my own learning at this camp.	0.71 (1.04)	1.14 (0.90)	0.75 (0.89)	-0.40 (0.89)
26. I felt that my teacher controlled my learning at this camp.	0.17 (0.87)	0.00 (0.58)	0.13 (1.25)	0.80 (0.45)
27. Self-evaluation of my own speaking skills was difficult.	-0.13 (1.03)	-0.14 (1.07)	-0.88 (0.99)	0.40 (0.55)
28. Self-evaluation of my own listening skills was difficult.	-0.21 (1.02)	-0.14 (1.07)	-1.00 (0.93)	0.40 (0.55)
29. Self-evaluation of my own reading skills was difficult.	-0.38 (1.01)	-0.29 (1.11)	-1.00 (0.93)	0.00 (0.71)
30. Self-evaluation of my own writing skills was difficult.	-0.42 (0.97)	-0.29 (1.11)	-1.13 (0.64)	0.00 (0.71)
31. What I should be able to do in Japanese by the end of the program was clear.	0.17 (0.96)	1.14 (0.69)	-0.38 (0.52)	0.20 (0.84)
32. What I need to work on more to improve my Japanese became clear through self-evaluation of my own Japanese skills.	0.67 (1.27)	1.57 (0.53)	0.25 (1.49)	-0.20 (1.30)
33. The can-do checklist was a useful tool for my Japanese learning.	-0.38 (1.13)	0.71 (0.95)	-1.25 (0.71)	-0.60 (1.14)
34. The skills described in the can-do checklist matched classroom instruction.	-0.29 (1.04)	0.14 (1.07)	-0.25 (1.16)	-0.80 (0.84)
35. The skills described in the can-do checklist were relevant to me.	0.21 (1.06)	0.71 (0.95)	0.00 (1.31)	-0.20 (1.10)
36. What is described in the can-do checklist seemed feasible for me.	0.67 (0.87)	1.14 (1.07)	0.63 (0.74)	0.20 (0.84)
37. The can-do statements are phrased clearly.	0.71 (1.23)	1.14 (1.21)	1.25 (0.71)	0.20 (1.30)

<sup>1</sup> Items 18 and 20 were not used to calculate a mean of students' self-assessment use since these two items asked what their teacher did instead of what the student did.