



# The self-study of teaching practice and students' assessment of the teacher

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## ABSTRACT

Evaluation of teaching practice is often conducted by the university assessment board through a single instance of seeing a class through a walk-through observation. Oftentimes, teachers would receive either positive or unintelligible comments from the evaluation board. Ultimately, teachers must gather information from several sources, including peer criticism, reflection on educational theories or practices, self-assessment, and students' appraisals of instruction, to make changes to their lessons and teaching tactics. During this self-study, we examined and analyzed students' assessments of the teacher from the viewpoint of a critical friend. A total of 262 Chinese students enrolled in the English Speaking I course participated in the end-of-semester evaluation. We gathered data with a semi-structured questionnaire through the Zoho Survey platform. The data were subsequently examined using descriptive statistics and critical friend feedback. The teacher received both commendation and criticism in the evaluation. By carefully reflecting on the successful implementation, the teacher can use critical feedback from a trusted colleague to plan and develop alternate strategies to address any areas that need improvement in their teaching techniques.

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in doing self-study of teaching practice, often known as S-STEP (Butler & Bullock, 2022; Collins et al., 2023; Martin, 2022; Meidl et al., 2023; White & Raphael, 2023). A significant amount of S-STEP research has been conducted using a variety of methods, including ethnography, action research on classroom teaching, reflection on teaching practices, and narrative inquiry (Brandenburg et al., 2017; Butler & Bullock, 2022; Martin, 2022; Ritter et al., 2018; Samaras, 2010). According to Fletcher, Ní Chróinín, O'Sullivan, and Beni (2020), to achieve the legitimacy, authenticity, and trustworthiness of the study, researchers using the S-

STEP methodology need to incorporate several properties into the framework. These properties include suggestions from supervisors, advice from colleagues, self-reflection, interviews or surveys with students, and a variety of texts (Samaras, 2010). Within the context of this self-study, we utilized a different framework from previous studies that included both the evaluation of teaching by students and the feedback from critical friends to evaluate the teaching practices of teachers. Approaching S-STEP in this way enables us to analyze from two different points of views, an educator researcher verses a critical friend, about the importance of students' feedback for the teachers.

Teacher educators are differentiated because of their personal and professional traits with the word "self" in the term "self-study for teacher educators." According to O'Carroll and Scanlon (2023), the study is a one-of-a-kind personal examination that was carried out by teacher educators in relation to their teaching and education practices. Teachers, however, are not only analyzing their own teaching by looking at their own self-narratives and self-reflections, but they are also incorporating the voices of others, such as their colleagues and students (Aktekin, 2019; Rosa et al., 2021). This allows them to recognize the images of themselves that they have not been able to see and transform themselves into better educators (McDowell, 2018). According to Garbett and Ovens (2016), when teachers engage in self-study, they can strike a balance between their self-initiated and self-oriented teaching practices and their fulfillment of professional services. Teachers can also use their innermost selves, distinctive identities, and inspiring experiences as references to refining, re-framing, changing, and growing, as well as engaging in effective teaching and education (Causarano Dr., 2022; McDaniel & Samaras, 2007; Wu, 2021).

Teacher educators can share their experiences and tales with one another when they have a close and trusting relationship with their critical friends (Carlson, 2019). Critical friends who can examine teachers' actions, experiences, and viewpoints on teaching practices in an open and critical manner play a significant role in helping teachers move beyond their own perspectives (Alan et al., 2021). It is expected that these critical friends will be able to provide constructive criticism regarding the performance of the teachers (Hardiman & Dewing, 2014). According to Cavanagh et al. (2014), teacher educators can go beyond the process of creating an understanding of themselves by pondering the suggestions made by critical friends.

Critical friends are not only colleagues in the workplace or in the professional world; they are also colleagues who have a close, trustworthy, robust, and long-lasting friendship with the educator (Samaras, 2010). Teacher educators intentionally engage their critical friends in self-study, recognizing their potential to challenge, expand, and reshape their personal and professional development (Alan et al., 2021). Critical friends are not afraid to disagree with and disapprove of the instructors' thoughts, and they are willing to offer serious and considered alternatives to the teachers (Collins et al., 2023). Consistently critical friends listen to each other and provide encouragement through informal communication. It is possible that they will participate in similar professional development programs on occasion (Samaras, 2010). A teacher-educator should be able to navigate across their teaching and context through other perspectives, see clearly the underlying factors that cause problems to appear in their teaching practices, identify thoughtful ideas to be implemented, and prepare an appropriate way to share practices with others (McDaniel & Samaras, 2007). Having critical friends should certainly enable the teacher-educator to do all these things.

As a result of the fact that students are at the heart of the learning process and teachers fulfill the roles of facilitator and mediator, it is imperative that the voices of students be incorporated into the evaluation of teaching practices (Adhikary, 2021). We believe that the information that teacher educators provide can assist instructors in aligning their courses to suit students' learning needs if they allow students to review their teaching techniques objectively (Barnard & Henn, 2023). Therefore, one of the fundamental beliefs that we hold in the field of

education is that students are aware, experienced, and informed observers of what happens to their learning when they are receiving instruction in the classroom. If the instrument that was used to collect data was correctly prepared and administered, and if the data were interpreted with caution, then the evaluation of the students appears to be legitimate and valuable for both the teachers and the decision makers (Constantinou & Wijnen-Meijer, 2022).

Some individuals have raised concerns about the impartiality of the information gathered from students through interviews and surveys, which is intended to provide teacher educators with the necessary information to improve their practices. However, we also discovered that several publications (Clayson, 2022; Constantinou & Wijnen-Meijer, 2022; Zhao et al., 2020) have appeared to take into account the voice of students. These studies have revealed sufficient benefits for educators to self-evaluate and improve their teaching approaches, as well as the courses they teach. We propose in this study that student evaluation of instruction is a significant perspective on S-STEP research, and we present examples to support our claim. To this point, we have observed that there has been a relatively small amount of conversation around self-study and student evaluation of teaching. Our goal in conducting this research is to ascertain whether students' evaluations of their teaching adequately consider any difficulties that the instructor may not have been aware of in his teaching style.

The evaluation of students, which has been well planned and collected, has the potential to provide teachers and decision-makers with knowledge that goes beyond the lesson. Students have the opportunity to provide feedback on the following aspects of the evaluation: (a) the organization of the course; (b) the interaction between the teacher and students; (c) the interaction between students and peers; (d) the clarity of instruction; (e) the quality of media used in the classroom; (f) the workload and exam; and (g) the grading system (Clayson, 2022; Constantinou & Wijnen-Meijer, 2022). If the teachers carefully analyze the information, they can see the dynamics of each class, the process by which students are improving, the students' creativity and motivation, the major drawbacks of the instructional strategies, the activities that could be adjusted, and many other significant issues that are related to their teaching practices.

The evaluation of teaching practices by students is one of the many excellent tools that can be utilized in the process of reviewing teaching practices. Its planning and administration should be comprehensive, but not so burdensome that it overwhelms the students who are doing the assessment and the teachers who are using the information. Only the items that are necessary should be included on the evaluation tool for students, and they should be given sufficient time to finish working through the evaluation. It is the instructor's responsibility to ensure that the students have received a comprehensive explanation of the purpose of the information they have contributed and that their assessments have been collected in a confidential manner. To enhance both their personal and professional development, educators should interpret them as relevant facts

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We used a methodology known as S-STEP, which stands for "to explain the teacher-educator professional practice settings" (Fletcher et al., 2020; Hardiman & Dewing, 2014; Samaras, 2010). Furthermore, we used this methodology to interpret and evaluate students' evaluations of teaching from the perspective of both the teacher and a critical friend (Alan et al., 2021; Butler & Bullock, 2022). According to a well-known Chinese idiom, "闻过则喜，闻过则改 (wén guò zé xǐ, wén guò zé gǎi)" This term suggests that we should be happy to accept criticism from other people when they point out our mistakes; even if we are unaware that we have committed wrongs, we should be able to welcome feedback and instantly remedy our mistakes. This phrase is a reflection on the S-STEP that was offered in this paper about the experiences and practices of teachers in the English-

Speaking Course at Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages, China (which will be referred to as Yuexiu from here on out). Throughout the course of this investigation, the plural terms, such as teachers, educators, and teacher educators, refer to teacher educators in general rather than a particular individual's qualifications. The teacher is referred to as the original author, who is also the instructor who carried out the training that was investigated in this article. It is the critical friend of the author, who is the second author, and the title of the second author is the critical friend. It is our expectation that the explicit notation of these words will make it simpler for readers to navigate through the remaining portion of this work.

A total of 294 students who were enrolled in the author's English Speaking I class during Yuexiu's first semester were requested to complete the evaluation. Students who are enrolled in Yuexiu are required to take English Speaking I as part of their curriculum. When it was finally time for the evaluation to be completed, a total of 262 students had completed it. Participation in this survey was made obligatory; however, students who were not willing to take part in it were given the opportunity to opt out of doing so. Students who did not participate in the evaluation were identified as those who were not engaged in the learning, failed the class, and missed out the deadlines.

Data were obtained using the Zoho Survey, which was designed to be an online end-of-semester course review and was distributed electronically. In total, the evaluation instrument includes eight closed-ended questions and two open-ended questions. Most of this research focused on seven closed-ended questions. The objective of evaluating the teaching practices is directly related to these questions, which are highly relevant.

A student who is responsible for acting as a liaison between teachers and students was given the responsibility of sending the online connection to access the evaluation to the class monitor. Additionally, the link was circulated using QQ Messenger. The students were allotted a week so that they could do the evaluation when it was most convenient for them. A reminder of the evaluation was sent out three days after the initial notice, and another reminder was sent out one day before the evaluation deadline.

The close-ended items were automatically generated by Zoho Survey as frequency distribution tables, which were supplemented by customized graphics. On the other hand, the replies to the open-ended items were methodically organized according to the date they were completed. After that, the data was retrieved and eventually saved in an Excel spreadsheet. The co-author was provided with comprehensive data and three questions to respond to. The questions that need to be answered are as follows: (1) What are the characteristics of a teacher-educator that can be determined by looking at their ratings? (2) Based on these ratings, what are some of the deficiencies that you would consider to be associated with the teacher-educator's teaching practices? (three) How do you feel about the ratings these students have given to the teacher's and educator's instructional techniques? Concurrently, the author and co-author engaged in frequent conversations via WhatsApp regarding the research, experiences, and other matters that were of concern to them. In the part titled "Results and Analysis," the setting of this study was presented first, and then the interpretation of the students' evaluation was presented after that. The study's backdrop encompassed the narrative of the course under evaluation. After that, the student evaluations are presented in the form of frequency distribution tables, and their interpretation is accomplished by combining the theoretical and practical perspectives of teaching methods held by the author and the co-author.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Yuexiu's non-English majors are required to take the English Speaking I class, which is part of the fourth series of English-speaking classes that are mandatory. In English Speaking I, most Yuexiu

students gain their first exposure to English as a medium of instruction and interact with international English speakers. When it comes to learning, these students are also undergoing a transition from the dyadic technique (lecture, question, and response) to the participative approach that is being utilized in this course (Obenza & Mendoza, 2021). It is demanded of students that they actively participate in activities that have been planned by their teachers rather than simply listening to and taking notes on the lessons that are provided by their teachers. Through activities such as having questions and answers with the instructor, making and practicing conversation with classmates, performing pronunciation drills and practices, describing pictures or situations related to daily life, engaging in role-playing, asking and giving instructions, and a wide variety of other communication skills, students are given the opportunity to practice speaking English (Aflah, 2021; Allo & Priawan, 2019; Ngatmini, 2019). The students are given a test at the end of the semester to determine whether they have re-performed what they have practiced in class.

The instructor has requested that students provide feedback on his teaching using the end-of-semester evaluation. This request was made with the assistance of class monitors. To provide students with an explanation of the survey's objectives, a message was sent to them along with a link to complete the evaluation. The students' voluntary participation in the evaluation was encouraged. Ninety-nine-point eleven percent of the 294 students who were enrolled in the class participated in the poll. These results nevertheless need to be taken with caution, taking into consideration the disparities and the students who choose to opt out of the evaluation, even though the overall responses to all the evaluation questions were favorable. We would like to briefly show the data that was collected through the survey before we proceed with the interpretation of the results.

**Table 1.** The speed of the instruction, the teacher showed concern for students learning, and the clarity of explanation

Speed of Instruction	Percentage	Teacher Concern	Percentage	Clarity of Explanation	Percentage
Much too fast	6.49	Extremely Concerned	51.15	Extremely Clear	45.42
Too fast	8.78	Very Concerned	38.93	Very Clear	41.22
About right	84.35	Somewhat concerned	7.25	Somewhat Clear	11.07
Too slow	0.38	Not so concerned	1.53	Not So Clear	1.53
		Not at all concerned	1.15	Not at all Clear	0.76

Table 1 presents the students' assessments of the pace of instruction, the degree to which the instructor demonstrated concern for the students' learning, and the clarity of the explanation. It is remarkable that more than three-quarters of the students who participated in the evaluation stated that the pace of instruction offered through the medium of instruction, which is English, is approximately appropriate for them to follow. In addition, this indicates that the students did not have any difficulties following the verbal and written instructions given by the teacher regarding how to finish their assignments. This outcome is in good agreement with how the students judged the teacher's concern for their learning and the clarity of the explanations. The way the instructor demonstrated concern for the students' education might be viewed as the way the instructor exercises control to ensure that students participate in activities and finish their assignments with quality in mind. There is a correlation between the tactics that the instructor employs to make the instructions and lessons simpler and more straightforward for the students to comprehend, and the clarity of the explanation.

The case processing summary includes information regarding the number of valid cases as well as the proportion of cases that are missing. According to the information presented above, it is possible to ascertain that 39 samples were legitimate and that none of them were missing. The

processing of all samples indicates that there were no data losses. As shown in Table 2, the mean score for both the experimental group and the control group is presented.

**Table 2.** The effectiveness of media, assignment, the proportion of student-teacher talking times, and quality of the teacher responses to questions for facilitating learning

Category	Media (Percentage)	Assignment (Percentage)	STT:TTT (Percentage)	Response to Questions (Percentage)
Extremely helpful	49.24	46.95	52.67	58.02
Very helpful	39.69	38.93	39.31	36.64
Somewhat helpful	9.54	12.21	7.63	5.34
Not so helpful	0.76	0.76		
Not at all helpful	0.76	1.15	0.38	

In this study, rather than only providing an explanation of the numerical facts, the statistics are viewed from the perspective of another critical friend. Using this strategy, a critical buddy is able to provide feedback on the teacher's strengths and flaws, as well as how the total data has highlighted those matters (Alan et al., 2021). In a written response to the instructor's questions, the critical buddy expressed both praise and criticism in an open and honest manner. The teacher then produces a follow-up letter to the feedback in the form of a table that summarizes the input on three topics: the teacher's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the general teaching techniques for the student. As we continued to talk about the summary, we marked out terms and phrases that we did not want to be there, and we also altered our perspectives. Consequently, we found that we were in complete agreement with the issues that we presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Qualities, suggestion for overcoming weaknesses, and overall teaching practices from the view of critical friend

Qualities	Suggestions for Overcoming Weaknesses	Overall Teaching Practices
a) Extremely concerned about students' learning.	1. Need to pay more attention to students that have low confidence and low self-esteem.	1. Various learning strategies and learning activities.
b) Actively probe and quickly respond to students' questions.	2. Find the effective way to provide praise and positive reinforcements.	2. Combine didactic and communicative learning approach.
c) Offer to assist students when they encounter difficulties.	3. Identify and practice creative ways of focusing students' attention.	3. Friendly and supportive learning environment.
d) Give adequate and clear instruction.		4. Extremely helpful in presenting information and assisting learning.

Generally, the critical friend makes the teacher aware of the deficiencies in his teaching practice (Carlson, 2019; Hardiman & Dewing, 2014). This allows the teacher to be aware of the measures that need to be taken to fix the weaknesses when they are brought to the teacher's attention. The teacher devoted a significant amount of his time and effort to assisting students in their educational pursuits. It appeared that most of his students were pleased with these efforts. Shared by the critical friend, "Concern is invisible, it can only be felt. Here most students felt the teacher's attention and care for them are about the average that they can receive from other teachers. The satisfaction with the teacher responses to their questions and the acceptable speed of instruction are two convincing evidence pointed to the teacher's attention and care."

Furthermore, the critical friend pointed out the professor's shortcomings in a straightforward and concise manner (Alan et al., 2021; Carlson, 2019). Subsequently, she expressed

her profound appreciation for the instructor's skills by saying, "It seems common that the teacher was not being able to fulfill all students' needs. Apparently, I have noticed the slight discrepancy between satisfied and dissatisfied students. As far as I know the teacher, I can tell those causes of dissatisfaction with his teaching practices evaluation is neither due to his poor course design, poor class management, nor his ineffective instruction delivery. I believe that those who are dissatisfied perhaps attempted to have more attention from the teacher. The teacher then should help them to overcome their anxieties and their lower self-confidence. I believe they are expecting the teacher to provide encouraging motivation for them to participate in class."

The feedback we have provided here represents only a portion of the critical friend's perspective. There are further things that we can demonstrate, as if we had more room to be able to present them here. Considering these two examples, it is abundantly evident that the objective recommendations and perspectives of a critical friend can be of great assistance to a teacher in better understanding himself and his teaching practice than what he can obtain from the evaluation board. Within the context of the teacher's practices, the critical friend can freely communicate her feelings, ideas, and vision (Rosa et al., 2021). In addition, the critical friend provided examples and clearly explained both her suggestions and her criticisms.

The evaluation of the English Speaking I course at Yuexiu, a foundational class for non-English majors, provides a rich ground for analysis through the lens of assessment and second language evaluation theories (Clayson, 2022). The course's design and outcomes offer insights into the effectiveness of various instructional strategies and assessment practices.

Assessment in educational settings is a tool for measuring students' learning and providing feedback on instructional practices (Box et al., 2015). Formative assessment, which focuses on ongoing feedback to improve teaching and learning, is well-represented in this course through end-semester evaluations (Baquero-Vargas & Pérez-Salas, 2023). These evaluations, with a high response rate of 89.11%, suggest significant student engagement. The feedback collected allows the teacher to adjust instructional strategies and address any identified weaknesses, embodying the principles of formative assessment. In contrast, summative assessment aims to evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional period (Box et al., 2015). The course's requirement for students to re-perform practiced tasks is a summative measure of their speaking skills. The positive evaluation results indicate that the participatory approach effectively prepares students for these assessments, ensuring they can demonstrate their proficiency in English speaking.

Constructivist assessment emphasizes the importance of students constructing their understanding through active participation (Barnard & Henn, 2023). The course's shift from a dyadic approach to a participatory one reflects this theory well. Students engage in activities such as role-playing, pronunciation drills, and peer conversations, facilitating deeper learning and better retention of language skills. Similarly, the student-centered assessment approach is evident in the course's design and the subsequent evaluations (Armanda & Yosintha, 2022; Obenza & Mendoza, 2021). By involving students in the feedback process and adjusting teaching methods based on their input, the teacher ensures that instructional practices are responsive to students' needs, creating a supportive learning environment where students feel valued and motivated to improve (Ajjawi et al., 2022; Bardach et al., 2021).

Evaluating second language acquisition (SLA) requires specific considerations due to the complexities of learning a foreign language (Jabłońska, 2022). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes interaction as the means and the goal of learning a language (Sadigova, 2023). The course's focus on active participation and communication activities, such as asking and giving instructions and describing pictures, aligns well with CLT principles (Obenza & Mendoza, 2021). The positive feedback on the teacher's concern for students' learning and clarity of explanation suggests that the communicative approach is effectively implemented.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights the importance of social interaction in language learning (Alkhudiry, 2022). The course's participatory approach, including peer interactions and teacher-student dialogues, creates a collaborative learning environment that helps students internalize language skills through social interactions. This method's effectiveness is evidenced by students' satisfaction with the teacher's instructional speed and engagement. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) uses meaningful tasks to facilitate language learning (Aflah, 2021). The course incorporates various tasks, such as role-plays and conversation practice, designed to simulate real-life communication scenarios. The positive student evaluations indicate that these tasks benefit their language development.

Effective feedback and error correction are crucial in SLA for guiding learners and correcting errors (Jabłońska, 2022). The teacher's immediate responses to questions and using various media to facilitate learning indicate a robust feedback mechanism. The critical friend's insights further support this, noting the teacher's efforts to address students' needs and provide clear explanations (Alan et al., 2021). Integrating feedback from a critical friend provides an additional layer of evaluation, aligning with peer review in educational assessment. The critical friend's observations highlight the teacher's awareness of their weaknesses and suggest strategies for enhancing student engagement and addressing individual needs.

## CONCLUSION

This self-study incorporated the student evaluation of the teacher and the critical friend feedback to interpret the teacher-educator teaching-practice strengths and weaknesses. Based on the results, it can be concluded that involving the critical friend to interpret and explain students' evaluation has been very successfully revealing qualities, weaknesses, and the overall teaching practices of the educator. The findings suggest that the self-study approaches that we conducted here could be also useful for other teachers that want to perform the self-study of their teaching practices. The teachers can use the same techniques that we did in this study as replications to observe and evaluate their own cases.

Despite the positive outcomes and comprehensive feedback mechanisms employed in the English Speaking I course at Yuexiu, there are several limitations to consider. First, the voluntary nature of the end-semester evaluations means that the feedback may only partially represent the views of all students, particularly those who opted out of the survey. This self-selection bias could result in overrepresenting more engaged or satisfied students, skewing the overall results. Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the potential for response bias, where students might provide socially desirable answers rather than honest feedback. The study also does not account for external factors that might influence students' perceptions and performance, such as previous language learning experiences or varying levels of intrinsic motivation. Lastly, while valuable, the critical friend's feedback is subjective and may not capture the full complexity of the teaching dynamics and student interactions.

The findings from this study have significant implications for the design and implementation of language courses, particularly for non-English majors. The high level of student satisfaction and the effectiveness of participatory approaches highlight the importance of communicative learning approach and active learning strategies in language acquisition. Educators should consider incorporating more interactive, student-centered activities promoting real-life communication skills. The positive feedback on the teacher's concern for students' learning and clarity of explanation underscores teachers' need to be adaptive and responsive to students' needs. This study advocates for a more dynamic, responsive, and student-centered approach to language teaching, which could be applied to similar educational contexts to improve student engagement and proficiency.

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