

Fostering Self-Direction and Peer Feedback Skills in a Management Course

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Abstract: This study examines the implementation and effects of co-assessment within a management course on the development of students' ability to provide feedback, an essential competency for future managers. The size of the cohorts and the number of groups make this type of implementation challenging. Using a dedicated digital tool, therefore, opens a more realistic opportunity for deployment. Particular attention is given to self-direction, a transversal skill that enables learners to produce feedback, especially within the blended learning context. In this study, the ability to produce and provide feedback is assessed in a pre- and post-test, while their self-direction is examined through their self-determination, self-regulation, and self-efficacy in learning. By examining the interplay between co-assessment, peer feedback, and self-direction, this study aims to enhance understanding of peer feedback as both a training activity and an active learning practice. The findings identified a progression in feedback-related skills but show differentiated effects of the implemented learning scenario. The results highlighted a progression in learners' self-direction, notably their perceived self-efficacy in delivering feedback, while improvement in their self-regulation remains moderate. These findings shed light on the intrinsic nature of self-direction as a competency, which requires learners' proactivity in identifying their own action strategies in relation to goals as well as in monitoring their implementation to achieve targeted outcomes, while also inviting reflection on the role of external factors. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on how to design learning environments that foster both the development of feedback-related competencies and learners' self-direction in learning.

Keywords: Online Co-Assessment, Feedback, Self-Direction, Self-Regulation, Blended Learning

1. Introduction

The increasing integration of digital technologies into higher education has profoundly transformed learning environments and interactions. In management education, where work-study programmes and hybrid course structures are becoming increasingly common, blended learning environments provide new opportunities to diversify learning activities and support learner engagement. These environments combine face-to-face and online learning experiences and often require students to demonstrate greater autonomy in organizing, monitoring, and regulating their learning processes.

Within this context, self-direction in learning has become a central competence for higher education students. Self-direction refers to learners' capacity to take responsibility for their learning process through the articulation of motivational, cognitive, and metacognitive dimensions, including self-determination, self-regulation, and self-efficacy (Carré et al., 2011; Hiemstra and Carré, 2013). While blended learning environments may provide greater flexibility and opportunities for learner agency, previous research suggests that increased flexibility alone does not automatically foster learners' self-direction (Carré, 2003). The design of learning activities and the forms of support provided by lecturers, therefore, remain essential.

Among pedagogical approaches associated with active learning, peer feedback and co-assessment have attracted growing attention in higher education. Peer feedback activities encourage learners to engage critically with both their own work and that of others, while also supporting communication, collaboration, and reflective practices. Research has highlighted the potential of peer assessment to foster learner autonomy, critical thinking, and self-regulation (Shen, Bai and Xue 2020; Girardet, 2020).

This study examines the implementation of a Learning management system platform and the ChallengeMe plugin, designed to support structured online co-assessment activities within a blended learning management module. This master's level module was designed as a blended learning environment integrating online co-assessment activities, including inter-group assessment, intra-group assessment, and meta-feedback activities. The objective of this research is twofold: first, to examine the effects of online co-assessment on learners' self-direction and its dimensions; second, to analyse the evolution of students' feedback-related skills, considered

essential transversal competencies for future managers. By exploring the relationships between blended learning, online co-assessment, peer feedback, and self-direction, this study contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the design of learning environments that support both learner autonomy and the development of feedback-related competencies in higher education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Learners' Self-Direction in Blended Learning Environments

The development of learners' self-direction has become a central concern in higher education, particularly within blended learning environments that require students to manage learning activities across face-to-face and online contexts and increasingly rely on self-directed learning processes (Luo, Lin and Yang, 2021; Otto and Eickhoff, 2025). The flexibility associated with blended learning may offer opportunities for learner autonomy, but it also places greater responsibility on students to organize, monitor, and regulate their own learning processes.

Self-direction is generally conceptualized as a multidimensional competency involving motivational, cognitive, and metacognitive dimensions (Carré et al., 2011). Within research on adult learning, self-direction refers to learners' capacity to take responsibility for their learning through the articulation of self-determination, self-regulation, and self-efficacy (Carré, 2010; Hiemstra and Carré, 2013). In this perspective, self-direction extends beyond the mere completion of learning tasks and involves learners' proactive engagement in defining goals, mobilizing resources, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes.

This conceptualization is closely related to research on self-directed learning, defined by Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) as a process through which learners assume control over the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their learning activities. However, several authors caution against assuming that learner self-direction emerges automatically from flexible or technology-mediated learning environments. Carré (2003) notably argues that increased freedom within educational settings does not necessarily foster one's self-direction, as learning environments remain shaped by instructional structures and institutional constraints. In this regard, Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation (Carré, 2003; Ponton and Carr, 2012) also highlights the influence on learners' behaviours toward learning that stems from their previous learning or personal experiences, and their environment.

Within blended learning environments, learners are therefore confronted with a dual challenge: managing academic expectations while regulating their engagement across multiple learning spaces and temporalities. Previous studies have shown that instructional design plays a critical role in supporting these processes by structuring activities, interactions, and learner support mechanisms (Adinda et al., 2022). In this perspective, blended learning environments should not merely be understood as technological arrangements, but as socio-technical learning environments that may either support or constrain learners' self-direction and self-regulatory processes. The development of self-direction in blended learning therefore appears closely linked to the nature of the proposed learning activities, particularly those encouraging active participation, reflection, collaboration, and feedback practices.

2.2 Online Co-Assessment and the Role of Feedback for Learning

Peer feedback and online co-assessment are increasingly considered as instructional strategies supporting active learning, and learners' engagement (Wu and Schunn, 2023), as they encourage them to adopt a more active role in the learning process while developing analytical, communicational, and interpersonal competencies (Taghizadeh Kerman et al., 2024).

Peer feedback can be understood as a collaborative learning activity through which learners provide evaluative and constructive comments on the work of their peers (Taghizadeh Kerman et al., 2024). Beyond its evaluative dimension, feedback constitutes a learning process that supports reflective thinking skills (Pham et al., 2020). Several studies have also highlighted the potential of peer assessment to foster learner autonomy and self-regulation by encouraging students to compare, justify, and revise their judgments (Shen, Bai and Xue, 2020; Kaplan, 2019).

In online and blended learning environments, digital technologies can further support these processes by structuring interactions, facilitating asynchronous collaboration, and providing traceability of learning activities. Online co-assessment environments may therefore create conditions favourable to reflective learning practices

by extending opportunities for interaction beyond face-to-face sessions. Previous research has shown that collaborative online activities and problem-based learning situations may contribute to the development of learners' self-direction in blended learning contexts (Adinda et al., 2022).

From an instructional design perspective, online co-assessment activities also provide opportunities for learners to engage with feedback at multiple levels. By allowing learners time to understand and interpret assessment criteria before responding or providing feedback for peers, online environments may encourage the production of more thoughtful and elaborated feedback. This process may contribute to the development of feedback-related skills, including critical thinking (Zhan, 2021), communication, and interpersonal skills (Lai et al., 2020), all of which are also essential leadership skills in workplace environments (Mumford, Campion and Morgeson, 2007). In this regard, Henderson et al. (2019) also add the ability to use appropriate resources for the completion of the activity as one of key elements describing capacity for feedback.

However, the effects of peer feedback on learners' self-direction remain complex and uneven across its different dimensions. While peer assessment may strengthen learners' perceived self-efficacy and engagement, the development of self-determination and self-regulatory processes may require more explicit instructional support and guidance from lecturers. The role of instructional design therefore appears central in structuring interactions, supporting reflection, and creating conditions favourable to learners' active participation and self-direction in online co-assessment activities. Furthermore, when learning activities require learners to provide feedback, the extent to which the learning environment and instructional design support learners' ability to provide feedback is also of interest.

3. Research Method

3.1 The Instructional Design of the Course and Study Sample

The study was conducted among 142 students in the Master in Management (MiM) at a French Business School. The participants were enrolled in a work-study programme, combining periods of academic study with professional experience or internship in a company. A 15-hours blended learning module called "Management and leadership" was selected for the study for two reasons: providing feedback is one of its key addressed competencies, and at this level, students should have advanced expertise to assess their peers' work. The assessment structure for the module comprised 25% of the total grade allocated to multiple-choice questions graded individually by the lecturer. The remaining 75% was focused on co-assessment, divided into two parts: 25% for intra-group assessment, where each student's performance was marked individually, and 50% for inter-group assessment, assessed collectively for the group as a whole.

The studied blended learning module included a case study activity, through which learners worked in small groups and participated in co-assessment, and peer feedback activities. To develop learners critical thinking skills, collaboration, communication and interpersonal skills, necessary for providing constructive feedback, the co-assessment adopted following stages (Figure 1):

- Anonymous inter-group assessment: each group assessed another group's work on case study using assessment criteria provided by lecturer and delivered written feedback following suggested guidelines. In this initial stage, the focus was on work assessment, which is considered more relevant than assessing individual contributions for training peer feedback skills
- Intra-group assessment: within each group, members assessed the individual contributions of their peers to the group's work on the case study, guided by an assessment grid provided by the lecturer
- Inter-group assessment and peer feedback review: each group review feedback and assessment of their work
- Meta-feedback: the lecturer provides feedback on students' written feedback from inter-group assessment, providing formative comments.

The blended learning environment was designed to support asynchronous learning activities. The online activities included individual preparation for the activities (consulting resources, reviewing the case study prior to the face-to-face session, preparing the inter-group assessment and carrying out intra-group assessment), and group activities (working on the case study after the face-to-face session and submitting works for the case study and for inter-group assessment). Discussion for the inter-group assessment was managed during the face-to-face session, although its preparation, notably the individual preparation for the activity, carried out online.

Figure 1 also shows that the groups were invited to review the inter-group assessment and their peers' feedback on their work. The discussion on this topic took place during the face-to-face learning.

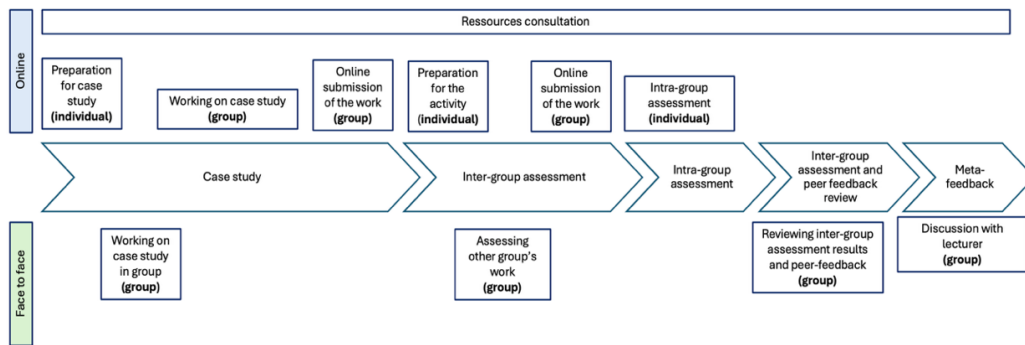


Figure 1: Instructional design of the course

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

A questionnaire is often used for surveying a large number of participants. It allows data to be collected at different periods during the semester, enabling the observation of changes or eventual progress over time. Furthermore, as presented in the literature review, learning is a complex process shaped by individual and environmental factors. Given the limitations in observing students' learning experiences, notably the individual part of learning, learners' self-direction and its components (self-determination, self-regulation, and self-efficacy) were quantified through a self-assessment questionnaire with 5 points Likert scale. To understand learners' ability to provide feedback, a self-assessment questionnaire was also used. Feedback-related skills, including critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills, and their ability to use appropriate resources for the completion of the activity were measured across four dimensions (Table 1), in which critical thinking is integrated into the knowledge of the subject dimension.

Table 1: Measurement model assessment

Constructs	Indicators	Cronbach Alpha
Self-direction	Self-determination (SD)	0.843
	Self-efficacy (SE)	
	Self-regulation (SR)	
Feedback Skills (C)	Knowledge of the subject	0.820
	Communication skills	
	Interpersonal skills	
	Knowledge of resources	

Learners were invited to complete the self-assessment questionnaire on two occasions (at the beginning and at the end of the semester). The Cronbach's alpha for the instruments used (Table 1) was tested and revealed a high satisfactory value (Table 1), indicating that the items used are aligned with the objective of the instrument (Midy, 1996). For the analysis of the data related to self-direction and learners' feedback-related skills, by taking into account the Shapiro-Wilk test (Table 2) indicating low p-value and suggesting a violation of normality assumption, a Wilcoxon test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in score between the pre- and post-test.

Table 2: Shapiro-Wilk test results.

Indicators	p
Pre-SD – Post-SD	0.003
Pre-SE – Post-SE	0.14
Pre-SR – Post-SR	0.001
Pre-SC – Post-SC	<.001

4. Results

4.1 Online Co-Assessment and Development of Learners' Feedback-Related Skills

Pre- and post-test administered on the indicators of feedback-related skills (Table 1), pointed out a significant perceived progress in learners' ability to provide structured, relevant and constructive feedback. The mean score of the construct increased from 23.97 in the pre-test to 25.29 in the post-test, representing a significant progression ($p < 0.001$). This result suggested a perceived progress in learners' overall ability to provide feedback, which requires critical thinking, their knowledge of the subject matter and related resources, as well as their communication and interpersonal skills.

As for each indicator of the construct (Table 3), progressions in mean scores were also observed, regardless of their statistical significance. The results of Wilcoxon test indicated that the indicators of interpersonal skills represented the only non-significant progression, despite their higher post-test mean scores:

- "I feel comfortable giving feedback, even in sensitive situations" (C4, p -value = 0.282)
- "I know how to give feedback that encourages the other person to improve" (C5, p -value = 0.441)

These indicators focused on perceived confidence in complex interpersonal skills, which may require longer exposure to evolve significantly, as the reported mean scores of these two indicators do not show a significant increase.

As for learners' perception of the knowledge of the subject (C1), the results of the Wilcoxon test indicated a statistically significant progression ($p < 0.05$). Similar improvement were observed in learners' perception on their communication skills, particularly their ability to produce feedback in a clear and understandable manner (C2, p -value = 0.05), and adapt their feedback to the intended recipient (C3, p -value = 0.10), draw on course content when formulating feedback (C6, p -value = 0.05), and identify tools and external resources that may support them to produce and provide feedback (C7, p -value = < 0.001).

Table 3: Mean scores of Feedback related skills

Construct	Indicators	Pre-test	Post-test
Feedback Skills (C)		23.97	25.29
	Knowledge of the subject		
	C1	3.67	3.86
	Communication skills		
	C2	3.47	3.69
	C3	3.77	3.91
	Interpersonal skills		
	C4	3.31	3.39
	C5	3.81	3.87
	Knowledge of resources		
	C6	3.29	3.49
	C7	2.66	3.08

In sum, although changes in interpersonal skills remain to be further explored, the results indicated that feedback-related skills showed a significant overall improvement from pre- to post-test, with gains in all of the items.

4.2 Learners' Self-Direction in Blended Learning Environment

The results of the Wilcoxon analysis showed that students' scores of self-directions increased significantly between pre- and post-test ($p < 0.05$), with the mean scores rising from 56.1 to 57.4 (Figure 2). This progression is identified on two of three indicators: self-determination and self-efficacy.

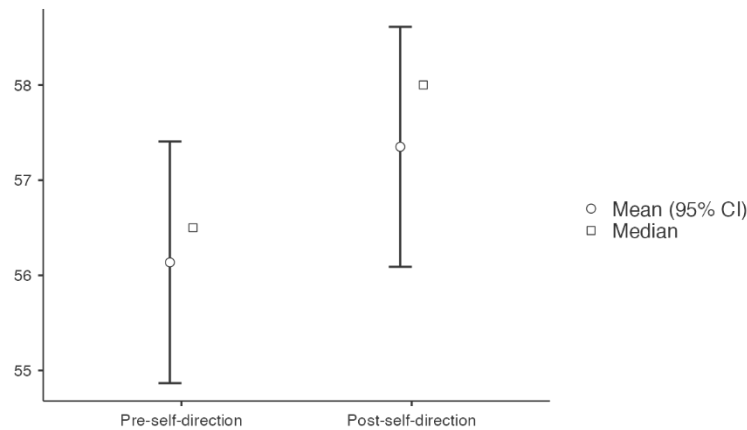


Figure 2: Wilcoxon test results on students' self-direction

The mean score for self-determination rose from 18.0 to 18.3 ($p < 0.1$). This construct encompasses the identification of personal and professional goals, the internalisation of external goals, freedom of action, proactivity, and engagement in learning. At the item level, most items showed increases. However, a small decrease was observed in participants' preference for general instruction allowing initiatives, indicating their need for a more structured one at the end of the program (SD4). Furthermore, the results indicated that the score remained stable at a relatively satisfactory level for participants' ability to identify their needs, strengths, and weaknesses when writing feedback at the beginning and the end of the module (SD3).

As for self-efficacy, the mean score for this construct increased from 18.6 to 19.3 ($p < 0.001$). This refers to participants perceived ability to evaluate their own work and that of others. At the item level, all items related to participants' perception of competence, motivation, and critical thinking showed increases. Only one item, related to participants perceived knowledge for producing feedback (SE4), showed no notable change, but remained at a relatively satisfactory level. At the item level, slight decreases, with a very small variation, were also found in participants' openness to receiving feedback on their errors (SR3), their control of the activity (SR4), and their perseverance to seek additional resources or information to complete a task (SR5).

Despite a minor variation and slight decreases in some items, the findings pointed out generally positive results of the intervention in learners' self-direction, notably in their perceived self-efficacy and self-determination, while improvement in their self-regulation remains moderate.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicated positive outcomes from the experimentation, though the level of statistical significance varied. Perceived feedback-related skills improved significantly from pre- to post-test, with gains observed across almost all items. Only the indicator "interpersonal skills" in giving feedback do not show a significant increase over time. The results also highlighted growth in learners' self-direction, particularly in their perceived self-efficacy when delivering feedback, while improvements in self-regulation were more moderate.

Within self-direction constructs, self-efficacy showed the most improvement, with a statistically significant increase in scores, suggesting that participants' perception of their competency in the activity has improved, except for one item, showing that participants have a positive perception of their knowledge for producing feedback in general contexts since the beginning of the module. This result may show that participants already have some experiences in writing feedback. Nevertheless, the results also showed that they would need more extended exposure to the activity to develop their interpersonal skills significantly in giving feedback. Bandura (1997) argued that self-efficacy is strengthened through iterative activities and accumulated experiences. Indeed, one's perception of their self-efficacy is essential to feeling comfortable providing feedback in sensitive situations. Consequently, these findings also suggest that the ability to provide feedback, notably in sensitive situations requiring interpersonal skills, and the capacity to encourage improvement, are best fostered through repeated exercises, real-world practice, and observations.

In this study, self-regulation appears to be the only component of self-direction that did not demonstrate significant improvement over time. This may be explained by the structured nature of the module's instructional design (Figure 1), which may have limited students' perception of their need to self-regulate their actions: the completion period for the activity was predetermined, and the resources students needed to prepare their

feedback and understand the ones received, such as activity instructions and assessment criteria, were also provided. The co-assessment activities conducted during asynchronous time required students to work autonomously. As such, students' with extrinsic motivation would need to develop an integrated regulation of their actions (Deci & Ryan, 2016).

As for self-determination, the findings highlighted a significant increase. The only identified stable scores are related to participants' ability to identify their own needs, strengths, and weaknesses when producing throughout the module. This stability may be explained by the fact that the intervention did not specifically target participants' ability to identify their own needs, strengths, and weaknesses when producing feedback.

This study aims to contribute to the discussion on how to design learning environments that foster both the development of feedback-related competencies and learners' self-direction in learning. The findings of this work showed students need for more time to develop interpersonal skills. This can be provided in a blended learning environment through repeated exercises that can be conducted during both online and face-to-face activities, as each of them has its own specific potential for learning (Graham, 2021). For instance, online environment can allow repetition without social stress. In contrast, face-to-face exercise provides the opportunity to learn the emotional realism of giving feedback. To support mastery of the skill, role-play exercises, enriched with real-time peer feedback (Luttenberger et al., 2014), might also be beneficial in this context, and to address some slightly decreased skills: openness to receiving feedback on their errors (SR3) and perseverance to seek additional resources or information to complete a task (SR5).

The study also pointed out the need for a learning environment that supports the implementation of integrated regulation. For Deci and Ryan (2016), integrated regulation represents the highest level of internalisation of external learning goals, in which an individual's personal goals are aligned with external learning goals. Consequently, in this level of internalisation, students are able to engage in autonomous actions (Deci and Ryan, 2016). This objective can be targeted by organizing an introductory activity allowing students to recognize various resources provided by lecturer, while also to identify their own needs, strengths, and weaknesses when producing feedback.

In sum, the findings of this study showed that self-direction in learning, encompassing self-determination, self-efficacy and self-regulation, represents an interplay between individual proactivity and learning environment constraints, particularly those related to the learning activities associated with the potentials of a blended learning environment, and the targeted learning skills, confirming Bandura's triadic reciprocal causation (Carré, 2003; Ponton and Carr, 2012).

Finally, this study is limited by its reliance on self-reported measures, which only capture students' perceived progression of self-direction in learning and their feedback-related skills. The absence of a control group also constitutes a limitation of this study. However, for ethical and practical reasons, all students were therefore given access to the same learning activities. Future research could further explore causal inference by comparing alternative feedback-training designs. It could also examine the extent to which the perceived progressions observed vary according to the status of the feedback within the learning objectives. Furthermore, an analysis of the quality of the peer-feedbacks produced, combined with semi-directive interviews, could enrich the present study findings to further investigate students' performance and self-regulatory process, in relation to the role of inter-group and intra-group assessment. The role of the learning environment highlighted in this study also invite further reflection on the role of digital technology as a catalyst for teaching practices to foster learners' self-direction in learning, particularly given the increasing accessibility of generative artificial intelligence that can support students' feedback writing skills.

Ethics Declaration

Participation in this study was voluntary, and all data were fully anonymized.

AI Declaration

An AI tool was used for grammar verification of this manuscript.

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