



**Influence of Self-Assessment in Spoken Production in A1 Students**

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## INFLUENCE OF SELF-ASSESSMENT IN SPOKEN PRODUCTION

### **Influence of Self-Assessment in Spoken Production in A1 Students**

When we learn a second language, it is normal to develop a deeper sense of self-awareness on the way we speak, and the way others speak. We compare ourselves to native speakers or to other learners who are in a different level than us. Although contrast is necessary for acquiring new knowledge, it does not provide any evidence of our actual progress and we often forget to use that sense of self-awareness for our own benefit.

Assessment is a fundamental part of the learning process, but the educational system based in testing as the primary source of evaluation can be overwhelming and even damaging for the student. This means that as teachers, we should find other ways to restructure the assessment process and extract the actual potential of the role of the student in this aspect.

The purpose of this research is to show how self-assessment can influence the spoken production of adult A1 students who struggle with pronunciation and a limited vocabulary regarding daily activities. The chosen path for this research aligns with the educational virtual environment in which we have been immersed during the pandemic and the importance of engaging students in having a more active role in their evaluation process.

### **Literature Review**

This section gathers a selection of definitions related to language learning, that contributed to the conception of the present research.

According to Rolheiser and Ross (2001), the process of “self-evaluation is defined as students judging the quality of their work, based on evidence and explicit criteria, or the purpose of doing better work in the future” (p. 1). This requires a step by

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step follow up process that helps students establish a difference between evaluating and identifying mistakes.

We need to move beyond this definition to help students see the role that criteria play in the judgment of their work. It is not about the teachers or even their parents, but about themselves and what they can turn into if they become more autonomous. In terms of the model behind self-evaluation, Rolheiser and Ross mentioned that:

Goals, effort, achievement, self-judgment, and self-reaction all can combine to impact self-confidence in a positive way. Self-evaluation is really the combination of the self-judgment and self-reaction components of the model, and if we can teach students to do this better, we can contribute to an upward cycle of better learning. (p. 5).

This is deepened by the final question that remains after self-evaluation: "How do I feel about my performance so far?" which is going to be crucial for the rest of the students' learning path in every subject and academic level.

The results align with Brown and Harris' (2014) observations about how learners should be introduced to more complex methods for self-assessment that help them deepen on their understanding of the process. It seems more useful to have students focus on comparing their work to that of established standards or against their previous performance rather than on how others are doing.

### **Problems**

However, the process of self-assessment does not replace the role of the instructor; it gives the students more autonomy on their learning progress when encountering mistakes. The teacher still remains as a facilitator of the material, knowledge and guidance but when it comes to evaluating, it is the student the one to identify their achievements and weak spots in their performance. This part of the

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progress is probably the most difficult one when it comes to creating a habit of self-assessing. “In the downward cycle low self-evaluations lead students to develop negative orientations toward learning, select personal goals that are unrealistic, adopt learning strategies which are ineffective, exert low effort, and make excuses for poor performance.” (Rolheiser & Ross, 2001, p. 6). If the guidance is not adequate and does not come in the exact timing, the student might not know how to address their doubts or what to do about their mistakes, that is when the excuses may show up as a mechanism to deal with the lack of answers. On the other hand, if they do not have enough encouragement when needed they could develop a negative relationship with facing mistakes and trying again.

### **Ways to Use it Effectively**

Setting realistic goals is important to avoid the possible problems of self-assessment, for both teacher and student. Accurate self-monitoring contributes to the possibility of entering a growth-pathway in which students identify and respond to their weaknesses, instead of pursuing an ego-protection pathway in which students seek to maximize unmerited positive feelings about their work (Boekaerts & Corno, 2005).

To answer the research question of this study: “How does self-assessment influence the spoken production of A1 adult students?” we have to consider that the classroom environment must be a safe place where active participation can be appreciated and not become a reason for discomfort. That relationship between the students and their environment should also include their own perspective on the learning process. In that sense, Rolheiser and Ross (2001) affirmed that older students (such as the subjects of this research) should expand the definition of self-evaluation where they not only judge their work to align to a certain standard in a criterion, but to do it for the purpose of improving. According to Bucheli (2021), in a similar research

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that analyzed the relationship between self-assessment and speaking skills in adult students in Ecuador, the process of self-assessing roleplays helped them to develop their speaking skills with the confidence for learning English as a foreign language. In the same way, Bueno (2021) stated in her research on the same topic that the innovation process of students self-assessing their speaking videos from week to week helped them strengthen their engagement with the language and reflect on their gradual improvement.

### **Innovation**

The unit was imparted by the teacher, who was the guide and facilitator, for one month divided into 4 sessions of 2 synchronous sessions weekly 40 minutes each. The transfer goal of the unit was to learn vocabulary related to food, question words, grammar related to simple past tense, present tense and to speak with understandable pronunciation. So that far ahead they would be able to describe themselves, what they do and where they live, they can describe simple aspects of their everyday life in a series of simple sentences, using simple sentences provided they can prepare in advance.

The activity designed as a pretest consisted in a 10 second monologue modeled by the teacher which the students were asked to alter putting their own information in the underlined parts. The example given was: Hello, my name is Damián and I am 18 years old. I live in Don Juan with my brother Jesús, my mother Leslie and my dog Manchas. They wrote it down and read it out loud for the rest of their classmates.

After that they were instructed to assess this first practice with a checklist. The final task was a posttest that consisted in a recorded one-minute monologue response to the request "Tell me about yourself". The students were asked to include their name,

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age, city of residence and favorite food. Then, they described what they do on a regular day. They finished their introduction asking the other person: What about you? They self-assessed their recording with the same checklist used at the beginning of the unit. The final monologue was an extended version of the first one modeled by the teacher and amplified every session with the new learned vocabulary.

The final task consisted in a response to another speaker's request: "Tell me about yourself". They started their introduction saying their name, age, city of residence and favorite food. Then, they described what they do on a regular day. They finished their introduction by asking the other person: "What about you?". After this, they self-assessed with a checklist.

The students used a checklist to assess their progress based on what they needed to learn to reach the transfer goal, the second parameter showed what the teacher needed to see to evidence this and the third parameter exemplified what strategies should be implemented by the teacher in case that the goal was not achieved as expected. Due to their A1 learning level the checklist was written in Spanish and they were trained on how to use it with examples of spoken production given by the teacher before using it on their own. This included more examples of assessing videos and recordings of other people and a closer observation of their own performance. To motivate the reinforcement and improvement of their pronunciation the teacher recorded the words or phonemes that each student needed to practice more while also engaging in positive feedback.

Later on, they used it to assess themselves on their practice activities, including their pretest and posttest activities which consisted in writing down and recording monologues that included new vocabulary words related to the topic that they were learning in class and adding more vocabulary and therefore more seconds to the

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recording with each session. After that, the teacher gave feedback comparing each checklist to the previous ones.

### **Research Methodology**

The present investigation is conducted through “Action Research”, due to its level of detail regarding the process and how straightforward it addresses the identified problems. This model was developed around social topics and later brought into education (Lewin, 1933, as cited in Adelman, 1993).

It was exemplified by the discussion of problems followed by group decisions on how to proceed. Action research must include the active participation by those who have to carry out the work in the exploration of problems that they identify and anticipate. After investigation of these problems the group makes decisions, monitoring and keeping note of the consequences. Regular reviews of progress follow. (p. 9).

### **Participants**

The participants were a small group constituted by 4 adults and 1 teenager, attending regularly the facilities of a private foundation specialized in gender and education that works with children and teenagers. Their age ranged between 16 and 27 years. They identified as mestizos, and their nationality was Ecuadorian. They did not have immigration background and their level of education was Intermediate: Upper secondary education. The participants were selected because of their high level of availability and attendance which would allow the correct application of the study. Their proficiency level at the moment of the research was A1.

### **Instruments**

The instruments used to answer the research question consisted in rubrics and self-assessment checklists implemented during the pretest and posttest activities.

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The rubric used during the implementation of the unit included five levels. Number 5 being the highest and number 1 the lowest. The rubrics were divided in two sections: Vocabulary and Grammar (A1 level students are evaluated with these two categories combined), and Pronunciation as seen in Appendix: Figure 3 and Figure 4. The rubric was graded by the teacher after evaluating the recorded monologues. The rubric created for this project is an adaptation of the 2018 Cambridge Speaking Test for A1 students, according to the needs and immediate context of the participants.

For A1 students the self assessment checklist needed to be written in Spanish and it worked in a different way compared to the rubric. The sections were divided in three parts that had numerical equivalences to help contrast the results with the rubric scores. The students marked “Yes”, “No” and “Not yet”, as possible answers to the different skills developed by the students, that were linked to the learning goal. The numerical equivalences were “5-4” “3-2” and “1-0” respectively.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data was organized in order to answer the research question. The grades from pre and posttest were registered and analyzed in an excel document and descriptive statistics such as: mean, mode, median, minimum, maximum and standard deviation, were run. Inferential statistics like *p* value was also calculated to measure the impact of the innovation unit on the students.

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Banegas and Villacañas de Castro (2015), collaboration is a fundamental principle for action research in education “both collaboration and participation need to be voluntary and participants must be autonomous and free to withdraw at any time without any consequences”(p. 60). The ethical considerations taken during this study included the principles of voluntary participation, informed



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consent and anonymity. The adult participants were addressed with informed consent of the nature of the study, its duration, purpose and results while the teenager of the group also required a consent letter signed by his parents prior the conduction of the research.

### Results

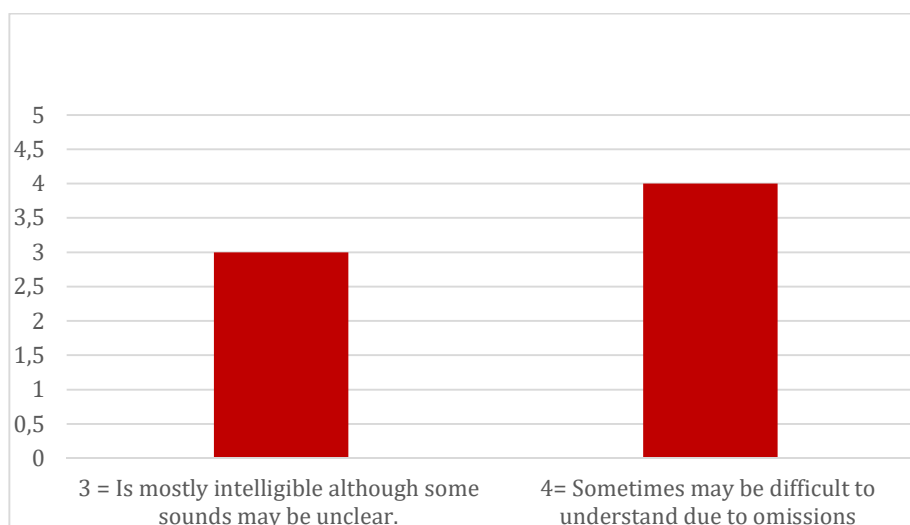
#### Progress According Self-Assessment Checklist

All of the participants completed their self-assessment through the unit and although students' self-assessment was not graded for points, the scores are reported here in Figure 1 to explore their progress. For example, students' self-assessment score was correlated with their pretest and posttest scores regarding the pronunciation item. On average, students rated their pronunciation at a 3.6 which places their score between the two rubric categories of 3 = Is mostly intelligible although some sounds may be unclear, and 4= Sometimes may be difficult to understand due to omissions.

The correlation between pretest and self-assessment showed a positive association ( $r = 0.66$ ). In the same way, students' posttest and self-assessment scores showed a positive association ( $r = 0.61$ ).

#### Figure 1

##### *Progress According Self-Assessment Checklist*



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The difference of the pretest and posttest rubrics exhibits an improvement in their speaking skills and vocabulary. In that same way, the hypothesis “It is expected that the implementation of self-assessment in the unit will improve the spoken production of adult A1 students” is being proven as the paired-sample *t*-test identified a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, indicating support for the alternative hypothesis.

At the end of the unit, the students showed improvements in their pronunciation, grammar structure and useful vocabulary to their context. All 5 students showed an increase in their grades as observed in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Progress in Vocabulary & Grammar and Pronunciation scores*

	<i>Rubric Pretest</i>				<i>Rubric Posttest</i>			
	V & G	Pronunciation	Total	%	V&G	Pronunciation	Total	%
<i>Mean</i>	3.4	3.4	6.8	0.68	3.8	3.6	7.4	0.74
<i>Median</i>	3	3	7	0.7	4	3	7	0.7
<i>Mode</i>	3	3	7	0.7	4	3	7	0.7
<i>Min</i>	3	3	6	0.6	3	3	7	0.7
<i>Maximum</i>	4	4	7	0.7	4	5	9	0.9

The pretest scores on the pronunciation rubric resulted in a mean of 3.4 out of a possible five points. While the posttest scores on the pronunciation rubric resulted in a mean of 3.6. Indicating an improvement or mean difference of 0.27.

A paired-sample *t*-test, where the null hypothesis is that there is difference between dependent groups, was used in the rubric pretest and posttest scores in order to explore the research question. At the end, the test identified a statistically significant

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difference between pretest and posttest using scores ( $t = 6.8, p < 0.05$ ) indicating support for the alternative hypothesis.

### **Discussion**

The positive results of the unit align with Brown and Harris' (2014) observations on Intermediate stage learners and how they should be introduced to more complex methods for self-assessment that help them deepen their understanding of the process. The students started the unit with the knowledge that self-assessment was going to be a part of it and they slowly began to realize how that meant a shift in the roles of both the teacher and them. Whether it is in a competitive environment or not, it is beneficial for students to evaluate their previous performances based on a realistic criterion designed according to their needs.

As stated by Boekaerts and Corno (2005) The engagement of the students is important for this part of the process because it makes them reflect on their previous steps and be more aware of their next ones, but more importantly it helps them create a structure of monitoring their second language beyond the classroom.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, self-assessment influences the spoken production of A1 students. The rubric helped students understand the parameters they needed to observe in order to reach their transfer goal. The guidance of the teacher was crucial for understanding the checklist and monitoring their own progress accurately.

During the pandemic context, the conditions merited a more autonomous role of the student while also being guided step by step to do so. With hardly any interaction among students due to the sanitary emergency of COVID-19, implementing self-assessment was the best option to improve their spoken production. The innovation unit

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helped them acquire vocabulary related to their context and daily activities and the process of self-assessing with checklist was both encouraging and useful for them.

This attention to detail during the process allowed them to compare their performance with their previous ones and prepare them to identify future problems that may come along as they keep on learning English as a foreign language.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations was the short period of time in which the unit was imparted, considering the amount of new vocabulary that was needed to achieve the transfer goal. This limitation affected the delivery of the classes and required more guidance and repetition creating stress and anxiety in some of the students. Another aspect that demanded more attention than expected was the lack of a continuity of the sessions due to the virtual environment. Some of the lessons had to be rescheduled or were interrupted due to technical problems. Extra tutoring sessions were needed to provide a closer observation of the students' individual needs to come up with different strategies that would help them reach the transfer goal and implement self-assessment.

### **Recommendations**

To avoid an unexpected increase in the hours of work that might exhaust both teachers and students, I would suggest a slow dosage of new vocabulary each week, divided in 5 words for each session. By the end of the week the words should be revisited in the form of a spelling written activity that reinforces the newly acquired knowledge. This also leads us to the next limitation which is the short duration of the study: when trying to be realistic it is fundamental to plan our possible obstacles and leave room in our lesson plan for clarifications, reviews and even reshaping. It is also important that students find a balance between their motivation for reaching the transfer goal and the responsibility for their progress to avoid unnecessary stress. It is

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fundamental to keep in mind that, even though the curriculum might be designed in a linear way, learning does not always occur like that and there are multiple aspects that may have an influence on this.

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**Appendix 1**

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

**Appendix 2****Rubric**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 3****e-portfolio link**

Available upon request.