The Role of Self-Assessment in Improving Oral Fluency in Adult EFL Learners

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Research Report

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Adult EFL learners have several obstacles to overcome when they start their second language learning journey. This research examines the challenges that adult learners encounter while trying to become proficient in English. As the renowned linguist Henry Widdowson noted learning a language is a complex process, with obstacles that can be especially intimidating for adult learners. Widdowson drew attention to the cognitive difficulties that people encounter when learning a second language since they must adjust to new linguistic patterns in addition to struggling with well-established ones in their mother tongue. Adult learners may experience dissatisfaction and self-doubt because of these obstacles; thus, it is critical to recognize the particular challenges they face when learning a language (Widdowson, 1978).

The article also highlights the challenges that adult learners of EFL face in class, with a specific focus on the issues arising from the literal translation of Spanish words and expressions (false cognates). This issue has been a part of my personal experience as an online teacher. I have encountered students who are not only adults but also, an age range from 35 to 60 years old, and their English level according to the CEFR is A2, making the learning process even more complex. Through an analysis of existing literature, language acquisition theories, and empirical studies, this paper aims to shed light on the difficulties that EFL adult learners face in the process of acquiring English proficiency. The findings underscore the importance of targeted language instruction strategies to address these challenges.

Literature Review

Self-assessment can be defined as the process by which learners evaluate their own language abilities and provide feedback on their performance (Boud, 1995). Liu and

Sadler (2003) found that language learners who used self-assessment displayed higher levels of motivation and autonomy. Self-assessment is an opportunity for students to take control of their learning and find their voices in a target language (Rubin, 1975).

In the academic setting, self-evaluation is a component of the learning process. Self-assessment develops a sense of agency and personal responsibility in addition to being a useful diagnostic tool for evaluating one's educational development. Self-evaluation is an introspective process that helps people become more aware of their advantages and disadvantages. As a result of their increased self-awareness, they are better able to choose their educational paths.

Furthermore, Yan et al. (2022) claimed that teachers should implement checklists, rubrics, and other tools that encourage autonomy and independence making students more confident when performing assigned tasks. Training students in Self-assessment can be achieved through direct instruction and modeling. When a teacher models an activity, they perform a task in a way that students can understand and replicate. After modeling, students complete the requested assignments using checklists as a reminder of specific outlooks. There are studies such as the one made by Mark Lejk and Michael Wyvill (2001) in which they claimed that there was a predisposition for students concerning the top end of the group to under-assess themselves in comparison with the evaluations done by their classmates and for students towards the end of the group to overrate themselves.

Oral Fluency refers to the ability to express oneself smoothly and coherently in spoken language. It involves the flow of speech, the ability to articulate thoughts without unnecessary pauses, hesitations, or disruptions, and overall proficiency in verbal communication (Richards & Renandya, 2002). As defined by Lennon (1990), oral fluency is the capacity to create language easily, accurately, and smoothly, it considers elements including speech coherence, pace, and pause patterns. Derwing et al. (2009) stated that

some qualified evaluators based their oral fluency assessments using either objective

methods, such as counting the words or syllables generated per minute, or subjective

evaluations based on fluency.

Oral Communication Skills include skills such as articulation, active listening,

appropriate use of tone and body language, and the capacity to adapt communication style

to different audiences and contexts. One scholar who has contributed to the understanding

of effective communication is Deborah Tannen (1994), who explored some aspects of

communication in professional contexts, highlighting different communication that have

an impact on workplace interactions. She emphasized that understanding communication

traces a subtle distinction to achieving oral communication. Samovar et al. (2020)

conducted an experiment and found that non-native English speakers with higher English

language proficiency were more likely to be employed in professional settings.

Self-assessment in oral fluency: Self-evaluation is an aspect of the language

learning process, especially for adult EFL learners who want to be more fluent in oral

communication. Self-assessment in the context of oral fluency enables students to consider

how well they speak, pinpoint areas that require work, and establish individual language

development objectives (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). Educators can develop a more student-

centered strategy that encourages metacognition and self-reflection by incorporating self-

assessment into the instructional design. This will generate a more autonomous and

empowered learning experience for adult EFL learners.

Backward Design is a pedagogical strategy that begins with identifying the intended

learning outcomes and then works backward to develop instructional activities and

evaluations that support those results (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). When investigating how

self-assessment helps adult EFL learners improve their oral fluency, researchers can define

specific goals and then organize the study to meet those goals by using a backward design.

For instance, researchers can design interventions and assessments to specifically address the intended changes in oral fluency, pronunciation, and communicative competence (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This methodology ensures that the research design of the study is intentional, targeted, and in correlation with the desired results, thereby increasing the credibility and significance of the findings.

Innovation

This research introduces an innovative method to improve oral fluency among adult EFL learners at the A2 level, specifically focusing on expressing themselves properly when describing their work experience in a one-minute video for a multinational job application, simulating a real-life situation. The proposed innovation involves integrating an interactive pronunciation coaching tool (Flipgrid) into the language learning environment, providing personalized feedback, the possibility to assess themselves, see their progress, and enhance oral fluency and communication skills.

To develop the innovation, the teacher worked in specific areas because the goal was for the students to learn the following: vocabulary related to work and/or professional environment; grammar related to past simple and present simple; talk with understandable pronunciation, so that in the long run and on their own, they will be able to express themselves properly when they describe their work experience. To support this transfer goal these questions should be answered by the students and can be asked as many times as needed throughout the unit designed for this innovation:

1. Can I effectively communicate my job experience?

2. Can I talk about my skills and qualifications clearly to my potential employer?

To perform this transfer goal, the students need to clearly express their work experience and their work skills in a one-minute video. The lesson plan was designed to be achieved in 4 weeks consisting of 8 lessons of 45 minutes each.

In week one, the students conducted a pre-assessment through a video monologue focusing on clear and understandable speech, this was after an introduction to the unit and the importance of describing their work experiences in the competitive environment of today's job market. Also, the checklist was explained for them to self-assess themselves later.

In week two, students worked on the present simple tenses and practiced the recorded monologue. They described weekly activities at work in a one-minute WhatsApp voice note. After that, they used a checklist to see if they met all the criteria. They also performed role plays simulating a job interview and did a word association practice in which they learned work-related adjectives and adverbs. In week three, students practiced again describing their dream job. They also inquired about the use of past simple tense of regular verbs by listening to a conversation about work experiences.

Finally, in week four, the participants prepared a video monologue where they described their work experiences. They had to focus on correct vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and clear speech. They self-assess their performance based on the objectives of the unit. In total, they had four opportunities to practice their speaking skills through video and audio recordings.

Research Methodology

A component of any scientific investigation is research methodology, which offers a structured framework for the planning, execution, and evaluation of research projects. It acts as a guide for researchers gathering, analyzing, and extrapolating information from data. As stated by Creswell (2014), it involves the "philosophical assumptions, the research design, and the specific methods for collecting and analyzing data." (p. 4). Yin (2018) emphasized the importance of a well-structured research design, stating that it "provides the glue that holds the research project together." (p. 19).

Action Research is described by Stringer (2013) as a systematic, reflective inquiry by educators (teachers, administrators, counselors, etc.) into their educational practices. He emphasized that action research is performed in order to improve students' learning outcomes, expand practice, and address issues. Efron and Ravid (2013) affirmed that Action Research is different from traditional educational research since it is constructivist, situational, practical, systematic, and cyclical.

This research intends to explore the following research question: To what extent would the self-assessment process improve the oral fluency of adult EFL learners? The study goes through the existing literature on self-assessment practices and empirical evidence to evaluate the extent to which self-assessment contributes to oral fluency. The research employs quantitative data analysis through video recordings and observations. The findings aim to provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers seeking alternative strategies to promote oral fluency in adult EFL learners.

Participants

The author of this research selected 10 participants whose age range is from 20 to 40 years old, 5 women and 5 men. Their proficiency level is A2, according to the Common European Framework Reference. Participants study with a private English teacher who gives online classes. All students are Ecuadorian but located in different cities of the country. All participants' native language is Spanish and each lesson from this research was given from December 2023 to January 2024, they had 4 sessions of 45 minutes for 4 weeks.

Instruments

To answer the research question, a first assessment had to be carried out at the beginning of the study. A pre-test is an assessment tool given to participants before they are exposed to the upcoming innovation, according to Mauldin (2020). The exam evaluated students on subjects they had not yet mastered to find ways to improve their learning

outcomes. According to Richland et al. (2009), less-than-ideal outcomes offer chances for growth rather than implying a lack of learning.

A post-test was then administered to the same group of people. After the implementation phase, this assessment allows for a comparative examination of the intervention (Budert-Waltz & Levitas, 2022). The pre-test and post-test results were quantified by the researcher using a rubric that had previously been approved by the teacher in a different setting. Both pre and post-tests to compare their oral fluency levels before and after implementing Flipgrid for self-assessment.

Throughout the intervention, the researcher recorded changes and difficulties that the students faced and kept notes about the remarks. The self-assessment measure was used initially, two practice sessions were held, and the intervention's conclusion was observed. Using a variety of approaches to provide a nuanced analysis, this multifaceted strategy sought to provide a thorough knowledge of the study topics. Students had the opportunity to self-assess their performance through video recordings and voice recordings to introduce themselves similarly to a job interview. To self-assess themselves they used a checklist as guidance to recognize if the goals of the lesson were met. According to Efron and Ravid (2013) a checklist is made up of a predetermined list of behaviors or activities that are the focus of the observer's attention. An observation checklist was created to assess specific aspects of oral fluency, such as pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammar accuracy, and coherence.

The researcher used a rubric to grade the students' performance during the intervention According to Jonsson (2014), a task or assignment rubric is a methodical scoring guide that outlines particular criteria and performance levels for assessment and evaluation. It acts as a disciplined framework that teachers can use to provide students with clear expectations and specific feedback (Stevens & Levi, 2012). Because they are good at

encouraging uniformity, transparency, and equity in grading, rubrics have become popular in educational contexts (Brookhart, 2013). Rubrics help to create a more objective and systematic evaluation process by dissecting difficult skills or activities into identifiable components with predetermined criteria (Reddy & Andrade, 2010).

Data Analysis

Using a rubric that included the same criteria as the student's checklist, the researcher was able to carefully evaluate the learners. For the purpose of the quantitative analysis, a pre-test and post-test were conducted. The result of the descriptive statistics: the mean, mode, medium, maximum, and standard deviation were uploaded to an Excel spreadsheet and then thoroughly examined by the researcher. As for the inferential statistic, the researcher calculated the p-value. Following the intervention checklists were collected to document which factors the self-assessment technique affected the most.

This research method also offered insightful information about how well the intervention promoted adult learner's ability to assess themselves. Field notes were taken during the current study's intervention to illustrate the obstacles that students faced when using self-assessment. This method improved the researcher's understanding of the challenges that students faced throughout this research.

Ethical Considerations

Some of the ethical considerations that were addressed include the following: Participants were fully informed about the study and what their involvement in it was in detail. They decided through a Google form, their express consent whether they wanted to participate or not. This included explaining the purpose of the study, the methods that were going to be used, the risks and benefits of their participation, and the rights of participants, (National Institutes of Health, 2021). All personal information and data collected from participants were kept confidential. This research aims to provide the benefit of

maximizing oral fluency using Flipgrid and pursues minimizing risks associated with their

participation in the study, such as breaches of confidentiality that happen when private

information is disclosed to a third party without the owner's consent. Finally, this study

was conducted during private lessons, therefore there was no need for an institutional

review and consent for the study.

Results

Regarding how much self-evaluation helps students at the A2 level produce oral

fluency. The pre-test and post-test findings were displayed using descriptive statistics tables.

The findings of the minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation and p-value are displayed

in the following table.

Table 1

Pre-tests and Post-tests Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

	MIN	MAX	M	SD	p.value
Pretest	5	10	7.8	1.326649916	0
Post test	8	12	10.7	1.268857754	0

The findings showed a continuous rise in scores between the pre-and post-tests,

suggesting that the teachings had an impact. The improvement in mean scores showed that

practicing improves oral fluency outcomes for A2 students. Self-evaluation was put into

practice, and this helped them keep improving their language skills.

Table 2

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics per Construct

Construct	N	Pre-test				Post-test				p-value
		Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	
Vocabulary	10	2.00	2.00	2.10	0.300000	2.00	3.00	2.90	0.300000	0
Grammar	10	1.00	3.00	1.90	0.300000	2.00	3.00	2.40	0.489898	0

Pronunciation & Fluency	10	1.00	2.00	1.60	0.489898	2.00	3.00	2.60	0.489898	0
Content & Organization	10	1.00	3.00	2.20	0.600000	2.00	3.00	2.80	0.400000	0

The results shown in Table 2 prove that self-assessment helped improve oral fluency among students in the different areas that they worked in such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency, and content and organization. Overall, there was an improvement of 41% in all the areas that were targeted during the research. The most significant aspect improved was pronunciation and fluency with 63% improvement followed by content and organization with 40%. These outcomes suggested that the students became more fluent and organized when it came to oral production.

The researcher followed up constantly on the students' experiences with self-assessment and used field notes to record any difficulties they ran into during the intervention. On the other hand, students were more focused and conscious of their pronunciation and fluency as they practiced and learned how to evaluate themselves. During the intervention, students were able to overcome obstacles such as the fear of making mistakes out loud, the thought of feeling embarrassed, the lack of fluency, or the heavy accent when producing oral utterances. As a result of this intervention researcher noticed students became more confident, spoke without fear and were more fluent at the end of the research.

Discussion

The findings of this study portray the impact of self-assessment in improving oral fluency among adult EFL learners. The research demonstrated an overall improvement of 41% in the specified areas. Among these, it was shown a 63% improvement in pronunciation and fluency. This outcome reflects how self-assessment can improve learners' ability to articulate sounds accurately and speak more naturally.

The improvement in pronunciation and fluency can be attributed to the reflective nature of self-assessment. By engaging in self-analysis, EFL learners can identify specific pronunciation challenges, that they can monitor and correct. This aligns with the research of Boud and Falchikov (2007) who emphasized the importance of self-monitoring and corrective feedback in language acquisition. The noticeable increase in pronunciation and fluency confirms that self-assessment motivates students to actively participate in their language development, developing a more confident oral communication.

Furthermore, this study found that when participants evaluated their speaking skills, there was a 40% improvement in how they organized and presented their spoken ideas. This suggests that self-assessment helps EFL learners to become more confident when talking in the targeted language. This finding is in line with the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2005) and their studies with backward design that confirms that this particular methodology ensures that the research design of the study is intentional, targeted, and in correlation with the desired results, thereby increasing the credibility and significance of the findings.

Conclusions

The use of self-assessment tools helps enhance oral fluency in adult EFL learners. The tools facilitate learners with their language skills and reflect their learning journey providing them with more autonomy and enhancing their oral communication skills. Addressing challenges related to technical access, privacy concerns, and confidence is essential to ensure the successful integration of self-assessment tools in adult EFL contexts. Throughout this study researcher noticed the lack of confidence in the group of participants, they felt most of the time embarrassed or ashamed of making mistakes. It is essential that in the future, teachers create environments that make students feel safe and provide them with the tools to make them feel confident to learn and participate in class without any judgments.

Limitations

Some of the limitations encountered in this study include the short amount of time for delivering the lessons, the fact of not being a formal English academy or school that can put some sort of pressure on the students and finally working with adults that have jobs, have families, and have several endeavors to attend and a very short time to commit with the study.

Therefore, it was challenging for the researcher to keep up with students not showing up to class and postponing several times a week the lessons taking the study a longer time than expected. Another obstacle that was faced and is worth mentioning was the fact that many of the students did not want to participate because they felt they were being judged and this made them self-conscious and embarrassed. So, this research started with 16 students but along the way, six of them retired during the study.

Recommendations

The study suggests that teachers incorporate self-assessment into their lectures as a useful technique to improve student's performance in the skill in which they wish to perfect. After a lesson, teachers might utilize self-assessment to get a sense of how well their students think they performed. This could be put into practice by curriculum requirements. More research in this area is needed to provide educators with more modern teaching methods that will aid students in developing their language proficiency. Particularly on adult learners because there has not been much research on the subject. The methods that give students more confidence when learning a second language should also be the subject of these investigations.

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Appendix 1

Lesson plan.

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Consent letters

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

E-portfolio

Available upon request.