



## ENHANCING SPOKEN ENGLISH PERFORMANCE THROUGH TEXT READING: EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF RUBRIC-BASED SELF- ASSESSMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Spoken English proficiency is a fundamental component of communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts; however, many learners struggle with speaking anxiety and limited awareness of their own progress. This study investigated EFL students' perceptions of rubric-based self-assessment as a strategy for improving spoken English performance. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved ten eleventh-grade students at SMAN 12 Semarang, Indonesia. The study was conducted over five days, beginning with a text-reading activity on Day 1, followed by three consecutive days of short speaking tasks during which participants recorded their performances and assessed their fluency, pronunciation, and intonation using an analytic rubric. The process concluded with a final text-reading task on Day 5. Data were gathered through self-assessment rubrics, researcher observation notes, and semi-structured interviews to explore students' experiences, perceived challenges, and observed improvements. The data were analyzed thematically through processes of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of rubric-guided self-reflection in enhancing learners' awareness of their speaking abilities, addressing challenges in self-evaluation, and fostering greater learner autonomy in EFL speaking classrooms.

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**Keywords:** *EFL students; qualitative research; rubric-based self-assessment; Spoken English performance; text reading*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

English proficiency is widely recognized as a fundamental competency that enables individuals to communicate effectively and serves as a significant indicator of a learner's overall language ability (Abdullah, 2017, as cited in Alfianti & Aminin, 2022; Kholmurodovna, 2024). Despite its importance, learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) frequently encounter challenges in

monitoring, evaluating, and improving their spoken English performance (Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2022). While many students possess adequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, they often struggle to produce speech that is fluent, natural, and confident (Kholmurodovna, 2024). Speaking-related activities, such as public speaking, oral presentations, and reading texts aloud, commonly evoke psychological barriers, including anxiety, fear of making mistakes,

**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

and feelings of discomfort (Kholmurodovna, 2024; Nazri, 2025; Sintayani & Adnyayanti, 2022). These emotional challenges may hinder students' ability to accurately recognize their speaking proficiency and monitor their progress in developing fluency throughout the learning process (Alfianti & Aminin, 2022; Qassrawi et al., 2024; Shi et al., 2024).

One assessment approach that has gained increasing attention in language education is self-assessment, which actively engages learners in evaluating both their learning processes and outcomes (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013, as cited in Sintayani & Adnyayanti, 2022). Through self-assessment, students are encouraged to reflect critically on their strengths and areas for improvement, thereby fostering greater learner autonomy and self-awareness (Alfianti & Aminin, 2022; AlAli & Wardat, 2024; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Nevertheless, EFL learners often remain highly dependent on teachers, who have traditionally been viewed as the primary evaluators of student performance (Alfianti & Aminin, 2022; Sholah, 2019; Xu et al., 2022). To promote more independent learning practices, rubrics have been introduced as effective tools for supporting alternative assessment methods. By offering clear performance criteria and descriptive feedback, rubrics can guide learners in conducting meaningful self-assessments and developing a deeper understanding of their language performance (Dang & Le, 2023; Saha et al., 2023; Kohan et al., 2023).

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to investigate EFL students' perceptions of rubric-based self-assessment in evaluating spoken English performance through text-reading activities. Specifically, the study aims to examine students' views regarding the quality, clarity, and relevance of rubric criteria related to pronunciation, intonation, and pace during oral reading tasks (Dang & Le, 2023; Akramy, 2020; Saed et al., 2021). Furthermore, it explores how rubric-guided self-assessment assists learners in identifying their weaknesses, monitoring their progress, and evaluating changes in their spoken English performance over time (Huang & Gui, 2015). In addition, the study investigates the challenges and obstacles students experience when implementing rubric-based self-assessment, including difficulties in interpreting assessment

criteria, time constraints, and other practical issues that may affect the effectiveness of the self-evaluation process (Fraga-Viñas & Bobadilla-Pérez, 2025). Through this investigation, the research intends to provide a deeper understanding of the role of rubric-based self-assessment in supporting speaking development and learner autonomy within EFL contexts.

Guided by the objectives above, this study is designed to investigate:

1. How EFL students perceive the quality, clarity, and usefulness of rubrics in assessing their spoken English performance through text reading.
2. The specific ways in which rubrics facilitate EFL students' recognition of their spoken English performance weaknesses when reading texts aloud.
3. The practical challenges and obstacles EFL students face during the self-assessment of their text reading performance.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *Rubrics and Self-Assessment*

Rubrics provide a detailed breakdown of what's expected for each assignment (Huang & Gui, 2015). They serve dual purposes: scoring student work while also guiding learners through the assignment process. By focusing students' attention on key areas, rubrics help them make reliable quality judgments about their work.

Self-assessment is the process by which learners evaluate their own knowledge and skills or assess their own performances (Bourke & Mentis, 2011, as cited in Dang & Le, 2023). According to Stiggins and Chappuis (2005), rubrics help learners clearly know the learning outcome, and as a result, they are better able to achieve it. In the self-assessment process during text reading, students pay attention to pronunciation, fluency, intonation, grammar, and word usage. Students perceive rubrics as a facilitative tool of practice and self-assessment. Ultimately, self-assessment encourages learners to take responsibility for their learning by actively engaging in the process and reflecting upon their performance to foster continuous improvement (Andrade &

Valtcheva, 2009; Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2022).

## 2.2 Previous Study

Research on self-assessment and rubric-guided instruction in EFL speaking contexts has expanded significantly over the past decade (e.g., Dang & Le, 2023; Huang & Gui, 2015; Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2022). Huang and Gui (2015) looked at what happens when Chinese EFL students use rubrics to assess themselves. Students got better at organizing their thoughts, spoke longer, and could adjust their language use more flexibly. Alfianti and Aminin (2022) conducted research called "The Implementation of Self-Assessment in EFL Students Speaking Performance" among university students in Indonesia. The findings showed improvements in pronunciation, fluency, grammar, intonation, and vocabulary. Santos (2022) combined speaking techniques and self-assessment rubrics, finding that the group that got the rubrics improved significantly more noticeably.

Dang and Le (2023) surveyed 96 university students about their experiences using rubrics in speaking classes. Students said the rubrics were high-quality and genuinely helped their speaking improvement, though time constraints and concerns over subjectivity were noted. Fraga-Viñas and Bobadilla-Pérez (2025) found that 78% of students reported that rubrics helped them be more objective when evaluating their own work. Sintayani and Adnyayanti (2022) noted that self-assessment works if teachers actually teach students how to do it right. Agustini et al. (2024) found that fear and confusion about self-assessment basically went away after students got proper training and practice. Anh et al. (2022) showed a strong correlation between student self-evaluations and teacher assessments. Van Le et al. (2025) showed significant improvements in student self-awareness when combining peer and self-assessment using rubrics.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of rubric-based self-assessment on students' speaking performance, self-awareness, and assessment accuracy (Alfianti & Aminin, 2022; Anh et al., 2022; Dang & Le, 2023; Van Le et al., 2025), most of these studies primarily focused on measuring speaking improvement or evaluating the effectiveness of self-assessment

practices in general speaking contexts. Limited attention has been given to students' perceptions of rubric-based self-assessment specifically in text reading activities. In addition, few studies have explored how students perceive the quality and usefulness of rubrics, how rubrics help them identify weaknesses in their spoken English performance, and what challenges they experience during the self-assessment process while reading texts aloud. Therefore, further investigation is needed to better understand EFL students' perceptions of rubric-based self-assessment in text reading contexts.

## 2.3 Theoretical Foundation

While these empirical studies clearly highlight the practical benefits and outcomes of rubric-based self-assessment, understanding the cognitive mechanisms behind these improvements requires a strong theoretical foundation. Underlying these empirical findings is Zimmerman's (2000) self-regulated learning theory, which posits that learners go through three distinct phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection. Self-assessment is a cornerstone of this self-reflection phase. As Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) define it, self-assessment is "a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on the quality of their work... and revise accordingly." In practical application, analytic rubrics serve as the essential cognitive tools that make this self-assessment and reflection possible within the EFL classroom (Wolf & Stevens, 2007).

## 3. METHODS

This research focused on exploring students' perceptions of rubric-based self-assessment. The repeated text reading sessions were designed to support reflection and evaluation rather than solely to measure quantitative improvement. A qualitative methodology was deemed most appropriate for this investigation, as students' perceptions are inherently subjective and context-dependent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This descriptive design is particularly effective in addressing complex "how" and "why" inquiries, allowing researchers to thoroughly examine dynamic educational phenomena over a period of time (Nimehchisalem, 2018).

**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

This study involved 10 Grade 11 EFL students (ages 16-17) from SMA N 12 Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The decision to recruit 10 participants was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidance on thematic analysis. Purposive sampling was used to recruit these participants (Patton, 2002). All participants were assigned pseudonyms (Student 1 through Student 10) to protect their identities. The text reading sessions were fitted around the school break and ran over a period of 5 consecutive days, with activities taking place between 3:30 and 4:00 PM

To gather comprehensive data, the researcher utilized three primary instruments: rubric self-assessment sheets, researcher observation notes, and a semi-structured interview guide. The researcher observation notes were collected as unstructured field notes across the three-day self-assessment phase (Days 2 to 4). As suggested by Kawulich (2005), unstructured observation allows researchers to capture authentic behaviors and contextual nuances that other instruments might miss. These notes specifically tracked the daily progression of the students' behavioral engagement, their initial confusion with the grading mechanics, and their gradually improving ability to evaluate their own pronunciation and intonation accurately over time. The interview process was uniquely designed in two distinct parts to ensure comprehensive data collection:

- 1) **Daily Brief Interview:** Embedded directly during the 15-minute self-assessment windows. These were short, targeted questions intended to capture spontaneous reactions while students were actively evaluating their recordings
- 2) **Final Interview:** Conducted on the last day of the research, focusing on deeper, overall reflections regarding rubric clarity, spoken English performance improvements, and practical challenges across the entire 5-day period, directly aligning with the three research questions.

The data collection procedure was systematically structured over a 5-day period to accommodate this. Day 1 served as an initial baseline where students performed a text reading task and recorded it prior to utilizing any self-assessment rubrics. Then, during the core self-assessment phase (Days 2-4), the

researcher conducted daily 15-minute group sessions. Each session was methodically split into a 5-minute text reading and recording phase, followed immediately by a 10-minute individual self-assessment and reflection phase of their spoken English performance using the rubric. Finally, Day 5 consisted of a final text reading task to observe how students evaluated their performance after several days of guided practice, followed immediately by the final post-program interviews. To ensure the reliability of the self-assessment data and to enable proper triangulation, the students' recorded speaking performances were also evaluated by an expert rater (the English teacher) using the exact same analytic rubric. As highlighted by Brown et al. (2015), comparing student self-assessments against expert or teacher ratings is a highly reliable method for establishing the accuracy and validity of the self-evaluation process. This expert judgement served as an objective baseline to compare against the students' self-assigned scores, allowing the researcher to observe the accuracy of the students' self-evaluations over the 3-day period.

Following Miles et al. (2014), the qualitative data were analyzed through three stages: data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions. During data condensation, the researcher summarized rubric sheets, transcripts, and observation notes to extract key patterns. These condensed data were then organized into thematic matrices and theme maps during the data display stage. Finally, themes were verified against research questions to draw conclusions and discuss implications for EFL spoken English instruction. All themes were validated through data source triangulation using the rubric scores, interview transcripts, and observation notes (Denzin, 2009).

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### Results

The qualitative data for this study were gathered from two-part semi-structured interviews with 10 EFL students and triangulated with document analysis of their daily rubric sheets (including their answers to the reflection questions). The findings are categorized based on the three main research

questions: the quality and usefulness of the rubric (RQ1), the recognition of weaknesses and improvements (RQ2), and the challenges faced during self-assessment (RQ3).

**4.1 Thematic Analysis of Student Interviews**

Table 1 presents the inductive thematic analysis process of the interview transcripts,

**Table 1. Thematic Analysis of EFL Students’ Self-Assessment Interviews**

Translated Statements / Quotations	Keywords	Codes	Theme (Based on RQs)
<p>“I clearly understood the rubric because it had direct, written explanations... so it served as a guide.” (Student 1) “It was highly understandable because it was simple and the explanation was okay...”(Student 2) “The explanation was clear and not too long.” (Student 7) "Yes, it was easy to understand in my opinion." (Student 8)"The rubric is easy to understand, because the explanation is clear and you just follow it..." (Student 10)</p>	<p>Clear explanation, simple, guide, easy to understand</p>	<p>Criteria clarity</p>	<p>Perceived Quality &amp; Clarity (RQ1)</p>
<p>"It helped me learn because from the rubric I learned a lot, like how many seconds to pause..." (Student 1)"Of course it's for learning... so I think my text reading is okay now." (Student 3)"It helps both for learning and self-assessment, so we know our progress from day to day." (Student 10)</p>	<p>Learned a lot, for learning, know our progress</p>	<p>Facilitative Tool</p>	<p>Perceived Quality &amp; Clarity (RQ1)</p>
<p>"It was very effective because every time I wrote in [the reflection], the goal was so that tomorrow I wouldn't rush..." (Student 1)"It affects me, because I am the type who has to write what to do for tomorrow in the reflection..." (Student 4)"It really worked because every time I wrote in the last question, I wrote that I needed to know more words..." (Student 7)"For the 'plan for tomorrow' I filled it with things like finding the correct pronunciation... so it really affected me." (Student 9)</p>	<p>Plan for tomorrow, wouldn't rush, write what to do, affected me</p>	<p>Reflection as Goal Setting</p>	<p>Recognition &amp; Improvement of Spoken English Performance Weakness (RQ2)</p>
<p>"I became very aware because when I listened to myself, I felt I spoke too fast and sounded mumbled." (Student 1)"Yes, because sometimes what we say is different from what we hear. My specific weakness is in fluency." (Student 5)"For my weaknesses, the first is in pronunciation... and intonation sometimes sounds flat." (Student 8)"I realized my weakness was in pronunciation and sometimes speaking too fast when listening to my recording." (Student 10)</p>	<p>Aware, mumbled, weakness in fluency, flat intonation</p>	<p>Recognizing Weakness</p>	<p>Recognizing &amp; Improvement of Spoken English Performance Weakness (RQ2)</p>

highlighting translated statements, assigned codes, and the resulting themes. The table incorporates voices from all 10 participants to demonstrate widespread agreement and shared experiences regarding the self-assessment and reflection process.

**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

"Sometimes I find it hard to score my own fluency and intonation because... pronunciation can be searched on the internet." (Student 6)"I was confused because if you assess yourself, it could be too high or too low." (Student 8)"What made me confused was between feeling I did it right but still lacking... it felt like cheating if I gave a good score." (Student 9)"The hard part is scoring yourself, sometimes I'm confused if it's good or not, afraid the score is too high or too low." (Student 10)

Hard to score, too high or too low, confused  
Ambiguity in Scoring  
Challenges in Self-Assessment (RQ3)

"I think 8 minutes if there are no obstacles..." (Student 2)"The best time limit would be a maximum of around 30 minutes." (Student 4)"My recommendation for the best time limit is 15-25 minutes." (Student 5)"For me 5 to 10 minutes is enough, I only took 5 minutes." (Student 8)"I think 15 minutes is perfect, but for absolute beginners, maybe 15-25 minutes." (Student 9)

Time limit, 8 minutes, 30 minutes, 15-25 minutes, 5-10 minutes  
Time Constraint Variations  
Challenges in Self-Assessment (RQ3)

"I felt shy and lacked confidence because my pronunciation was messy, especially when hearing my friends' better voice records." (Student 2)"Because I am assessing myself, I find it difficult. I might think I'm already good enough, but for others, it might still be lacking." (Student 3)"I felt a bit insecure especially if my friends listened..." (Student 7)"In the beginning I just felt nervous, having my voice heard by others especially in English." (Student 9)

Shy, lacked confidence, nervous, insecure  
Speaking Anxiety & Self-Doubt  
Challenges in Self-Assessment (RQ3)

#### 4.2 *Qualitative Trends in Rubric Scoring and Reflection Data (Triangulation)*

To ensure the robustness of the interview findings, the researcher qualitatively analyzed the rubric sheets filled out by the 10 students over the 3-day self-assessment period.

- a. Initial Disconnect (Day 2): On the second day or the first self-assessment day, students displayed a noticeable disconnect between their perceived ability and their actual performance. For example, Student 1 evaluated their Pronunciation and Intonation as "excellent (4)", while the expert scored them as "Good (3)". Conversely, students experiencing speaking anxiety lacked self-confidence; Student 5 self-scored "Needs Improvement (1)" for Pronunciation, but the expert

objectively rated it higher as "Good (3)".

- b. Growing Critical Awareness (Day 3 & 4): By the final days, a powerful convergence occurred. Students became highly critical and observant of their own flaws. For instance, Student 2 actively downgraded their own self-assessment for Pronunciation to "Needs Improvement (1)" on Day 3. By Day 4, the gap between the students' self-evaluations and the expert's judgments closed significantly. This matches interview statements where students expressed becoming aware of sounding "mumbled" or "flat" upon hearing their recordings, utilizing the rubric's 3 criteria (Fluency, Pronunciation, Intonation) to guide their critical focus.

**Discussion****1) Perceived Quality, Clarity, and Usefulness of the Rubric (RQ1)**

During the short implementation period, initial responses from the students indicated a generally favorable perception of the rubric's clarity and usefulness. Specifically, the simple 4-point scale and clear definitions for Fluency, Pronunciation, and Intonation demystified the concept of "effective spoken English". However, the rubric criteria prompted a conceptual shift towards acknowledging the importance of pausing, pacing, and intonation. The ease of application, simply circling the appropriate level and writing a brief reflection, minimized cognitive load and allowed students to focus purely on the evaluation process. This finding directly validates Stiggins and Chappuis (2005), who posited that clearly defined learning outcomes enable students to internalize expectations and achieve them more effectively.

**2) Recognizing Weaknesses and Evaluating Spoken English Improvements (RQ2)**

Listening to their own audio recordings while actively consulting the rubric significantly heightened the students' self-awareness. The qualitative analysis of the daily rubric scores strongly triangulates this finding: as the days progressed, students moved from inaccurately judging their abilities on Day 2 to precisely aligning with the expert's scores by Day 4. This demonstrates a sharpened ability to recognize their true spoken English performance levels. A critical mechanism for this improvement was the rubric's reflective prompt. By requiring students to articulate Setting Actionable Goals, students actively adjusted their performance. Students 1, 7, and 9 emphasized the effectiveness of writing down their goals, utilizing it as a conscious anchor to find "the right pronunciation for new words" or ensure they "wouldn't rush" the next day. This aligns deeply with Zimmerman's (2000) self-regulated learning theory, specifically the forethought phase, where goal setting actively dictates future performance.

**3) Difficulties and Challenges in Self-Assessment (RQ3)**

The self-assessment process was not without hurdles, offering crucial insights for

pedagogical implementation. The students highlighted three primary challenges:

- a. **Psychological Barriers and Self-Doubt:** A pervasive Lack of Self-Trust and Speaking Anxiety were noted across almost all participants. Students (like Students 3, 4, 8, and 10) felt that judging their own performance was "difficult" because of internal biases, fearing they were either inflating or unfairly lowering their grades. Additionally, they experienced a lack of confidence and nervousness "especially when heard by friends" (Students 2, 7, and 9). As noted by Agustini et al. (2024), these affective barriers demonstrate that introducing a rubric must be accompanied by comprehensive teacher scaffolding to build student confidence and normalize making mistakes.
- b. **Ambiguity in Scoring:** While the rubric was generally clear, students struggled with subjective gradients in certain criteria. As Students 6 and 9 pointed-out, fluency and intonation are sometimes harder to independently verify compared to pronunciation (which can be checked via internet tools). This was vividly reflected in the Day 2 scoring data, where self-scores frequently mismatched expert scores, suggesting a need for ongoing teacher calibration (Sintayani & Adnyayanti, 2022).
- c. **Time Constraints:** Students had vastly different perceptions of the time required for self-assessment. While fast readers like Student 8 felt 5-10 minutes was plenty, others (Students 4, 5, and 9) recommended longer reflection periods ranging from 15 to 30 minutes to allow for deep reflection without rushing the listening and writing process, especially for those encountering new vocabulary.

**5. CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that rubric-based self-assessment is an effective and transformative tool for enhancing spoken English performance and self-awareness among EFL students. The students perceived the analytic rubrics as clear and easy to understand, effectively breaking down the components of spoken English into

**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

recognizable criteria (fluency, pronunciation, and intonation). A key finding of this study is that while the rubric provided the framework for evaluation, it was the embedded reflection questions that successfully drove student improvement. By explicitly writing down their challenges and plans for the next session, students engaged in actionable goal-setting that helped them pinpoint and correct specific weaknesses, such as excessive speed and flat intonation.

However, the implementation of self-assessment presents distinct practical and psychological challenges. Students faced internal conflicts regarding scoring ambiguity, often fearing they were grading themselves too high or too low, and struggled with varying time constraints. Furthermore, a prevailing sense of self-doubt and anxiety was evident when students had to listen to their own recorded mistakes. Therefore, for rubric-based self-assessment to be optimally effective, educators must allow flexible time limits for reflection, explicitly train students on how to accurately interpret and apply scoring criteria, and foster a highly supportive classroom environment that mitigates the emotional vulnerability associated with language learning.

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**Vol 9, No 1 (2026): ESTEEM**

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