

---

# *Promoting Student Autonomy through Self-assessment and Learning Strategies*

---

ANA MARÍA SIERRA  
CRISTINA FRODDEN  
*Universidad de Antioquia*

In this article, a teacher-researcher and her advisor report on an Action research project aimed at developing student autonomy through the implementation of self-assessment and learning strategies, in an English course for students of different academic programs in a well-known university in Medellín. Affective factors, metacognition, the role of the teacher and linguistic achievement emerged as the main themes related to developing learner autonomy. In this paper the authors aim at a better understanding and discussion on how motivation affects students' decisions regarding planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning, and how this regulation process and the facilitating role of the teacher helps them broaden their learning strategies and improve their linguistic performance.

This article reports a case study carried out with a group of English students in a well-known Colombian public university, with the aim of developing students' autonomy through the implementation of self-assessment and learning strategies in the course. It is part of a collaborative action research project conducted in four educational institutions by teacher-researchers who are members of an action research group interested in fostering teacher and learner autonomy.

The concept of autonomy that we want to promote is the one that refers to the individual's capacity to manage her own life, taking into account the academic, social and political contexts that influence the individual's life. Regarding students' autonomy, we focused on the technical, psychological and political versions of learning, presented by Benson (1997): the technical associated with positivism, the psychological associated with constructivism and the political associated with critical theory. In the technical version of autonomy, which

emphasizes the development of learning strategies where learning takes place outside the institutional context, students are given opportunities to learn by themselves. In the classroom, teachers help students to discover knowledge instead of transmitting that knowledge. Teachers who consider this approach train their students in the use of learning strategies and help them to learn and think about their learning process (Benson, 1995).

From a psychological point of view, autonomy is defined as an internal capacity that allows students to take charge of their own learning (Benson, 1997). This version emphasizes the individual's internal transformation, which includes behavior, attitudes and personality. It also emphasizes the individual's responsibility in making decisions about what to learn and how to learn it. This approach is based on the constructivist principles of pedagogy, especially the following:

- Learning should involve negotiation and social mediation.
- Students should be encouraged to self-regulate and develop their self-consciousness.
- The role of the teacher is that of a facilitator and guide of learning, not that of an instructor.

To understand the political version of autonomy, Benson (1997) proposes a wider vision of the political aspect, which includes factors such as the roles and relationships both inside and outside the classroom, and the content to be learnt. Autonomy means the redistribution of power in a more democratic society (Benson and Voller, 1997). This view is the one supported by the Ministry of Education when it argues that autonomy is principally concerned with the development of the capacity that people and collectives have to self-direct, establish the rules to live together, set goals and support each other to achieve these shared goals, make decisions and self-regulate (MinEd, 1998, p. 25). The role of the teacher is to help students develop the attitudes and the abilities—motivation, self-confidence, knowledge and skills—needed to learn more independently, communicate more independently and to be more independent individuals (Littlewood, 1997).

The article is divided into five sections. First, a description of the context where the project was carried out and the issues that prompted



this research are presented; second, the actions implemented and their reception by the students are described; third, the data gathering and analysis procedures are explained; fourth, the findings supported by a theoretical revision of the different topics that emerged are discussed, and finally, a brief reflection on the process of conducting action research is provided.

## **THE CONTEXT AND STARTING POINT**

Due to internationalization policies, in 1997 the university created a language program with the aim of promoting academic excellence, providing the academic community with opportunities for international cooperation, and integrating and strengthening the access to and socialization of knowledge. In this program almost 2000 people from the lower and middle social classes—students, teachers and administrative staff—may learn English, German, French, Japanese, Italian, Portuguese or Chinese for free. Students who want to enter the program require an average grade of over 3.7 in their fields of study in a grading scale of 1-5, and those with the best averages are selected. Most of the places are given to students, who choose mainly English and French. The program offers five eighty-hour semesters, where students develop their written and oral performance in the target language, the latter being the most emphasized. The course syllabi are normally based on textbooks, such as *Interchange* and *Panorama*.

Six women and five men, aged between 18 and 28, belonging to different undergraduate programs such as Social Work, Biology, Engineering, Medicine, Education, Social Communication, Veterinary Science and Accounting, formed the group of third level students with whom this research was carried out during one semester. Some had chosen to study English because they wanted to be better qualified as professionals in their fields and find a job easily after graduation; others wanted to study abroad, and others wanted to learn how to speak English simply because they loved it. When they first came to the class it was evident that although they knew they had linguistic problems, they were not autonomous enough to study on their own. Lack of responsibility with their homework and materials for class, tardiness

and lack of self-confidence in speaking English in class were the features that described most of these students.

Since the entrance in the program in 1999, it had been possible to observe that students' knowledge of the language was below the expected level for the course, and that certain attitudes such as low class attendance, tardiness, irresponsibility with assignments and materials needed for classes interfered with their learning process. Furthermore, it had been possible to realize that students' motivation to learn English was not that high because they focused all their effort and commitment on their majors. Seeing these problems, students were questioned about their lack of commitment, and the most common excuse they gave me to justify this was their lack of time, because they had a lot of things to do for their other subjects. They devoted all their time to preparing quizzes, and mid-term or final exams for the different subjects in their majors, but they did not devote any time to the English course. Questioning was carried on to them every time they did not accomplish what they committed themselves to do, and they reacted in different ways. Some cancelled the course because they realized that learning English required a lot of time, and they were not willing to devote more time to it. Others reflected and decided to cancel the course and take it when they had more time. Others reacted positively to questioning and began to study more on their own, and assumed more responsibility towards the different demands of the course. In teachers' meetings it was common to hear teachers complaining about these same problems, and the students' lack of autonomy concerning their learning process. This is very common in our educational context where most students are passive and are used to working only to get good grades.

Self-assessment has been implemented in the courses since it was possible to realize that questioning students was not enough to promote their reflection and to help them become aware of the importance of studying on their own, in order to overcome their problems. Moreover, students were presented with some learning strategies to apply inside and outside the classroom, which according to them helped them a lot to improve. It was easy to notice how students' frequent self-assessment and the need to see their progress encouraged them to look for solutions to their problems. Students are seen in the



language laboratory listening to tapes and borrowing videos in order to work on their listening problems, and others consulting grammar books to work on their grammar problems. It had also been observed how low class attendance, lack of responsibility with assignments and materials for class, and tardiness had decreased. At the end of those courses students expressed how much they had learnt and how the process of self-assessment had helped them to improve.

However, this had not been a systematic process, so a decision to carry out this research was made in order to know whether promoting self-assessment of linguistic and attitudinal aspects, and training students in the use of learning strategies, helped students to be more responsible for their learning process, i.e. to become more autonomous students and human beings. The following research questions were posed: To what extent does the self-assessment of linguistic and attitudinal aspects help students to be more responsible for their learning process? To what extent does the use of learning strategies help students to be more responsible for their learning process and to improve their linguistic performance?

## **ACTIONS TAKEN AND STUDENTS' RECEPTION**

Since students' willingness to become more autonomous was fundamental for the project in order to guarantee good results, on the first day of class the group of students was asked about their interest in participating in this project, and they were given an explanation on what it was about. They signed a contract to assure their serious participation and some actions were implemented from the very beginning of the course. Each strategy had a specific purpose and they were followed in a logical order.

The first strategy implemented was to raise students' awareness of the importance of self-assessing linguistic and attitudinal aspects in the learning process. This was done through a discussion that was guided by some questions that students talked about in groups, such as: What do you think about self-assessment in the learning process? Have you ever had any experience with self-assessment in your academic life? How was that experience? How do you think self-assessment could be

carried out in the learning process? Students' opinions about self-assessment were very positive. They said that self-assessment was a very helpful process that helped them reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and look for solutions to their problems, but that this required commitment, preparation and honesty from the part of the students in order to be carried out properly. They also commented on their previous experiences with self-assessment and how it had not been a very democratic process, since their teachers had been the ones who had decided the criteria for self-assessing. Others mentioned that on some occasions their teachers asked them to self-assess, but they had not respected their opinion and had changed their grades, which according to them was unfair. Bearing their previous experiences in mind, it was explained to them that our process would be a democratic one and that those experiences they had undergone in previous courses were not going to happen again. This was because we would agree on the criteria for self-assessment in this course, and students would be prepared to assess their work honestly to assure that their self-assessment was respected. The activity was planned for thirty minutes, but students were so involved in it that we took almost two hours, because they were very interested in listening to my explanations about how we were going to work. They were reminded again that their participation in the project was voluntary and that they could quit at any stage of the research project. Students were not forced to be part of the project, but to convince them of the importance of this project for the development of their autonomy.

The second strategy was to train students to develop the capacity to self-assess, and make it reliable for everybody (Cárdenas, 1997; Harris & McCan, 1994). In order to accomplish this, at the beginning of the course two diagnostic activities were carried out with the purpose of making students reflect on their learning process. The first one consisted of a letter from the students telling me about their linguistic problems in learning English (Harris & McCan, 1994). The second activity was a reflection on the responsibilities any person has to assume in order to have a successful learning process. Moreover, students self-assessed, taking into account those responsibilities in order to see which aspects they had problems with and realize that they had to improve them. After analyzing their responses it was found out



that students did not plan their work, i.e. they did not devote time to study, they did not have clear goals concerning what they wanted to improve, nor ideas about the materials and the strategies they could use to work on their problems outside of class. Furthermore, it was noticed that students knew what their responsibilities as learners were, but that they lacked the self-regulation needed to change the attitudes that were interfering with their learning. In their reflections and letters they recognized their lack of commitment to their learning process.

Since one of the purposes was to promote students' participation and decision-making in their learning, we negotiated the criteria for self-assessment. Their improvement was sought, not only concerning their linguistic performance but also their commitment to the learning process, which included changing their negative attitudes and using learning strategies. Together, we looked at their reflections and letters and chose those linguistic and attitudinal aspects that were most recurrent. With this Students were helped to start thinking about the actions they were going to implement to overcome their difficulties in learning, and to plan how to carry out those strategies (Moss, 2001). It was observed that most of the students participated actively by giving ideas on the aspects of self-assessment. Some students were very shy and did not give ideas during the discussion, so they were asked individually for their opinion about each one of those aspects, and it was not possible to move on to the next one until listening to their points of view. They explained that they did not say anything because they agreed completely with those criteria.

One of the problems we encountered when defining the criteria, was that students were not very specific about the responsibilities a person has to assume in the learning process, and it took us more class time to agree on the criteria, since they had to explain what they meant by having discipline and being responsible, among other aspects. It was important to do this, since discussing those issues would help them to realize what concrete actions they could take. They mentioned things such as doing the homework, being on time for class and bringing the class material, working on their own, etc., all of which we included in the self-assessment format (See Annex 1).

Another action implemented was to help my students to develop

the learning strategies they needed to be able to take charge of their own learning. From the beginning of the course they were helped to become aware of the importance of using learning strategies to overcome their problems, and they were encouraged to use these since they were an essential part of being able to see progress every time they self-assessed their work. Students shared strategies with their classmates as part of their training in learning strategies (Tyacke, 1991 cited in Lee, 1998), and they were given strategies with the aim of helping them become more self-directed. We also discussed the strategies they could implement in class, and one of the students proposed giving reports on any topic of their interest with the aim of improving their speaking skills.

The idea was to try to implement learning strategies both inside and outside class. On two occasions some class time was used to discuss students' learning strategies outside class. The first time it was realized that only few of them were implementing strategies because they talked about them and expressed how they were doing, but the rest of them did not say anything, even when they were asked directly. Their lack of autonomy was questioned and they were asked to think very seriously about their commitment to learning and their desire to improve, since they seemed not to be interested in it because they kept saying they wanted to, yet they did not do anything about it. They remained quiet, but their faces showed that some were angry because of what had been told to them, and others were ashamed and thoughtful. Talking to students is a good way to invite them to reflect on and question themselves about their role as students. The second time students were checked on their use of learning strategies it was surprising because they all talked about their strategies and how often they were implementing them.

Some time later, students were given a handout with learning strategies for all the skills and sub-skills of the language which was prepared for them to improve each skill and sub-skill. The idea was to provide students with the necessary strategies for them to change the ones that were not helping them much. However, students did not read those strategies until they were asked about them, since they never knew it was a homework. Students in this group were passive and were not used to applying learning strategies. It was very disappointing and



they were told about this feelings on the part of the teacher and were called their attention again because of their lack of interest. In the following class one of the students gave a report about the strategies they had been given to improve listening, which was one of her major problems. When they were given the list of learning strategies they seemed to be pleased. However, some of them put them into practice and some others did not, as they expressed in their interviews.

When I saw Ana she gave (the list of strategies) to me. I had it and I remember that I read it once and never looked at it again. I did not revise it again. (Eliana, I-J-02)<sup>2</sup>

I did not know that the list was there. And if I did not know it was because I did not ask either. In class we did an evaluation of the strategies people had implemented. I told them about the one of speaking on the weekend, but I have not applied anything else (Nancy, I-J-02).

The fourth strategy carried out was that students self-assessed their work periodically in order to check their progress and reflect on what they needed to improve in the future (Harris, 1998). Students agreed to self-assess three times during the semester, i.e. at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the course. We used the same format all the time so that students could see their progress every time they self-assessed their work. Students were told about how important it was for them to start working on their problems in order to have good results at the end of the course, and how achieving good results in their self-assessment required a lot of work on their own from that time on.

In general, students improved between the first and the second time they self-assessed. However, one of the students who did not improve pointed out that the period of time between each self-assessment was too short, and that it did not give them time to work and improve. Her point was understood since the fact that they could not perform miracles in just one semester was stated, so an explanation for her was needed. To some extent they needed that pressure to take actions quickly, otherwise they would not see any progress by the end of the course and she understood this point as well. The main problem with

this strategy was that some students did not do their self-assessment on time so they could not see their progress. Those students seldom came to class and even though they were asked to hand their self-assessment in the following class they did not do it. At other times they left the format at home, so the dates for the self-assessment were very close to one another, not giving them the opportunity to see their progress or to plan new actions to improve.

The fifth strategy implemented in order to avoid students' under and overestimation when self-assessing their work, was to ask students to revise their self-assessment, reflecting again on those aspects in which it was thought they had given themselves a higher or a lower grade than they deserved. On some occasions students were asked to revise their self-assessment again, and when they did it they chose options that really represented their performance and commitment. This revision was just on one, two or three aspects of their self-assessment, since it was normally reliable and it represented their performance in the course. When students were not able to evaluate themselves according to their actual situation after the second reflection, a counseling session was planned. In this session students were to examine and correlate both their evaluation and mine concerning their performance and commitment to the course (Harris & McCan, 1994; Harris, 1998). The purpose of these advisory sessions was to help the students realize that they had to reflect more on their learning process to be able to see what they had achieved and what they had not, in order to make decisions and plan again what to do in the future to reach the goals they had set. Nevertheless, throughout the course it was necessary only one meeting with one of the students who was underestimating his performance, and we reached an agreement. The situation with this student was that he was not only evaluating his performance in class, but also outside class. He was the best student in class - he was fluent, possessed a good vocabulary and participated a lot in class, but he said that it was not the same when he talked to other people outside class, especially with a native speaker whom he was practicing with. His point was understood and his self-assessment accepted because if their work outside was being promoted through the use of learning strategies, students had to evaluate that performance as well.

Students' absence was a constant problem, which interfered with



their reflection and preparation for self-assessment. Students did not bring their letters, reflections or self-assessment formats on time and did not think of learning strategies they could use. So, every time the continuation of the course plan was sought, those who had not attended classes were lost and were lagging behind in the process, since every action strategy was planned in a logical sequence in order to prepare them to self-assess honestly.

When students did not attend class they normally did not bother finding out what the assignments for the following class were, so a list with their phone numbers was given to call each other in order to be prepared for the class. However, they did not use it at the beginning of the course, so that issue was raised because that fact showed their lack of responsibility. Around the middle of the course, and after a period of unhappiness because of my constant questioning, the less committed students started to change their attitudes, and every time they did not attend classes they called a classmate and were prepared for the class.

Another problem that interfered with the process was that in trying to encourage and motivate these students, obstacles were faced especially those related to their attitudes concerning their capabilities as learners, since they avoided doing some activities out of fear of failure (Williams & Burden, 1997). They were encouraged by telling them about the importance of having positive attitudes towards their capabilities as learners in order to increase their motivation (Thanasoulas, 2000). Students were stimulated to avoid negative ideas about their capabilities of accomplishing any task and to feel confident about accomplishing them, and they were taught to apply self-talk (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

## **DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

Since this was an action research project, a variety of techniques to collect data were used. To obtain the students' perspective their reflections were analyzed on their linguistic and attitudinal problems concerning their learning at the beginning of the course, and their self-assessments on linguistic and attitudinal aspects. Furthermore, a colleague conducted interviews with them at the end of the course.

These interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. In order to check students' linguistic improvement, eight students voluntarily took a speaking test (see Annex 2) at the beginning and at the end of the course, which was also tape-recorded. The speaking test was devised taking into account the tasks students were supposed to be able to do after having taken the previous courses. Last but not least, a journal was kept in order to reflect on the process the students underwent, and to try to make the necessary corrections during it.

To analyze the data, inductive and deductive methods were used. First, categories related to the concept of autonomy were defined. With the research questions in mind, the data was read, the relevant passages were underlined and they were coded using the categories already defined, and new ones were created especially those that emerged from the analysis. To analyze the speaking test the ACTFL proficiency guidelines was used. Then the advisor's feedback on that analysis was sought to have a different perspective in order to improve its reliability. Finally, the different sources of information were triangulated, some hypotheses stated. They were also discussed with the advisor. These hypotheses were grouped in the four major themes of the findings.

## **FINDINGS**

In this section a discussion of the four most recurrent topics that emerged from the data analysis: affective factors, metacognition, the role of the teacher and linguistic achievement is presented.

### **Affective factors**

The attitude that appeared most frequently related to the issue of autonomy was motivation. Gardner (as cited in Williams and Burden, 1997) defines motivation as the combination of a desire to learn the language and positive attitudes towards learning the language. However, Dörnyei (2001) sees motivation as a rather complex issue, which includes two dimensions: direction and magnitude. Direction involves choosing to engage in a particular action, and magnitude involves expending effort on it and persisting with it. It was possible to observe that students who were aware that in order to learn a language it is



necessary not only to be motivated but also be committed to it, had better results in their learning process. Commitment is similar to Dörnyei's concept of magnitude of motivation. At the beginning of the course, it was clear that most students were motivated to learn the language, but they were not that committed to their learning process, since they did not accomplish the responsibilities connected with the course and they did not devote time outside class to improve. In their reflections students wrote:

I think I lack more commitment to the course and to study and practice more outside class (Omar, R- M-8)

Regarding effort and motivation there is an imbalance concerning effort because it does not match my motivation, which is very high. ( Andrés, R-M-8)

The magnitude of students' motivation may depend on the type of motivation. According to van Lier (1996), students are motivated to learn in different ways and to different degrees. Masgoret and Gardner (2003) differentiate integrative and instrumental orientations in motivation towards language study. When students are integratively motivated, they study the language because they want to be identified with the culture of the speakers of that language. Instrumentally motivated students, on the other hand, are driven by practical reasons to learn the language such as passing exams, getting a job, or developing a career. Most of my students showed instrumental motivation; however, this instrumental orientation was not enough for them to enhance their learning and take more responsibility for it.

Because of this, the role with this group of students was to help and enable them to make appropriate decisions concerning their learning. According to Williams & Burden (1997) the teacher is a very significant other who can enhance students' motivation. That is why students' personal feelings about the teacher influence their perceptions about her, and the interactions that exist between them, e.g. the feedback teachers give their students certainly affects students' motivation towards learning. The interactions that occurred between these students and the teacher influenced their motivation to learn and take more

responsibility for their learning. Praise for them was used. These relevant comments concerning their performance aroused their motivation, and talking to them was used to help them become aware of their problems and take actions to improve.

I chose a topic (...) and I presented in front of everybody and people understood and (the teacher) told me, in front of everybody, that that was a good report because I had chosen a very difficult topic and despite of that fact I had been clear, people had understood me, that she liked it a lot (...) I feel that she does not need to be telling us, she does not need to be on top of us, “Look why are you doing this?” (...) Different from other courses I want to learn, now I like the language and I did not like it. I studied it as a requirement because I need it. (Inés, I-J-02)

This supports Dörnyei’s (2001) process-oriented approach to motivation, which sees motivation not as something stable but as changing over time. He distinguishes three phases of motivation: choice motivation, executive motivation and motivational retrospection. Choice motivation needs to be generated, and determines the setting of goals and the actions to be taken to achieve that goal. Executive motivation deals with maintaining and protecting the generated motivation, and is particularly important in classroom settings, where students are diverted from their initial goals by several factors such as affective, social and physical conditions. Motivational retrospection occurs when the task has been completed and students evaluate whether to continue or not with their learning endeavor.

Since English was not an obligatory course, the magnitude of students’ choice motivation was evident. What needed attention was the magnitude of their executive motivation, because as soon as they were pressed by the requirements of their other subjects, some of them tended to dedicate less time to studying English and others to cancel the course completely. Motivation went through ups and downs depending on the phase of the semester—mid-term or final exams—so that I had to encourage them constantly by giving them feedback and helping them to reflect on how to overcome their difficulties through self-assessment and learning strategy training.

In general, learning strategies are essential in developing autonomy,



since they help students to take an active part in their learning, and contribute to directing their involvement in the development of communicative competence (Oxford, 1990, p.1). Wenden (1998:18) defines learning strategies as ‘mental steps or operations that learners use to learn a new language and to regulate their efforts to do so’. In this study it was clear that if we help our students to develop affective strategies, then they will use cognitive strategies more frequently. Cognitive strategies are techniques that students consciously choose to tackle learning tasks (Dickinson, 1992), and affective strategies involve ways to develop the self-confidence and perseverance students need to learn a language (Oxford, 1990, p.8). Therefore, they are closely related to Dyörnei’s executive motivation.

The process of self-assessment required the students to apply learning strategies along the course in order to see any progress made. Besides seeing progress every time students self-assessed their work, they realized that they were able to reach their goals, which contributed to their self-efficacy, and their belief that they have the means to perform effectively (Zimmermann, 2000). At the beginning of the course, students were reluctant to speak in class because they were afraid of making mistakes.

I have to take more risks with English, not have any fear to be able to correct my mistakes and improve (Nancy, R-M-02).

I really consider that I do not have much strength in any of the skills of English. In my process it has been difficult to break away from the panic and the apathy acquired in high school. (Dora, R-M-02)

Concerning speaking, I think I am very much afraid to pronounce incorrectly. I also consider that I lack fluency. (Doris, R-M-02)

However, after teaching them some affective strategies, such as taking risks and self-talk (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990), it was observed how these self-encouragement strategies influenced their motivation (Oxford, 1990).

Now I am improving because before I used to be very quiet, and now I am trying to participate more. (Omar, I-J-02)

Their enhanced self-efficacy gained through self-assessment and the use of affective strategies contributed to students' increasing use of cognitive strategies. Students started taking advantage of the fact that English is everywhere around us, on TV, on the Internet, on the radio, etc. They watched movies on TV, trying to understand the general ideas and took notes on new vocabulary and expressions they heard, they repeated the lyrics of songs, and one student even started speaking English with a native speaker friend.

It is a language that you do not know, so there is fear of speaking nonsense. Anyway, there are some classmates who know more, so you feel some reluctance (to speak). But, you overcome that. You become more confident and that helps a lot, for instance in the reports. In each class someone volunteers to talk about any topic, and in the previous class you say, "I want to talk next class". It has helped me a lot even though I have done it only twice. (Nancy, I-J-02)

Oxford (1990) stresses the necessity of strategy assessment and training to help learners to be conscious of the strategies they use, and to evaluate the usefulness of those strategies. In this course the evaluation of strategies was something we did through discussions in class, where students talked about the strategies they were using and the effects of those strategies on their improvement concerning their linguistic performance. However we did not do this very regularly due to lack of time and knowledge on my part about how to do it more appropriately. I think that there is a necessity to train teachers to include strategy instruction in their courses, and to persuade them about the effectiveness of learning strategies in students' performance (Wilson, 1988 in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

## **Metacognition**

Another issue that appeared recurrently was the students' lack of planning, which is related to metacognition. This is defined by Aebli (1991) as knowledge about cognition, i.e. knowing about one's real learning process with its strengths and weaknesses. Students constantly excused themselves for not having done their homework because they lacked time to study English outside of class. However, it was observed



that students did not know how to plan their time and besides that, they did not know how to set goals and choose materials.

I see (in their reflections) that students do not establish goals and objectives, they do not evaluate their process, they do not work outside the class, they do not plan and I think this is their biggest weakness because they are aware they do not do these things, but they do not set out to do them. Besides, to do them they need to plan their time, objectives, materials, and to evaluate their process. (My journal, J-A-02)

Some students were also aware of this from the beginning of the course:

I have realized that things work together because they support each other. For example, dedication depends on proper distribution of time, the level of study on the materials that we use, and at the same time on our dedication. (Patricia, R-M-02)

Brown and Polinesar (1982) and Brown et al. (1983 cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) comment that regulation of cognition consists of planning, monitoring and evaluating learning. According to Zimmermann (2000), students' use of self-regulatory skills depends on their self-regulatory efficacy. For example, they must be willing, and they must believe that they are able to use self-regulation, i.e. to choose particular learning strategies, to manage their time, to resist adverse peer pressure, to set goals, to monitor their learning and to self-evaluate. This regulation was not clearly seen in these students at the beginning of the course and the key metacognitive strategy of planning (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) was not taken into account by the students to advance their learning process. They invested their time in their study programs and the time devoted to the English course was minimum.

Well yes, you have to have priorities and those are very important subjects. English is also important, but it is easier to fill the knowledge gaps in English than the knowledge gaps in your program of study. (Daniel, I-J-02)

Williams and Burden (1997) comment that involving learners in setting their own language learning goals is an essential component of motivation for learning a language, and that this is an important step towards learner control and autonomy in learning. It is recommended for the students to plan their work outside class and emphasize it devising a timetable to work on their English every week. Some students followed the recommendation about planning their work, as they expressed in their interviews.

Well, I chose a day that was the day in which I had more time to study English. It was Monday mornings. I got out of class at 8 am, I went to the library, and there I tried to look at the homework for next Wednesday and to study. I borrowed a book to improve my use of prepositions because I was not good at working with prepositions. I still have some difficulties, but I have improved a lot. I tried to study some parts of that book and to do the exercises. I dedicated, almost always, Monday mornings and Friday mornings to study English because I was free at that time. On Mondays I studied from 8 to 12 and on Fridays too. (Doris, I-J-02)

Nevertheless, it is believed that helping students to plan their own learning is not the only thing teachers have to do; they need to help students monitor and evaluate their work in order to achieve those goals. Oxford (1990) comments that many language students adopt a passive role in their learning process and work just to get a good grade, and that these attitudes and behavior need to be changed since they make learning more difficult, and the teachers' efforts to train students to be more self-directed and to use better strategies are unsuccessful. One way to help students become more active is to have them assess their own linguistic performance and their attitudes concerning the learning process. It was observed that students who self-assessed their work periodically applied more learning strategies in order to improve, and thus they became more autonomous. In the interviews students mentioned how self-assessment and the use of learning strategies helped them to improve.

We (self-)assessed at three moments and I liked it because I have to say it, I had been doing poorly in previous courses. When I completed (the



self-assessment) sheet I completed it with bad (concepts) because I knew I was doing poorly. In the second opportunity, (...) I knew I had improved in some aspects, and now at the end (of the course) I think I have improved a lot, not in everything, but it is true that I improved a bit in grammar and maybe a bit in pronunciation. In writing I think I improved a lot; and in listening not much, because really, I did not do much to improve. But in the other (aspects) I tried to improve and I think I did it. (Doris, I-J-02)

However, it is fundamental for this process that students decide on the criteria they will use to evaluate their work, because in this way they become aware of their problems and feel the need to make decisions about their learning process.

I think it is very good that we identify the criteria because we know what our problems are, we know what we have to improve. I think it was ideal that we decided which were the criteria to self-assess. That is autonomy, power to make decisions (Doris, I-J-02)

The first time they self-assessed, their low linguistic level and their lack of commitment to the learning process and to the course was obvious, their linguistic level being the lowest of all. In their second self-assessment the most responsible students felt they had improved significantly, concerning their language performance and their commitment to the course. Some of the less responsible students improved in some aspects of their self-assessment, but others did not improve at all. The third time students self-assessed, the improvement was more obvious in those students who at the beginning of the course had lacked commitment, and the responsible ones continued improving as they had done from the beginning. Three students remained almost the same concerning their linguistic level as at the second self-assessment, and their commitment to the course decreased further because by the end of it they had family and academic problems.

The importance of metacognition in the learning process should be stressed since according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), students who do not possess metacognitive approaches are learners without direction or opportunity to plan their learning, monitor their progress, or re-

examine their achievements and their future course of actions. This use of metacognitive strategies is closely related to Dörnyei's motivational retrospection mentioned earlier, since as students evaluate their process they decide whether they want to continue learning the language or not. Teachers must promote these metacognitive strategies in students if they want their students to become autonomous learners.

## **The role of the teacher**

Voller (1997) states that in autonomous learning the teacher adopts the role of a facilitator, which is characterized by two complementary functions: to provide psychosocial support and to provide technical support. For the first function the teacher requires some personal qualities: the capacity to motivate learners and the ability to raise learners' awareness. Technical support is related with helping learners to plan and carry out their independent language learning, helping learners to evaluate themselves and helping them to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to plan and evaluate their learning.

In this study it was observed that when students were questioned about their attitudes and language problems with the purpose of making them reflect on their lack of commitment to their learning process, they took a more active role in their learning. This idea is related to the psychosocial support provided by the facilitator. In order for them to become aware that they needed to be more committed to their learning, it was done through constant feedback and dialogue in which we discussed their lack of responsibility towards the course, their lack of autonomy and the actions they could take to change their behavior and improve their linguistic performance.

Candy (1991,) and Lee (1998) comment about the importance of creating a friendly atmosphere between the teacher and the learner in order to facilitate autonomy. Candy mentions the conditions required for this kind of atmosphere, such as "low threat, unconditional positive regard, honest and open feedback, respect for the ideas and opinions of others, approval of self-improvement as a goal, (and) collaboration rather than competition" (p. 337, cited in Thanasoulas, 2000, p.8). All the characteristics mentioned by Candy were present in our course, but what was understood as giving students honest and open feedback



some of them understood as scolding, and felt very uncomfortable because they felt questioned in front of their classmates.

At the beginning I did not like her comments, I did not like it because, I do not know, I thought that maybe I was one of the ones that she was telling off, so of course—it is logical—I liked it even less. (...) We were the ones she always told off because we were the ones who always came late. I mean, she was right but I did not like it. She was right about making those comments, but I did not like her to do it to the whole class. You can achieve more if you talk to the student and you ask him to come earlier or (ask him) “Why he are coming late? And you talk to that particular person because the other people do not care if you come late or not (Inés, I-J-02).

Others liked the questioning procedure developed in class because this helped them to become aware of their problems. The intention was always to invite them to reflect on their attitudes and linguistic performance which were interfering with the development of their autonomy. Moreover, I wanted to encourage them to take actions to improve.

It doesn't bother me. One must try to get the good part of it. Personally, it did help me because you say to yourself, “Yes, she is right”. Where is the commitment we assumed at the beginning? She does not tell us off, she simply tries (to tell us), “Come on!” That doesn't bother me. If she does it, it is because there is a lack of commitment on our part (Nancy, I- J-02).

When it was told to them what it was observed, it was never pointed out anyone in particular or told them off in front of the class, but since some felt guilty for their lack of responsibility, they felt accused in front of the others anyway, and they felt bad and angry.

What I do not like is that she makes comments in general. That is the only thing I do not like. Because I know she is right when she does that. Because of course if it was something arbitrary one would... But she is not offensive, because she never tells us, “Why didn't you do it?” She does not make you feel bad. On the contrary, I remember (...) once

for example, I had not come to class so I told her that I had called a classmate—who was the other one she frequently told off—and I asked her about what they had done in class and she told me that they had not done anything, but they have assigned some homework. So when Ana asked me about the homework I told her, “Ana, the thing is that Claudia told me that there wasn’t any homework”. Then Ana told me, “Look at who you ask, if you need something you have to ask these and these and these people”. So she was like discriminating, like saying these are the good ones and you are not, in front of everyone. So that is what I don’t like, but no more because the things she does are justified and I imagine that she also gets desperate because people are sometimes... or rather, one is very careless (Inés, I-J-02).

Reflection on the way students felt towards constant questioning, and made it possible to learn that the teacher has to be careful concerning this issue and try to talk to the students in private as a first approach to help them change those attitudes, bearing in mind the persuasive communication that Wenden (1998) refers to. This consists of a discussion in which the teacher presents arguments to change the students’ perception related to a topic, situation, etc. In other words, applying the concept of teacher counseling that Lee (1998) recommends as an essential component for teachers to foster students’ autonomy through dialogue. This communication includes evidence of what students have done and teachers’ advice about what they should do to become autonomous.

Nevertheless, it is possible to say that questioning students really helps them reflect upon their learning process, and what they do to develop their autonomy especially. We know that in our educational context we need to put pressure on the students to work, because of their passiveness towards learning.

All our lives you have been used to be imposed things. When you feel you are given freedom people simply get relaxed because we do not have someone on top of us. So I realized what was happening and I began to work. And I had less time, and ironically when I had less time I even paid more attention to English and everything. So it was because of that that I began to borrow a book, to look for another teacher to help me more because Ana does not have time. I did try to become more interested in the problem because she can tell us many things, but



in the end it depends on the students whether the situation improves or not (Inés, I-J-02).

With these students, pressure enhanced their motivation to learn since, as presented by Dörnyei (2001), their executive and retrospective motivation were influenced through questioning and feedback. In general, it was possible to notice that both the students who agreed and those who disagreed with the questioning reflected and reacted positively. Although the ones who disagreed took more time to understand the real intentions, all of them began to study more and as the course advanced they saw their progress and became more willing to learn.

Sometimes she goes back to primary. (...) If all the lack of interest that we show were accompanied by a lack of interest from her part, nothing would come out. I think she is very good. In fact, I like very much the classes with her. And it is because she is demanding, I think that helps. (Eliana, I-J-02)

Another aspect concerning the facilitator's role in the students' learning process is that if the teacher negotiates decisions with students, i.e. if she/he is flexible and involves students in decision-making, then the students will become more responsible and take charge of their own learning. Negotiation is a crucial aspect in students' development of autonomy, because if we empower students to make their own decisions they will feel more committed to taking charge of their own learning, which is the principle for learner autonomy (Little, 1995).

When I started working, she told me, "Your performance has been quite poor".. There was a month left to finish the course when I started working (...). I told Ana, "I think it is stupid to cancel the course. It's going to be difficult, but there is only a month to go. (Ana said) "But anyway you know your performance has been rather poor. You know I cannot give you a passing grade. If you commit yourself, if you really want to improve, I am going to help you, I am going to be flexible with attendance and everything, but I have to see your effort". I didn't contradict her, "All right, Ana, I know you are right, you cannot promote someone who you can see is not making any effort". So I

think that is why I have sort of tried to improve. (Inés, I-J-02)

Little (1995) states that the teacher needs to make decisions regarding the aspects in which she wants to promote learner autonomy, e.g. whether it is possible for the learners to set their learning objectives, choose their learning materials and participate in their assessment. It was decided to take students into account in the assessment process through the implementation of students' self-assessment, because it requires them not only to evaluate their learning in order to see their progress, but also to decide on the actions they need to implement in order to enhance learning. In other words, self-assessment makes them see the need to acquire learning strategies in order to have a more successful learning process, thus becoming more self-directed learners, i.e. more autonomous. In the process of self-assessment students were asked to propose and agree on the criteria with which to evaluate their performance, which helped them to become aware of the aspects they needed to improve.

The fact of asking yourself about what is happening to you, what your weaknesses are, helps you to question yourself. I mean, every time I think I have to work more and I have that in my head. No matter how you feel, I am (working outside class) as I want it, although I wish I could dedicate more time to it. (...) But evaluating yourself constantly helps you to question yourself (Nancy, I-J-02).

In our educational context it is difficult for students to undertake responsibility for their learning, which is why teachers must help them in this process, and since it is difficult for them to reflect on their learning, teachers must prepare them to do so (Little, 1995). Language teachers can help students become autonomous learners by involving students in identifying their learning strategies and training them in their use (Oxford, 1990). The negotiation of criteria for self-assessment is another way because it helps them to reflect, besides, by doing this we transfer control over their learning process to our students (Voller, 1997 cited in Benson and Voller, 1997), thus contributing to their autonomy.



## Linguistic Achievement and Student Autonomy

Candy (1991 in Lee, 1998) states that there are students who are better than others at self-directing their learning. In this study there was diversity in students' autonomy. Some students were more committed from the beginning of the course and followed advice regarding the use of learning strategies as soon as it was given to them, thus they were better at self-directing their learning. Others took time to react to the encouragement and see the value of using learning strategies, and started using strategies when the course was about to finish.

The chart below shows how much six students, who took a speaking test at the beginning and at the end of the course, improved their speaking ability.

Students	Speaking test (April 2002)	Speaking test (June 2002)
Javier	Novice-High	Between Novice-High and Intermediate-Low
Nancy	Novice-High	Intermediate-Low
Doris	Novice-High	Between Intermediate-Low and Intermediate-Mid
Inés	Intermediate-Low	Between Intermediate-Mid and Intermediate-High
Eliana	Intermediate-Mid	Intermediate-Mid
Martín	Between Intermediate-Mid and Intermediate-High	Between Intermediate-High and Advanced

Chart 1. Comparison of students' level at the beginning and at the end of the course.

If we compare their self-assessment with the results of the speaking test (Annex 3), Martin and Doris, who were shown to be very responsible from the beginning of the course, were the ones who improved the most in their linguistic performance. This is observed in the fact that Doris moved from Novice-High to Intermediate-Low and Mid in the ACTFL guidelines, which coincided with their self-assessment. Martin said that he improved in all aspects of his linguistic

performance, and Doris in all of them except vocabulary. On the other hand, it is important to mention that Doris always planned and worked on her own whereas Martin only started to do it more often at the end of the course.

This improvement was also seen in students such as Nancy and Inés, who at the beginning of the course showed lack of responsibility and autonomous work. Both improved concerning their responsibility with bringing the materials for class. Inés improved in aspects such as class attendance, responsibility with homework, class participation and autonomous work. As a result, she was better at grammar and speaking, and according to the ACTFL guidelines she moved from Intermediate-Low to Intermediate-Mid and High.

On the contrary, Javier, who was very responsible, but did not have the ability to learn the language and did not take risks to participate in class, did not advance in his linguistic performance. According to what he said in his self-assessment, he improved only his listening and his grammar when writing, which coincides with the speaking test, since he was classified in the Novice-High category with some aspects in the Intermediate-Low, which shows he remained almost the same. Eliana, who improved a bit at the end of the course concerning punctuality and materials for class, could not improve her linguistic performance since it was then too late. For instance, she did not improve her grammar and pronunciation, which were her biggest problems, and she stayed at the same level according to the ACTFL guidelines. She never worried about applying learning strategies, and limited her strategies to reading texts related to her program of study and watching films on television.

Finally, it is possible to say that this process was satisfactory, considering the students' lack of training in strategy use in previous courses and the little time they had in the course to be involved in this process.

## **REFLECTION**

Doing action research was a very enriching process. From the moment of graduation from the teaching program the work with self-assessment in English classes has been a goal. It is an essential tool to help students reflect upon their learning and to encourage them to take



charge of it. Nevertheless, implementing self-assessment in a systematic way was something applied in action research, therefore the involvement in this project was very interesting. This experience helped the teacher to grow professionally and personally and that is why in this reflection the focus is on these aspects.

As teachers, we have to understand that it is not enough to encourage students to become autonomous, but that it is necessary to take specific steps to help them reach that autonomy, e. g. training them in learning strategies and in self-assessment. It is possible to be more reflective concerning the role as teachers and more aware of the needs in order to develop as a good professional, for example. It is necessary to gain more theoretical knowledge about teaching and learning. Furthermore, it has been realized the importance of giving constant feedback to the students concerning what they have gained in their learning process as well as what they need to improve, but it is important to consider changing the way the teacher addresses students in class when trying to make them reflect on their problems, if the teacher wants to be a good facilitator and create an appropriate classroom atmosphere that facilitates students' learning.

As teacher-researchers, we can learn how to carry out action research, and it is one of the most significant rewards from this process. Constantly reading and acquiring knowledge about action research and teaching and learning in general was very important. Thanks to this process teachers can feel better qualified to face the challenges in their daily practice. The importance of collaborative work when doing action research should be stressed since the involvement of students—by writing their reflections, participating in the speaking test, giving interviews and assessing themselves—and colleagues is crucial. The feedback received from the members of the research group helped to see things from a different point of view and make the necessary corrections when problems arose with data gathering and analysis procedures. Teachers have to learn to be more flexible when gathering and analyzing data since perfectionism and the desire to be systematic did not let see that a lot of information was available and it was not possible to cope with it. The great amount of data made it necessary to ask a student for help in transcribing the speaking test, but he lost one

of the transcriptions, presumably because he did not see the importance of this work, so it was only possible to compare the performance of six participants instead of eight.

As with the students, metacognitive strategies were also applied by the teacher. In this process, planning was of great importance in order to work systematically and accomplish the objectives, because in that way it is possible to manage time better and see all the steps needed to follow in order to accomplish them. Developing this planning skill has helped to be more prepared to carry out the tasks that have to be accomplished as teachers and teacher-researchers.

Furthermore, the importance of publicizing the knowledge was highlighted. Through publications or presentations in conferences, the teachers gain in confidence to help other teachers improve their daily practice and encourage them to do action research in their institutions. It is necessary to continue conducting action research and involving our colleagues in this endeavor, so as to implement the necessary changes that will serve in the development of our profession, our students and the academic environments where we work.

As a person, the teacher who conducted this research realized that she must be an agent of change wherever she is, and that it is not necessary to wait for others to propose ideas to make the changes needed in our social contexts. This process helped to open the eyes concerning the world we live in and increased her critical thinking. She widened her views on the social, political and educational contexts that surround her and has assumed a more critical position. She has understood that it is important to express what she thinks in the contexts where she participates, in order to question other people and invite them to make proposals to improve our teaching and our working conditions, and that through collaborative work we can join forces to implement changes in the contexts in which we are involved and together begin to construct a better world.

As a conclusion we can state that the three versions of learner autonomy were fostered in this case study. Concerning the technical version, students were encouraged to reflect on their learning process through self-assessment and to use learning strategies to work inside and outside the classroom. Aspects of the psychological version were fostered by helping students become aware of the importance of



changing attitudes and behavior, self-regulating and using metacognitive strategies, such as goal setting, planning, monitoring and evaluating. Regarding the political version students were given the possibility to take a more active participation in making decisions and negotiating the criteria for self-assessment. As teachers, it is possible to fulfill the technical aspects of the facilitator's role by training students in learning strategies and giving them the opportunity to participate in making and negotiating decisions about assessment criteria. Regarding the psychosocial support, students' awareness of their role as learners was raised and this motivated them to take more responsibility for their learning.

Students changed their attitudes towards their learning, i.e. they were more aware of their role as learners, and due to this fact they assumed more responsibilities which helped them improve their linguistic performance. They increased their commitment towards the course and began to incorporate metacognitive strategies, such as planning and evaluation of their learning process.

However, it is important to emphasize that in our educational context where students are rather passive, the process students began in this course should allow them to be able to reach a higher degree of autonomy. They still need teachers who encourage them to work towards autonomy, which requires autonomous teachers, since it is an interdependent process, which requires looking at its complexity. We must bear in mind factors such as students' choice, executive motivation and motivational retrospection and all their main motivational influences. Moreover, we need to consider students' capacity to self-regulate and apply learning strategies as well as the importance of a good facilitator in this process. It is important to look carefully at the quality of feedback we give our students and the way we give it, and to be flexible and open in negotiating with students matters concerning their learning, for example, the criteria to assess their work.

After going through this process, it is possible to say that when students see some success in using strategies and in evaluating their work, they change their attitudes concerning their abilities, they increase their motivation, and they become more willing to take charge of their own learning. Our challenge and job as teachers is to prepare our

students to take more responsibility for their learning, and in this way help them to develop their autonomy. It is an important issue to think if students will continue taking charge of their learning after only one course in which they were trained in the use of learning strategies and self-assessment. Would instructing teachers in how to train students to use learning strategies and self-assessment help them to see the value of encouraging students to take charge of their own learning? These questions will need further research.

## Notes

1. Ana María Sierra is the teacher-researcher who carried out action research with this group of students. Cristina Frodden was the research advisor who gave support and feedback to Ana María in all the stages of this project as well as in the writing of this article.
2. With the purpose of keeping anonymity, real names were substituted with pseudonyms.

## THE AUTHORS

Ana María Sierra holds a B.Ed. in Foreign Language Teaching from Universidad de Antioquia, full time teacher at the same university and member of the “*Grupo de Investigación Acción y Evaluación en Lenguas Extranjeras*”.

Cristina Frodden holds a B.Ed in “Pedagogía en Inglés” from Universidad de Concepción, Chile and an M.A in Applied Linguistics from SUNY at Stony Brook, USA. Currently she coordinates the “*Grupo de Investigación Acción y Evaluación en Lenguas Extranjeras*”.

## REFERENCES

- Aebli, H. (1991). Factores de la Enseñanza que Favorecen el Aprendizaje Autónomo. Madrid: Narcea, S.A. de Ediciones.
- Benson, P. (1995). A Critical View of Learner Training. *Learning Learning* 2/2, pp.2-6.
- Benson, P. (1997) The philosophy and politics of learner autonomy. In



- Benson, P., Voller, P.(eds.) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London and New York: Longman
- Benson, P., Voller, P.( 1997) *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. London and New York: Longman
- Cárdenas, R. (1997) Exploring possibilities for alternative assessment in foreign language learning. *Ikala. Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 2,pp.57-73.
- Dickinson, L. (1992). *Learner Autonomy: 2: Learner training for language learning*. Dublin: Authentik, Books for language teachers.
- Dörnyei, Z. ( 2001). *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harris, M.& McCan, P.(1994)*Assessment*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Harris, M. (1998) Self-assessment of language learning in formal settings. *ELT Journal*, 52/1,pp.12 -20.
- Lee, I.(1998). Supporting Greater Autonomy in Language Learning. *ELT Journal*, Vol. 52/4, pp. 282-290.
- Little, D.( 1995) Learning as a Dialogue: The Dependence of Learner Autonomy on Teacher Autonomy. *System*, Vol. 23, pp. 175-181.
- Littlewood, W. (1997). Self-access: Why do we want it and what can it do? In Benson, P & P. Voller (eds.) *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London-New York: Addison Wesley-Longman Ltd.
- Masgoret, A-M & Gardner, R.C. (2003). Attitudes, Motivation, and Second Language Learning: A Meta-Analysis of Studies Conducted by Gardner and Associates. *Language Learning* 53:1, pp. 123-163.
- Ministerio de Educación Nacional (1998). *Lineamientos generales de procesos curriculares. Hacia la Construcción de Comunidades Educativas Autónomas*. Santafé de Bogotá: Ministerio de Educación Nacional.
- Moss, G. (2001).Democracy starts in the classroom. Ponencia presentada en ASOCOPI & ELT Conference, Agosto, 2001, Medellín.
- O'Malley, M. & Chamot, A. ( 1990) *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R.L. ( 1990) *Language Learning Strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Pennycook,A. (1997).Cultural alternatives and autonomy. In Benson, P & P. Voller (eds.) *Autonomy and independence in language learning*.

- London-New York: Addison Wesley-Longman Ltd.
- The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. VI, No. 11, November 2000 <http://www.aitech.ac.jp/iteslj/http://iteslj.org/Articles/Thanasoulas-Autonomy.html>
- Van Lier, L.(1996). Interaction in the Language Curriculum. Awareness, Autonomy and Authenticity. London –New York: Longman.
- Voller, P. ( 1997) Does the teacher have a role in autonomous language learning? In Benson, P & P. Voller (eds.) *Autonomy and independence in language learning*. London-New York: Addison Wesley-Longman Ltd.
- Wenden, A. (1998). Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy. Great Britain: Prentice Hall.
- Williams, M & Burden, R. (1997). Psychology for language teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zimmerman, B. (2000). Attaining Self-regulation: A Social Cognitive Perspective. In M. Boeckaerts, P.R. Pintrich and M. Zeichner (eds.) *Handbook on Self-regulation. Directions and Challenges for Future Research*. San Diego: Academic Press, pp. 13-39.



## Annex 1: Self-assessment format

### Self -assessment on Students' Performance and Commitment

Universidad de Antioquia  
Programa Multilingua Inglés III

Name \_\_\_\_\_

This format is for you to assess your performance in English and commitment to the course three times this semester: April 8, May 15 and June 21. In each of the questions below, put a tick in the answer that best explains your performance and commitment to the course. Please be honest.

Performance	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Do I use correct grammatical structures when I speak in English?					
Do I use correct grammatical structures when I write in English?					
Do I understand native speakers in videos and tapes when they speak about daily topics?					
Do I speak English fluently?					
Do I pronounce words correctly?					
Do I use good intonation in questions and statements when I speak?					
Do I have enough vocabulary to express my ideas when I speak in English?					
<b>Commitment</b>					
Do I pay attention to my classmates and the teacher when they speak in class?					
Do I bring all the material I need for the class					
Am I on time for the class?					
Do I attend classes?					
Do I do the homework?					
Do I participate in class?					
Do I plan and work on my own?					

## Annex 2: Speaking test

UNIVERSIDAD DE ANTIOQUIA

*Grupo de Investigación en Autonomía*

*Proyecto de investigación: "Desarrollo de la autonomía de estudiantes y profesores"*

### Guidelines for the conversation

The following speaking test is to know your ability to use the English language. It will serve for research purposes only and will not be graded. However, you will have access to the results.

### Instructions

- Talk about the following topics with your partner using your knowledge of the English language.
  - Try not to use Spanish. If your partner doesn't understand what you say, try to say it again with other words until s/he understands.
  - Please do not stop the tape recorder.
1. Personal information
  2. Family
  3. Daily schedule
  4. Free time activities
  5. Favorite music
  6. Favorite food
  7. Favorite sport
  8. Comparison of family members
  9. Description of the personality and appearance of a family member
  10. Description of a city you know
  11. What you did over the weekend
  12. What you did on your last vacation
  13. Your plans for the weekend.
  14. Your plans for the future.

*Thank you very much for your help!*