

SELF-ASSESSMENT TO ENHANCE SPEAKING



Self-Assessment and the Use of Social Media Enhance the Speaking Skill

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English has a great importance as this language is considered a lingua franca, it is used by many countries to be able to communicate in the same language. For this reason, English is considered relevant in the Ecuadorian national curriculum; likewise the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is the reference to guide the teaching of the language and achievement at every level. As Ministerio de Educación (2014) mentioned, schools and also teachers have the job "to build up learner's communicative language competence" (p. 9).

Language is a social phenomenon that in its origin and evolution is closely connected to men's culture. It is a system of signals applied by men for the conveyance of thought arbitrary symbolism. It is primarily oral and secondly written. There are many reasons that sustain the primacy of oral communication or speaking over the written form: First, language is originated orally. Second, the only reason for writing to exist is to represent spoken language.

After two years of facing a pandemic that started in the early months of 2020, people were forced to change their daily routines and stay connected through an environment that allowed them to use social media in online learning as a modality of virtualization. Important activities such as work and studies are being carried out using technology, applications, and web 2.0 tools. All of these activities are also enriched online, due to Hubbard (2009) pointed out, "Online learning is a natural extension of earlier forms of distance education" (p. 11) and this idea presupposes the use of social media to complement knowledge.

Teachers, students, and people in general kept a positive attitude about the changes the world was facing. Teachers have started to adapt their activities and

techniques to teach through virtual classes. This represented a challenge but not an impossible one.

Technological tools have already been used and implemented during Face-to-face classes, sometimes even as a hook to increase students' attention. Although, they are the main source teachers employ as support to collect students' information about their progress in their virtual classes. As Richards and Renandya (2002) explained in their book: "The use of technological aids, especially those related to computers, has increasingly become a common feature of the classroom" (p. 361). Consequently, educators can create a series of activities that with the correct accompaniment and feedback, can enhance students' speaking skills by guiding them into a self-assessment using a rubric to improve their performance.

The purpose of this research was to create in the students the ability to self-assess in speaking tasks as a way to improve it. As a result, due to the pandemic and the switch to online classes, the students' lack of participation in oral production was noticeable. Their pronunciation and fluency required significant attention. All activities, exercises, and role-plays are aimed at achieving the required level of A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2018).

The use of self-assessment as an implementation strategy was necessary to evaluate the students and give feedback. This can be a harder assignment, as it can be confusing to really understand and grade their own progress. However, with the right amount of practice and set of instructions, students can learn how to self-assess to enhance their work.

Literature Review

For the purpose of this study, it was relevant to cover the concepts of speaking, self-assessment, and rubrics.

Burns and Joyce (1997) defined speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. Its form and meaning depend on the context in which it occurs, the participants, and the speaking purposes. Speaking is a productive skill that needs to be developed to communicate with others in the second language or the mother tongue (Khabbazbashi, 2017). Khabbazbashi's studies underline that speaking English is crucial for students and necessary to develop language skills for communication.

On the other hand, Lazaraton (2007) claimed that speaking or oral communication is the most basic means of human communication, and the most demanding of the four language skills. In the same line of reasoning, Marzuki et al. (2020) added that speaking is one of the most feared context-based anxieties globally; because of this, some researchers investigate this problem. Consequently, many students feel scare to speak English as a foreign or second language, since many sub-skills are necessary for successful oral communication.

Speaking is an important skill for communication, considered at the same time as the most difficult one to express thoughts successfully (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). In the same line of reasoning, the fear of speaking comes from anxiety and a lack of communication and preparation (Kralova & Tirpakova, 2019).

Therefore, teachers in foreign language teaching or second language teaching should strive to look for new methods and procedures that may help learners achieve this goal. In this way, modern pedagogical and didactic researchers have come up with self-assessment for improving oral communication. Self-assessment is believed to be an

efficient tool that could help students comprehend the function of the assignment and the assessment criteria (Asdar, 2017). It is a tool, technique, and procedure used to accumulate and understand what students can or cannot do (Goral & Bailey, 2019).

According to Rolheiser and Ross (2001), “self-evaluation is defined as students judging the quality of their work, based on evidence and explicit criteria, for the purpose of doing better work in the future” (p. 1). Ross (2006), provided more arguments through some statements that considered how self-assessment encourages students to focus on their attainment of explicit criteria, and not on normative comparisons to other students.

The same author highlighted that some powerful strategies referred to teacher explanations of each criterion, teacher modelling of criteria application, and student practice in applying the rubric to examples of student work. Likewise, there are many strategies for deploying self-assessment such as pair share, think aloud, exit slip, journal entry, and two sentence summary (Denton et al., 2013).

As Wiggins (1993) pointed out, “students, like adults, need the reinforcement that comes from getting better and better at difficult challenges” (p. 138). In the same line of reasoning, Ndoye (2017) mentioned that "students actively engaged in their learning through formative assessment tasks are more likely to become aware of learning gaps and the need to find and use more resources to address these gaps" (p. 256).

On the contrary, the greatest challenge of self-assessment is the gap between the teacher and students' goals. Thereby, students tend to perceive themselves as having poor performance which leads to negativism towards learning. Thus, teachers must help and show students how to self-assess effectively (Rolheiser & Ross, 2001).

A four-stage model for teaching student self-evaluation can be used. First, involve students in defining the criteria that will be used to judge their performance. Second, teach students how to apply the criteria to their own work. Third, give students feedback on their self-assessment. Fourth, help students develop productive goals and action plans. (Rolheiser & Ross, 2001).

Another effective way to apply self-assessment is by using the single point rubric. It is a tool for students which indicates one set of goals. This set of goals specifies the following: “I know where I am going”, “I know where I am now”, “I know how to get there; and, I know how to go beyond” (Fluckiger, 2010).

Andrade and Valcheva (2009) suggested “a good rubric describes the kinds of mistakes students tend to make, as well as the ways in which good work shines” (p. 13). Also, as Nkhoma et al. (2020) agreed, “rubrics are educational tools constructed not only to standardize assessment but also stimulate learning and facilitate instruction” (p. 248). The current study explored the enhancement of speaking production through self-assessment with the support of online applications and social media.

Innovation

The implementation that took place in this study lasted eight academic hours within two weeks, divided into four lessons that included 60 minutes of synchronous hours and 60 minutes of asynchronous hours. This study was carried out with students of an institute of higher education who took their English modules at a private school academy. They voluntarily agreed to participate in the innovation. Students were learning about greetings before the innovation took place, the students were never instructed in how to self-assess themselves or how to use a checklist. In teaching practice as well as research, this instrument is considered a powerful tool that gives

students the standards for what constitutes quality work and then uses them to evaluate their current capabilities and identify the areas that must be improved (Harris & Brown, 2018). See Appendix 1.

The innovation was carried out virtually through Zoom, and technological resources were used for it. The use of Edpuzzle and Youtube for most of the activities was the basis for the realization of several activities where the four language skills were involved in the students' assignments. In all four lessons, the same system of in-class activities was used where new vocabulary and grammar were introduced and practice. At the beginning of the first lesson, within the synchronous activities, sufficient time was taken to instruct the learners in the use of the checklist for self-assessment as well as the respective practice to reinforce what they had learnt.

In this lesson, the instructor also modeled the final task that the students had to complete at the end of the four lessons. The first paired conversation in the first lesson was used as the pretest for the research. Prior to the first lesson, the first pretest data was required. The class was set with the final assessment or goal in mind, which was based on the idea of Backward Design or Understanding by Design by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). This made the class students-centered and the teacher acted as a facilitator during the duration of the innovation.

As mentioned, the activities planned for this innovation were driven into a final simple task where students needed to record a short conversation with another peer, lasting no less than 30 seconds, including a self-introduction, a description of their family, and their likes and dislikes as part of the unit created related to giving out personal information.

The implemented innovation pursued students' self-assessment through several activities that helped them improve their performance in speaking skills. For that, they

needed to carefully use a checklist previously provided by the teacher to auto-evaluate their progress in each lesson. See appendix 2.

After modelling the final product with direct and clear guidelines and being instructed on how to use a checklist during the next four lessons, the students put into practice how to self-assess their work. In each lesson, the students created with a peer a new dialogue by adding the vocabulary acquired so far. They recorded their conversation to later self-assess their performance as a way to boost their learning and achievement according to the lesson plan (See Appendix 3).

Research Methodology

This study contained quantitative data and the author was involved in the research that was intended to investigate how an implemented strategy related to self-assessment can improve students' speaking skills. As Efron and Ravid (2019) pointed out, "action research enhances the ability to grow professionally, become self-evaluative, and take responsibility for their own practice" (p. 2). Likewise, Allan et al. (2018) mentioned that "action research is intended to support practitioner researchers in coping with the challenges and problems of practice and carrying through innovations in a reflective way" (p. 6).

For the purpose of this study, a rubric to grade speaking skills from a pretest and posttest data was considered for the subsequent research question: Does the use of self-assessment change English-language speaking skills marks among students of higher-level institutions compared to the students' marks before the implementation of self-assessment?

Participants

This study was carried out with a total of six students of an institute of higher education who take their English modules at a private Language school. This school

provides English proficiency preparation courses and international certifications. These pupils are studying for the second semester of their first year of their career. The students in this private institution were enrolled in a face-to-face modality but due to the confinement, they switched into an online mode. These students work during the day and study at night as their socioeconomic status is medium-low.

For the innovation project, 12 students were invited to participate, but only 6 students agreed to enroll. The six students range from 19 to 32 years old, 50% were women and 50% men. The group possessed some basic digital skills in the use of computers and web 2.0 tool applications. AT the end of their careers, the students need to achieve an A2 level, supported by an international certification under the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Instruments

For the purpose of this study, an instrument was used to collect pertinent data to answer the research question: Does the use of self-assessment change English-language speaking skills marks among students of higher-level institutions compared to the students' marks before the implementation of self-assessment? In order to measure the students' speaking skills, they had to create and record a dialogue with a peer and introduce themselves, this was considered as pretest data. As a posttest data the students were asked to record a 30 seconds conversation with a peer where they had to include in the dialogue all the vocabulary and grammar learnt in the unit, introduced themselves, discussed about likes and dislikes, and talked about family members.

The researcher implemented a rubric based on a checklist with the following criteria: vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation, and interaction. Each of these criteria went on a scale from 1 to 5, with an overall score of 15. Related to this, the use of rubrics as an analytic assessment tool offered detailed, focused, and precise assessment

(Ounis, 2017). The last conversation recorded was considered as posttest data. This study used a quantitative method in which the highest grade for each component was five and the lowest was graded with one.

For the category of vocabulary and grammar, the student obtained the highest score of five if they used the vocabulary required to deal with the tasks, introduced themselves, described their family members, likes and dislikes, and interchanged information using present tense. The mistakes were rare and meaning was generally clear, they could formulate questions on familiar topics using auxiliaries, and they could join ideas with some simple linkers (e.g. and, but, then).

On the other hand, they were graded with one as the lowest score if they used the vocabulary required to attempt some of the tasks, tried to produce simple structures to introduce themselves, described their family members, likes and dislikes, and interchange information using present tense. Moreover, they made some basic mistakes which may obscure the meaning, contractions were not used to make the conversation more authentic, responses were at word level, questions on familiar topics using auxiliaries were not generated, and they could join ideas with simple linkers (e.g. and).

For the criteria of pronunciation, the students scored five if their pronunciation was intelligible to introduce themselves, describe family members, likes and dislikes, and interchange information. They obtained a score of one if their pronunciation was limited and not intelligible to introduce themselves, describe family members, likes and dislikes, and interchange information.

Following the same structure for interaction, the students obtained a score of five, if they managed to interact on familiar topics by asking and answering with new and appropriate vocabulary, almost always responded promptly, although there may be

hesitation and some pausing, very little support was required. However, they scored one if they attempted to interact on familiar topics by asking and answering with new and appropriate vocabulary but had significant difficulty, frequent hesitation, repetition, or unfinished utterances, which required a lot of support.

Data Analysis

After gathering the information from the innovation implemented and with the use of Microsoft Excel, it was possible to generate descriptive statistics that allowed interpretations from the student's pre and post-test data. The tool paired-sample *t*-test and the Analytics Tools Pack to compare how the use of a self-assessment could improve the students' speaking performance.

The total score from the sum of the marks obtained in the different categories, such as vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation, and interaction was measured with the respective formulas.

The grades obtained in the pretest, that is, before the innovation was implemented, were analyzed using the formulas for maximum and minimum in Microsoft Excel. With these, it was possible to identify the highest and lowest marks. This procedure was carried out again to find the maximum and minimum marks from the information obtained after the implementation took place (posttest).

The next step was to calculate the mean with the results obtained from the six students before and after the innovation. Two last calculations were made to find the standard deviation and the *p*-value.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from the competent authority to carry out the innovation. Within ethical consideration, the most important thing to contemplate is the safety of all the participants involved in the research. It is the essence and core of good research to

ensure the implementation of enough strategies that guarantee responsible data collection (Cacciattolo, 2015). For that reason, the participants involved in research must maintain rights like privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, as well as be protected from harm, betrayal, or deception (Govil, 2013).

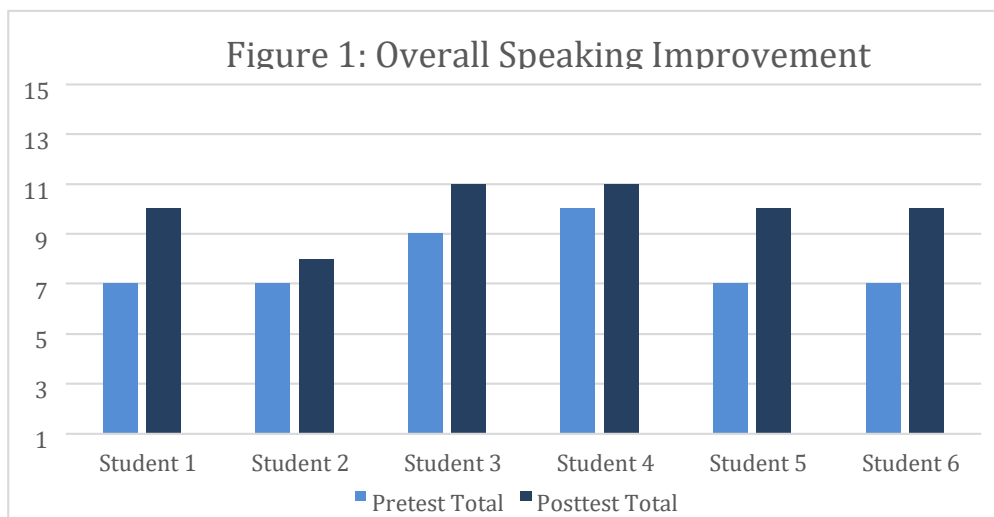
Results

To answer the research question, Does the use of self-assessment change English-language speaking skills marks among students of higher-level institutions compared to the students' marks before the implementation of self-assessment? the results provided from the pretest and posttest answered the question.

After the data was graded and analyzed using the rubric, it was possible to measure the student's improvement in all the speaking domains considered for this study (vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation, and interaction). The overall score obtained from the pretest and posttest data, demonstrated a significant improvement in all the participants.

Figure 1

Speaking skill overall improvement from pretest and posttest.



The significant improvement in all the participants is evident when comparing results obtained in the pretest due to the use of adequate grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation which enable communication effectively.

The table below indicates the results are statistically significant.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Pretest and Posttest

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	6	7	10	8.50	1.33
Posttest	6	8	11	9.50	1.10
Valid N (listwise)	6				

The previous results answer the question. The *t*-test indicate if the results are statistically significant. In the *t*-test paired-sample, the null hypothesis is that there is no difference between dependent groups. The paired-sample *t*-test showed a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest marks ($t = 5.39$, $p < 0.01$), which supports the research question in a positive way the use of self-assessment will improve speaking skills marks on scientific terms between pretest and posttest in students of higher level institutions.

Discussion

The positive result of the study demonstrated that self-assessment supports what Asdar (2017) mentioned when he said that students' self-assessment helps them comprehend the function of the assessment criteria.

At the beginning of the innovation, the students could not structure a simple sentence to interact with peers and struggled with the correct pronunciation of the words. It represented a big challenge but after enough practice and accompanied by the

improvement of one point from the mean in the pretest and posttest, it was noticeable what Khabbazbashi (2017) explained about speaking as a skill that needs to be developed in order to communicate with others.

After the implementation of the innovation, it was possible to note and statistically measure the students' improvement, which was due to the accompaniment, guidance, and practice they had with the teacher. This showed that students were able to self-assess their work and improve their speaking skills, as they were able to compare by using a rubric that set the criteria they needed to work on as a way to improve. This concurs with Rolheiser and Ross (2001), as they saw self-evaluation as the opportunity a person had to judge their own work with the goal of doing a better job in the near future.

Also, Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) encouraged the use of rubrics as a mirror that students can use to see the mistakes they are making or; on the other hand, the good work that makes them shine.

The good outcome from the research showed that self-assessment, and its implementation inside the classroom, engages pupils in their own learning and generates in them autonomy. This is similar to what Ndoye (2017) identified when he explained that students that are actively engaged are aware of their learning gaps.

Conclusions

This research project is intended to demonstrate that self-assessment can enhance speaking skills. The positive findings after the implementation of this strategy showed that, indeed, students were able to boost their performance after they clearly understood how to self-assess using the criteria of the rubric and its use. There is no better judge than ourselves, so when the students finished each lesson, they had enough instructions and practice to auto-evaluate their work in an autonomous way. Moreover,

as the material that was covered was meaningful to them, they felt motivated to participate, as nowadays, it is more common to have conversations through social media, so they felt they had the confidence to have a simple conversation with a native speaker. As a result, the use of self-assessment effectively benefits students' work when the respective training and enough time to practice it is given, especially when students have never used or been trained on how to self-assess.

Limitations

Among the limitations encountered during the implementation of the innovation and subsequent action research, some problems were identified, such as the small number of candidates willing to participate in the study, the limited time to carry out the necessary practices, as well as the lack of conceptions the students had about the use of a self-assessment checklist and rubric.

Recommendations

Based on the small number of participants involved in the study, it is suggested that the results of this research should be interpreted with caution. It should also be done with a larger sample and for a longer period of time to have more generalized results.

Since the effectiveness shown in this study after implementing self-assessment to enhance speaking skills, teachers should incorporate regular techniques of self-assessment and train the students as a way to benefit them. It should also be incorporated backwards design into the classroom to maintain and build a better understanding through the process of achievement of the final goal.

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Appendix 1

Self-assessment checklist (for students and teacher feedback)

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Teacher's rubric for pre and posttest

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Lesson plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

E-portfolio

Available upon request.