Universidad Casa Grande

Using Self-Assessment to Help Young Learners Improve their Speaking

Silvia Alexandra Loor Lizarzaburu

Coordinator: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Research Report

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-19-N˚.140-2020. Cohort 2022 - 2023. Author's email: silvia.loor@casagrande.edu.ec. Guayaquil, January 26th, 2024.

Using Self-Assessment to Help Young Learners Improve their Speaking

Working as an Early Childhood teacher has been the most significant experience in my life. I have seen the way many children learn and how they deal with their fears, especially when they are learning a new language.

In the current school year, I had the opportunity to start a new project in my school. The school authorities took the decision of increasing the English periods considerably to become a bilingual school. This is a challenge for every teacher and for students as well. However, due to the limited experience my children have in hearing and speaking English the challenge has become even bigger.

My students' level is Pre-A1, they are between five and six years old. In these last months, I have observed that it is much simpler for them to develop listening skills, because they are able to understand all the input information they receive. Probably the reason why listening is much easier for them to understand is the fact that in my classes I try to be as visual as possible, in other words, the main words or the instructional words are always accompanied by an image, so the students have the proper scaffold to build understanding by listening.

On the other hand, when it is speaking time, the stress level increases, making them feel discouraged, and confidentless. I am sure that by having the correct tools and aids, it will be much easier for them to overcome their difficulties and fears. To illustrate this theory, I will study the use of self-assessment techniques as a tool to increase confidence and help English students to find scaffolding to develop their speaking skills.

Literature Review

In this section I will present the conceptual framework and identify the theories, benefits and challenges behind self-assessment, its limitations and how to teach students

to apply this resource. These concepts will highlight the main purposes of applying self-assessment in the teaching practice.

Self-Assessment

Jamrus and Razali (2019) stated that an element of formative assessment is receiving feedback. That is why students themselves can be positive sources of feedback using self-assessment tools. They would reflect on their own work, and judge if he or she has fulfilled the goal set. If self-assessment is done in the right conditions, it can provide meaningful information and improve learning. Moreover, it might increase motivation, critical thinking, and reflection on their practices of English language. They continue saying that self-assessment also fosters students' commitment with their learning process and develops autonomy. It is a way to scaffold knowledge and help students to figure out how to build their learning process (p.64).

According to Gardner (1999), self-assessment is a tool to best develop autonomous learners, build confidence, and demonstrate learning gain. The author mentioned that autonomy is viewed like the ability to take charge of one's learning, and total autonomy is rarely reached. On the other hand, autonomous language learning refers to "the learning undertaken by autonomous learners, in other words, the process undertaken as a result of learners taking responsibility for their own learning" (p. 50).

The use of ICT in the classroom has changed the teaching practices. An innovative use of it would lead teachers to change the teacher-student relationship. Proposing video-based tasks can encourage students to take responsibility for their learning process and it is a way to involve them in authentic learning experiences (Fiorini, 2021),

The author explained that these practices have had a positive result in self-assessment activities; improving students' communication. In fact, the use of video

recording associated with self-assessment may foster oral skills as it encourages students' reflection on their own performance. Self-assessment can contribute to achieving speaking goals (pp. 1-2).

Additionally, when teachers use self- assessment tools, one of the purposes is to give feedback to students. And the purpose of feedback is to support the learning process and enhance students' performance; to generate feedback that enhances their performance in the learning process and also generates improvements developing the acquisition of any knowledge. Interviews of students who self-assessed indicated that students were motivated by the desire to obtain the highest possible grades (Andrade, 2019, pp. 2-3).

Limitations Using Self-Assessment

Having self-assessment tasks may have some limitations in students' perceptions. Andrade (2019) stated that the studies of children suggest that they tend to have inexperienced understandings of their purposes, which might lead to shallow implementation of related processes. In contrast, results from studies conducted in higher education settings suggested that college and university students understood the function of self-assessment and found it useful for guiding evaluation and revision (p.8).

Self-assessment to skill a knowledge tends to become poor or modest. The average between the academic self-views and the real performance of students may not be completely accurate, because some of them are likely to overinflate their self-assessments charts, giving themselves higher marks than the precise ones. Furthermore, the correlation between students and teachers' grades were higher in advanced classes than in introductory ones (Dunning et al., 2004, p. 85).

How Students Assess Themselves

According to Rolheiser and Ross (2001), there is a four-stage procedure to teach students how to assess themselves:

1. Students have to define a rubric to judge self-performance. When increasing a student's commitment with his or her own, the benefits are reflected on clearer goals, and suitable negotiation.

2. Students should know how to apply the rubric to their own tasks. They need to see examples in practice. Teaching modeling is important to give as many examples as possible.

3. Students must have feedback on their self-assessment charts. Teachers are the ones who help students to understand with accurate feedback.

4. After self-assessment, students have to develop action plans. Teachers should provide support to students to set new objectives and increase their effort levels (pp. 7-8).

Additionally, Kostons et al. (2012) stated that students need support and tutoring when applying self-assessment techniques; and this support has to be personalized. When the self-assessment is monitored and the teacher gives suggestions, students will increase their mental effort on the learning task. Teachers should keep in mind that poor prior knowledge on the task may influence the assessment task. As a result, students with more prior knowledge might assess themselves more accurately because their experience provides them with knowledge of the criteria, so standards and good performance would meet (pp. 121-132).

Innovation

The innovation plan (Appendix 1) was focused on interactive-speaking activities and the way students were assessed was by using a self-assessment checklist derived from the specific skills taught, using CEFR level (Pre-A1) which is: Can ask and answer

questions about him/herself and daily routines, using short, formulaic expressions and relying on gestures to reinforce the information.

The goal of the innovation planned was that students could learn clothes items, colors, feelings and the present progressive of the verb TO BE - 1st person. The students had to be able to ask and answer questions to each other to describe the clothes they were wearing, their colors and say how they were feeling when they were wearing the clothes. The use of the correct form of the verb TO BE was required for the task.

To develop the innovation, the teacher focused on specific objectives where the students were addressed to transfer the learning, and if they cannot do it, provide them the necessary scaffolding tools to fulfill the goals.

Some essential questions were considered for students in this innovation plan:

1. If I'm going on a trip with my family, how can I remember the vocabulary words learned?

2. How did I feel when I talked in front of my classmates?

The summative assessment task had the following characteristics:

- The students were interviewees and interviewers in a context of a TV show.

- The audience were: Classmates, Spanish teacher, Spanish Coordinator.

- In a context of a TV show, where the teacher was the host and the classmates the audience; the students dressed in different and fun outfits, were asked to perform a short conversation or dialogue in which they were describing what they were wearing, their colors and feelings. The students worked in pairs.

- With the clothing, colors and feelings vocabulary and the correct form of the verb TO BE the students performed a conversation that lasted one minute approximately, following the prompt: Q: What are you wearing? A: I am

wearing _____. Q: What color is your _____? A: It is color _____. Q: How are

you feeling? A: I am feeling _____.

 The student A asked the questions, the student B answered; then, they switched.

-   The teacher used a rubric (Appendix 2) and students were using a self-

    assessment chart (Appendix 3) for them.

There were some skills for students in order to be able to perform the proposed

task with success, those are: interaction to ask and answer the questions, express their

feelings, using the appropriate vocabulary in the conversation. The lesson plan

(Appendix 1) was designed to be done in eight periods or lessons of thirty minutes each.

The innovation was applied in four weeks.

In week one, to put the students in context, they read a story to introduce the

topic (clothes and feelings); then they performed a short pair-work in which they had to

have a conversation following a prompt. After having the conversation, they received

the self-assessment chart to assess themselves and had teachers' feedback.

In week two, the lesson started with a group work where students presented

different pictures of them and their families having vacation. Then, using a "Clothing

dice", they had to describe the clothes, their colors and say their feelings.

In week three, the students had to color some clothing items, following a color

code. Then, they had a fashion parade in which they wore their favorite clothes. During

the parade, they had a conversation in pairs following a prompt. Then, they received the

self-assessment chart to assess themselves and had teachers' feedback.

In week four, they read a story about feelings; and at the end of the week, they

performed the final task, recorded a video to watch and listen to themselves, and after

that they filled the self-assessment chart. They received feedback.

In total, the students had three opportunities to practice using the self-assessment chart, and received teachers' feedback.

Research Methodology

One of the definitions of research is "search for new knowledge or new applications of existing knowledge or for both" (Mukherjee, 2020, p. 2). It means, after exploring new pieces of information through observation, experiments or experiences; that valuable information can be used to develop better procedures. Actually, research findings have resulted in discoveries and inventions (p. 2).

In addition, Efrat and Ravid (2013) stated that action research emphasizes the role of practitioners in conducting investigations in their classes and in their schools. It is a complete concept that includes not only teachers, but other school members like administrators, specialists, counselors, tutors, and other members who are involved in the educational process. These people believe that action research has modified, changed, and improved the teaching-learning process. Furthermore, action research increases the ability to grow professionally and make the members more committed to their own practice (p. 2).

The current study was based on quantitative analysis in which the author applied two tests to the students: pre-test and post-test. The purpose of applying these tests was to determine if students' speaking skills improved, and if their confidence in the process was enhanced. To do this process, the researcher video recorded students' performance in both tests.

The researcher also collected data through a self-assessment checklist, a rubric; and took field notes. The following were the research questions for this study:

- To what extent does self-assessment improve speaking skills in Pre-A1 learners?

- Which part of the rubric was the most impacted by using self-assessment strategy?

Participants:

This study was applied to twenty-two students (twelve boys and ten girls) of First Grade from a private school in Guayaquil, they were between five and six years old. One of the students was diagnosed with special educational needs. Despite this situation, the student was included in this process like their other classmates. Their English proficiency level was Pre-A1, according to the Common European Framework. The instruments to apply on this innovation project considered that students' native language is Spanish and they might present some troubles understanding the instructions. That is why all the items to assess were accompanied with a picture to support understanding. The students' English proficiency and their abilities were considered too.

Instruments

To answer the research question:

- To what extent does self-assessment improve speaking skills in Pre-A1 learners?

Students performed a dialogue to ask and answer questions regarding the clothes they were wearing, what colors they were and say how they were feeling at the moment they were speaking. Learners worked in pairs. Speaking production was assessed using a self-assessment on both pre-test and post-test.

In the pre-test, the participants had to perform a dialogue using a prompt and real elements to perform it. The conversation lasted one minute. The participants had to role-play both characters. The rest of the students were the audience, the researcher recorded a video of each pair, and provided feedback.

In the post-test, the researcher set a scene for a parade, the participants were dressed with their favorite clothes, they walked over the red carpet in pairs modeling the clothes and then, they had to perform the same dialogue from the pre-test. The conversation lasted one minute. The participants had to role-play, and the rest of the students were the audience. The researcher recorded a video of each pair, and they had to assess themselves, using a checklist tool.

Then, the researcher applied a rubric designed to measure some speaking aspects like: vocabulary, the use of verb TO-BE and pronunciation. This rubric had a quantitative grading.

To answer the research question:

- Which part of the rubric was the most impacted by using self-assessment strategy?

The rubric tool was designed according to the participants' ages and level. It has four criteria: clothes, colors, verb TO BE, feelings, and pronunciation. Each one of these criteria were accompanied with a visual aid to help participants to understand the meaning.

Data Analysis

Teachers' results were tabulated using a rubric which contained the same contents from the students' checklist. Also a grade to calculate the quantitative results. The teacher graded the pre-test and post-test, and the results were exposed using tables, so this way the results were appreciated easily and its interpretation was clearly understood. Each graphic answered each research question.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the requirements needed to apply the innovation with the participants. Their names were anonymous to protect their identity. To access participants, the researcher had to ask permission in the school where she worked.

Efrat and Ravit (2013) highlighted participants had to agree on their participation in the research. Moreover, the researcher had to assure herself to have the proper permission to record the interview of the participants. Additionally, the authors suggest sending a letter to the participants or their guardians if they are minors. In this letter the researcher had to introduce herself and say the occupation she had in the school or center, and describe the purpose of the study (p. 75).

After the permission was accepted, the researcher sent Google Forms to the parents of the target participants, informing them of the procedure that was going to be applied. After their approval, the researcher started to apply the innovation. Then, the instructions were explained to participants, telling them that they were going to be part of an innovation study. At the end of the study, the results of the pre-test and post-test were shared with the participants.

Results

To answer the research question: To what extent does self-assessment improve speaking skills in Pre-A1 learners?, descriptive statistics charts were applied to have the result of the means, standard deviations, and p value.

Table 1

Pre-tests and Post-tests Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

	N	Min	Max	M	SD	p value
Pre-Test	22	2	6	4	1.55787	0
Post-Test	22	5.5	9	7.25	1.18248	0

The results showed that in both, pre-test and post-test, the scores increased in each of them, consequently, it can be noticed that a remarked improvement was

demonstrated along the lessons taken. The students got better in their speaking performance, just as the quantitative results presented.

In the first test, the students seemed a little confused on how to use it. However, at the end of the task, they could complete all the items of the chart easily. Moreover, in the post-test, they were able to apply the instrument confidently.

It was noticeable that there was a difference in the performance results between the pre-test and post-test. The students felt more confident and their speaking performance improved after taking the second test. Additionally, for the post-test performance, the use of the prompts given by the teacher was almost unnecessary.

The aspect that mostly impacted participants while using the self-assessment chart, was the honesty needed in order to assess themselves in a fair way. In both tests, some students were completely honest, however some students were not. It was important to mention to them that making mistakes is part of the learning process. This way their confidence increased and their fear about failing decreased.

Regarding the prompts and grammar structure, some students were not able to follow the prompts proposed, so they used L1 to perform the tasks, or chopped the structures proposed. The researcher based these statements according to the field notes taken along the process. Table 2 summarizes the answer to the second research question: Which part of the rubric was the most impacted by using self-assessment strategy?

Table 2

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics per Construct

		Pre-Test				Post-Test				
Construct	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	p value
Vocabulary	22	0.5	3	1.75	0.65795	1	3	2	0.5243	0
Verb TO Be	22	0	2	1	0.62765	1.5	3	2.25	0.45406	0
Pronunciation	22	1	2	1.5	0.44442	1.5	3	2.25	0.47956	0

A challenge found was the fact that the students were not in the same English level, for this reason, some words from the reading and activities were unknown for them. To help them overcome this problem, the researcher had to scaffold vocabulary knowledge, by using visual cards.

As the table shows, after some practices, the content in which the students demonstrated an improvement was in the conjugation of the verb TO BE and in their pronunciation. Moreover, the researcher could notice that students felt more confident speaking, using the prompts and structures.

Discussion

The results shown in the graphics above clearly demonstrated that there was a visible improvement on the students' performance, regarding their speaking skills. In relation to the research question: To what extent does self-assessment improve speaking skills in Pre-A1 learners?; after the post-test, students demonstrated confidence in their speaking practice.

When they watched themselves in the recorded videos, and compared their pre-test and post-test performances, they noticed their mistakes and reflected on how they could overcome these difficulties. As Jamrus and Razali (2019) mentioned in their research, is by receiving feedback that the students can seek advantage from a formative assessment. Besides, using the suitable self-assessment tools (video recordings, checklists and rubrics in this case), this advantage is enhanced. It is important to highlight that reflection on their own performance, can provide meaningful information, enhance learning and therefore increase confidence, just as the authors mentioned and was also demonstrated on students' performance during the lesson plan developed.

Additionally to strengthen the use of ICT in classrooms, as Fiorini (2021) mentioned, it has changed the teaching practices. Video-based tasks involve students in authentic learning experiences, encourage self-reflection, and bring up speaking goals. In this case, during this research report, the students had not only, but more than one opportunity to watch themselves in the recording video, hear their own voices saying the words and reflect on their performance.

As well as, to respond to the research question: Which part of the rubric was the most impacted by using self-assessment strategy?; in relation to the items: Vocabulary, Verb TO Be, and Pronunciation, the one that impacted the most was Vocabulary. As revealed along the lessons, the vocabulary related to clothing items they needed to perform the conversation was increasing.

The audios were a powerful tool to have them notice the meaning of the words, so the use of them in their regular speaking was increased, developing autonomy in the use of the language. As Gardner (1999) mentioned regarding autonomy, in order to develop it, teachers should increase the amount of self-assessment activities in classes. Therefore, participants had several opportunities to practice self-assessment; and as a result, autonomous learners take responsibility for their learning and their individual progress. In the developed lesson plan, the amount of occasions students listened to themselves in the audios, significantly impacted on the way they felt in each participation, consequently their self-esteem and autonomy during class sessions, was expanded.

Moreover, they can also gain motivation from this progress, because success increases confidence, even on the students who have little progress. Furthermore, feedback helps teachers to enhance their support with learners, identifying the specific areas in which their students need more support.

Another aspect to consider is that mostly all of them followed the instructions and were completely honest with their own grading. On the other hand, there was a little percentage of them who were not honest, and graded themselves higher than their real results. Dunning et al. (2004) mentioned that practicing self- assessment can be a little risky because it depends on students' honesty and their ability to face failure or success. In this research report, this aspect was not observed. Most of the participants followed the rubric, however some of them were not honest with their grading. This situation requires teachers to explain more deeply and raise awareness with their students regarding the value of being honest.

Overall, I can say that the participants from the current study found many benefits using self-assessment resources. Firstly, the activities presented to them gave them the tools to improve their speaking skills. Next, the video recordings and audios were useful and meaningful. Then, the prompts they had in all the lessons helped them in their progress; besides the topic proposed was authentic and related to their interests; creating an engaging scenario was helpful, too. And last, in the whole process they counted with their teacher support who was always motivating and helping them to build confidence on their skills and on themselves.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to help young learners to decrease the stress level that made them feel discouraged, and lack of confidence when participating in speaking activities; finding the tools and aids that guided them to increase their speaking skills and provide them the courage to be able to use them in a class context. Once the results were shown in this study, it can be concluded that the participants increased their confidence when speaking.

They overcome the fear felt in the pre-test due to several activities developed over the lesson plan. The checklist helped them to highlight the areas in which they had to improve. Additionally, the rubric helped the researcher to provide feedback to overcome the participants' difficulties.

The main goal was to help participants to develop fluency, considering grammar structure according to their level and keeping understandable pronunciation. The lesson plan developed in four weeks and eight lessons had all the resources to achieve the goal and the process happened in a meaningful way, as evidenced by the post-test in which the eighteen percent of the students got the highest score. Another aspect to consider is the visible improvement in the proper use of the verb TO BE, comparing the results from the pre-test and post-test, where eighteen percent of the students got the highest score.

The researcher noticed that the participants along the lessons and especially in the post-test were eager to participate, asking and answering questions, interacting between their peers. Consequently, it can be stated that the use of self-assessment is a powerful tool to help students to increase courage, confidence and develop fluency in young learners.

The positive results found on this innovation, encourage teachers and researchers to keep finding new and different techniques to apply self-assessment on regular classes. Moreover, the institutions have a strong commitment with education practices. One of their challenges is to train teachers on how to use these resources.

Limitations

It is appropriate to point out that there were certain limitations when applying the current study. First, the accessibility to the authorities in order to obtain the approval

for the innovation project in the proposed institution. The researcher had to wait several weeks to have the approval from the institution's principal.

Second, the adaptability that the researcher had to implement and develop the lesson plan in the four weeks proposed. Having a current year and established contents to teach in 1st. Grade level, it was quite difficult to find the time needed in order to implement the innovation plan.

And last, the struggles that some participants faced because they did not understand how to use the checklist resource. To overcome these difficulties, the researcher had to accompany them in the process.

Recommendations

It is important to recommend to future researchers some aspects to consider when another similar study takes place:

- Present the consent letter to the institution's authorities with sufficient advance notice.
- Develop the innovation lesson plan in the longest class period. This way the proper contents from the level will not be affected.
- Anticipate struggles with the tools and develop scaffolding aids to help the participants.

Increasing confidence in speaking skills in young learners is an interesting field that needs to be more explored and studied. The researcher from the current study hopes that teachers become aware of the importance of developing oral skills especially in early ages. Besides this, hopefully more studies regarding this field will come.

References

Andrade, H., (2019). A critical review of research on student self-assessment. *Frontiers in Education*, 4, 2-8. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00087

Dunning, D., Health, C., & Suls, J. (2004). Flawed self-assessment: implication for Health, Education and the workplace. *Association for Psychological Science*, 5(3) p. 85. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1529-1006.2004.00018.x

Efrat, S. & Ravid, R. (2013). *Action Research in Education*. The Guilford Press.

Fiorini, R. (2021). Fostering Speaking Skills Through Self- and Peer-assessment: Students Engagement and Moodle. *MOOCs, Language Learning and Mobility, Design, Integration, reuse*. Hal Open Science. Italy, 1-2. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M0B1KBoUyqd4b1YSKVH1Fk-eX8omwosk/view?usp=sharing

Gardner, H. (1999). Self-Assessment for Autonomous Language Learners. *Links & Letters,* 7, 49-60. https://raco.cat/index.php/LinksLetters/article/view/22713

Jamrus, M., & Razali, A. (2019). Using self-assessment as a tool for English language learning. *English Language Teaching*, *12*(11), 64-73. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n11p64

Kostons, D., Van Gog, T., & Paas, T. (2012). Training self-assessment and task-selection skills: A cognitive approach to improving self-regulated learning. *Learning and Instruction*, *22*(2), 121-132. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2011.08.004

Mukherjee, Sh. (2020). *A guide to research Methodology: An overview of research problems, tasks and methods*. CRC Press - Taylor & Francis Group.

Rolheiser, C., & Ross, J. A. (2001). Student self-evaluation: What research says and what practice shows. *Plain talk about kids*, *43*, 57-78. http://eloewen.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/118309278/Student%20Self%20Evaluaztion%20What%20Research%20Says%20and%20What%20Practice%20Shows.pdf

Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric for the Teacher

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist for Students

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Results Charts

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

E-portfolio

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Audio Recordings

Available upon request.