Improvement of Speaking Skills Through the Self-Assessment Implementation with High School Students

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Research Report

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In an interconnected and diverse society, the ability to speak English empowers learners to engage with a range of perspectives, cultures, and knowledge, fostering a skill set for their academic and future endeavors. However, developing speaking skills is one of the biggest challenges for students because it involves internal and external factors (Brown, 2015; Mota et al., 2014, as cited in Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2022).

This research report was implemented at a Fiscomisional school in Zamora Province, Ecuador, where students have three hours of English per week. During the first term, the researcher observed that high school students faced some challenges with their speaking skills. They frequently mispronounced words when they expressed their ideas. Furthermore, extended pauses were noted repeatedly which impeded their fluency in speaking familiar topics. In addition, they felt anxious and uncomfortable when they performed speaking tasks in the classroom.

The researcher identified negative factors through observations conducted for the present research report. These factors included low self-confidence, anxiety levels, limited use of vocabulary, and difficulties in pronunciation and fluency, all of which reduce opportunities for the development of oral communication skills. In response to these challenges, this research focused on the implementation of a self-assessment technique designed to encourage students to reflect on their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in a more comfortable learning environment.

Literature Review

This section of the research report outlines the theoretical concepts and educational approaches related to self-assessment that were taken into consideration to support the information presented in this study.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment is the learners' capability to evaluate their own performance by making informed judgments about their competencies (Papanthymou & Darra, 2019). It is a type of assessment that serves summative purposes while simultaneously facilitating the enhancement of learning outcomes (Yan, 2018). Self-assessment serves as a means of facilitating a transition for learners, enabling them to progressively develop self-regulation skills (Andrade, 2019). This technique aids in monitoring, cultivating, and evaluating the learning processes concerning the objectives and standards set by the curriculum. Furthermore, it enables students to evaluate their learning progress and develop skills for promoting independence (Borg & Edmett, 2019).

Self-assessment has numerous advantages in English language learning. It improves future performance, enhances motivation and engagement during speaking activities, and fosters productive interactions between teachers and students (Alek et al., 2020). This assessment strategy motivates students to learn and promotes self-reflection (Jamrus & Razali, 2019). Furthermore, these researchers affirmed that self-evaluation is crucial in language learning, particularly for measuring students' progress. On the other hand, Jin (2021) pointed out that self-assessment functions not only as an accurate measurement tool where students focus on correctness and accuracy but also fosters students' second language learning ability.

In a qualitative investigation carried out at the State Islamic Senior High School level in Sorong, Masruria (2021) found that most students recognized self-assessment as highly

beneficial. This perception stemmed from the ability it afforded them to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, facilitating improvements in their communication with the teacher. Additionally, the study indicated that self-assessment helped students enhance their speaking confidence, self-regulation, and engagement by fostering awareness of research, time organization, and autonomy.

Despite the numerous advantages of applying self-assessment in EFL classrooms, students may encounter difficulties when using this technique. Ma & Winke (2019) highlighted that self-assessment impacts students by prioritizing their higher-order thinking, self-reflection, self-regulation, and capacity to accomplish objectives individually.

In a research study applied to 19 undergraduate students from a pre-intermediate English course at a Colombian Public University, the participants shared that their failure to accurately assess their learning performance limits their ability to identify areas needing improvement. Likewise, the researchers noted that certain learners encountered frustration and decreased enthusiasm when their results did not meet expectations (Herrera et al., 2022).

Numerous investigations exploring methods to enhance the educational aspect of self-assessment have consistently discovered that training students in self-assessment is highly impactful (Ross et al., 1999; Sadler & Good, 2006, as cited in Kim, 2019). Teaching self-assessment is a gradual process, Rolheiser & Ross (2001) proposed a four-stage model that enables students to take self-evaluation seriously. In stage 1, the researchers suggested determining meaningful criteria that learners can use when judging their performance. In stage 2, educators should instruct learners on how to apply these criteria to their work, and students should analyze clear, practical examples illustrating effective self-evaluation. In stage 3, teachers are required to provide feedback on students' self-assessments. In stage 4, students should

develop action plans to address areas where they need to improve. This model can be a valuable resource for both students and teachers when implementing self-assessment in the classroom.

Innovation

The innovation was applied to 12 students in the first quarter at a Fiscomisional school in Zamora City. Their English level ranged between A1 and A2 according to the CEFR, and their ages varied from 14 to 15 years old. This innovation lasted 4 weeks, working 3 synchronous hours per week.

The purpose of this innovation was for students to describe their weekly plan for their upcoming holiday in a 1-minute monologue. In order to reach this goal, students learned holiday vocabulary, future simple tense with "going to" and "will" for expressing future intentions and making predictions, simple time adverbs, clear pronunciation with good intonation, and how to communicate organized and interesting ideas. The topics were adapted from the student's textbook, and the activities were planned to encourage students to extend their vocabulary in authentic situations.

During the first week, students were trained to self-assess using a monologue. In this part, the teacher introduced the concept and discussed the benefits of self-assessment. Then, students listened to the teacher's one-minute recording about holidays for 1 minute twice. After that, the researcher showed the checklist and explained to them how the recording matched the checklist.

Consecutively, the students used a picture with different holiday activities and based on the teacher's model, they described an upcoming holiday for 1 minute while the teacher recorded their monologues.

 In the subsequent weeks, two practice sessions were conducted after the training, during which the students assessed their video recordings using the checklist and submitted them to the

teacher via WhatsApp. The teacher listened to the recordings and looked at the checklist to identify what problems students had and provided individual feedback in the next class.

The final task was performed in the fourth week. On this day, students taped a 1-minute video where they described their weekly plan for the upcoming holiday, and then they uploaded the video to the teacher.

Research Methodology

This research report utilized the action research method as it involved research implementation to explore challenges with the speaking skills of a group of students in an educational institution. Manfra, (2019) defined action research as an educational model for empowering teachers to research into practice within collaborative communities, where action researchers address everyday problems to effect change. The purpose of action research is to enhance the instructional methodology of classroom teachers and their students' learning experiences (Efron & Ravid, 2019).

During this study, quantitative and qualitative instruments were used to collect data to answer the following research questions: To what extent do high school students improve their speaking skills with the implementation of the self-assessment technique? and What are students' feelings about the self-assessment technique used for improving their speaking skills?

Surveys were used as qualitative instruments, while pre and post-tests constituted the quantitative instruments. Furthermore, the checklist included parameters that students self-assessed, which were incorporated into a rubric for grading purposes. The rubric helped as a tool that provided data to be analyzed by the teacher. Lastly, the researcher interpreted the findings to evaluate how the innovation impacted high school students.

Participants

The participants of this research consisted of 12 students in the first quarter at a Fiscomisional school in Zamora City. The students were selected using a stratified random sampling, from a group of 24 students. The sample size was reduced due to a combination of factors, some students lacked access to cellphones and internet connection, and others were unwilling to record and send the required videos to the teacher.

The research intervention was applied to the entire class; however, data collection and analysis focused on this sample of 12 students (7 females and 5 males). The ages of the students ranged from 14 to 15 years old. The study took place during regular synchronous English class periods. Regarding their English proficiency, there were 4 students with level A1 and 8 students with level A2 according to the CEFR. Their proficiency level was assessed using an A2 key FCE speaking test as part of the diagnostic evaluation at the beginning of the school year.

Instruments

To address the first research question: To what extent do high school students improve their speaking skills with the implementation of the self-assessment technique? a pre-posttest was applied. The pre-test involved a voice recording during the first week of the implementation. On the other hand, the post-test was a video recording and it was developed at the culmination of the entire implementation period. The students self-assessed utilizing a checklist following each practice performance. According to the research from Cañete & Inostroza-Araos (2022), the findings indicated that using self-assessment checklists supported students not only to improve their fluency and pronunciation but also to influence positively their confidence and feelings about their oral performance. The categories on the students' checklist were aligned to the criteria outlined in the rubric. The rating system encompassed three parameters: "Yes,"

"Sometimes," and "Not yet." Once students self-assessed, they received feedback from the teacher.

The researcher used a rubric to calculate the students' speaking improvement in the pre and post-test recordings. Based on the studies of Helmanda & Nisa (2019), the authors highlighted the importance of scoring rubrics in evaluating students' oral presentations. They noted that despite a student's difficulty in forming correct sentences, they still received a score, acknowledging their participation effort. The criteria of the rubric included: grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and content and organization. The researcher graded each component on a scale from "1" to the lowest to "3" to the highest.

To address the second research question: What are students' feelings about the self-assessment technique used for improving their speaking skills? a survey was applied in Spanish to ensure that students comprehended the questions and provided meaningful responses. The objective was to gather the students' perspectives on the implementation of the self-assessment technique for improving their speaking skills.

Data Analysis

To report the first research question related to the improvement of speaking skills through the implementation of the self-assessment technique, the researcher employed a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel for the examination of the data. This involved gathering statistical measures such as the maximum, minimum, mean, standard deviation, and p-value from the student's grades.

To report the second research question concerning students' feelings about the implementation of the self-assessment technique, a Spanish survey was conducted with open-

ended questions. Then, the responses were examined to explore the depth of impressions and

perceptions while students used the self-assessment for speaking enhancement purposes.

Ethical Considerations

This research report was implemented following the established guidelines of ethical

considerations that the researcher requires to submit applications for obtaining approval to

conduct investigations (Head, 2020). First of all, the researcher requested approval to apply the

research to students from the first year of Bachillerato. Subsequently, the principal of the

institution approved the permission for the study to proceed. Then, the author asked for voluntary

participation and clarified to the participants that the purpose of this investigation served

educational objectives. Therefore, acceptance and authorization from the parents were acquired

successfully through signed authorization letters. In addition, the researcher ensured the

confidentiality and anonymity of the students through the use of numbers instead of their names.

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Results

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In response to the main research question: To what extent do high school students

improve their speaking skills with the implementation of the self-assessment technique? the

results are indicated below.

Table 1

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Descriptive Statistics

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	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	P Value
PRETEST	12	3	7	4.08	1.16	0.00
POSTTEST	12	7	9	8	0.85	0.00

Table 1 illustrates a comparative analysis between the pretest and posttest results for the

twelve participants. The posttest showed significant enhancements in Minimum, Maximum, and

Mean values. Furthermore, the standard deviation in the posttest decreased to 0.85, suggesting a

more focused distribution of scores. In addition, the pre and post-test p-values were less than 0.05, which implies a statistically notable difference between the grades of the two tests.

To address the second research question regarding the students' feelings about the self-assessment technique used for improving their speaking skills, the responses from the Spanish surveys were translated into English. The gathered data provided positive information on students' emotions after using this technique. Students' answers are outlined below:

"I felt good grading myself because I could identify the mistakes I made and had the opportunity to repeat and practice more." (participant 9).

"I felt very confident and comfortable while doing the video activity, recording myself, and then assessing my performance using the checklist." (participant 11).

In addition, students were asked whether they had improved their speaking skills after working with the self-assessment technique and to explain the specific manners in which they had improved. The teacher collected their responses and those are the following:

"Yes, I improved my pronunciation through the practice I did using this technique." (participant 7).

"Yes, I improved my speaking because, by realizing the parts where I was faltering, I could correct my mistakes." (participant 8).

Discussion

Concerning the first research question, to what extent do high school students improve their speaking skills with the implementation of the self-assessment technique? this investigation proved that students notably enhanced their speaking skills with the application of the self-assessment, as evidenced in the developments observed in the post-test. These results are consistent with prior studies that showed similar findings, such as Alek et al. (2020), who

demonstrated that engaging in self-assessment improves future performance, enhances motivation and engagement during speaking activities, and fosters productive interactions between teachers and students. Similarly, Jamrus & Razali (2019) stated that this assessment strategy motivates students to learn and promotes self-reflection. Furthermore, these researchers affirmed that self-evaluation is crucial in language learning, particularly for measuring students' progress.

The research also unveiled a noteworthy outcome concerning the autonomy development of high school students. The investigation revealed that, through repeated practice and constructive feedback, students became proficient at self-assessment, thereby achieving a more impartial evaluation of their own work. This aligns with the findings of Borg & Edmett (2019), who emphasized in their study that self-assessment aids in monitoring, cultivating, and evaluating the learning processes concerning the objectives and standards set by the curriculum. Moreover, the authors added that this technique enabled students to evaluate their learning progress and develop skills for promoting independence.

Referring to the second question on students' feelings about the self-assessment technique used for improving their speaking skills, the present study demonstrated that students exhibited calmness and self-confidence while performing speaking tasks in the classroom. This corresponds with the results of a qualitative investigation implemented at the State Islamic Senior High School level in Sorong, as mentioned by Masruria (2021) where the majority of students recognized self-assessment as highly beneficial. This perception originated from the student's ability to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, facilitating improvements in their communication with the teacher. Additionally, the study indicated that self-assessment helped

students enhance their speaking confidence, self-regulation, and engagement by fostering awareness of research, time organization, and autonomy.

Conclusions

Developing speaking skills is challenging for high school students, as it involves internal and external factors that impact the cultivation of oral proficiency. Based on observations carried out for the present study, it is evident that high school students faced various difficulties in their spoken language. They mispronounced words while expressing their thoughts. Moreover, limited vocabulary utilization and repeated pauses were observed constantly even when they talked about topics they had studied in their previous grades which impeded their fluency. Furthermore, students felt insecure and nervous when performing speaking activities in the classroom.

Implementing the self-assessment technique led to a significant enhancement in the students' oral abilities, as proved by the teacher's evaluation results in the post-test. This improvement was demonstrated across various elements of language speaking acquisition including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation through practice exercises, error recognition, and constructive feedback. Additionally, students enhanced their self-confidence and alleviated anxiety when speaking English because they could assess their performance in a nurturing and non-critical environment.

Limitations

Initially, the anticipated number of participants was the entire class (twenty-four students); however, the sample size was reduced by half to twelve students due to various reasons. The primary factors were the limited time during class hours and the absence of internet connectivity within the classroom. Consequently, the teacher instructed students to record the videos at home and submit them. This caused difficulties, especially for some students without

access to cell phones and internet connectivity at home. In addition, there were occasions when a

few students showed reluctance to record and send the necessary videos to the teacher.

Furthermore, in the first practice of the intervention, one student felt uncomfortable and

unable to self-assess her video recording using the checklist, as it was the first time that students

were applying this assessment tool.

Recommendations

The author recommends conducting these studies over an extended duration of class

periods to have more time for face-to-face oral performances inside the classroom and mitigate

connectivity issues. Moreover, to address students' unwillingness to record and submit the

videos, researchers should promote a supportive classroom culture where errors are seen as

opportunities to learn and improve.

Finally, future researchers should allocate additional time to train students in the use of

checklists for self-assessing their oral performances to allow them plenty of opportunities to

practice and refine their self-assessment skills.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric developed by the researcher (for pre and post-test)

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Self-assessment Checklist (for students and teacher feedback)

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Spanish survey applied to students

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Grades

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

E-portfolio

Available upon request.