



Impact of Self-Assessment on Students' Oral Production

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Research Report

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During the journey of learning a new language, learners tend to have one obstacle in common, and that is to speak fluently. Speaking in English as a foreign language is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon; thus, providing a concise definition for it is very hard (Bygate, 2009; Thornbury & Slade, 2006). The lack of opportunities to use a foreign language in a realistic context, the limited skills when trying to communicate orally, are some difficulties that learners find hard to overcome. Self-assessment is an alternative way of learning and has evolved and became a way of developing speaking skills and making learners more confident.

The speaking part has always been one of the most difficult to develop due to the lack of plans or activities that sometimes are not part of the syllabus, learners get frustrated when they have to face a situation, and they do not know how to handle it because they have never practiced in class.

Learning and using English has become a necessity, and it is no longer a privilege, the ability to speak a foreign language is a complex task therefore it is difficult for every learner to speak that language fluently and appropriately. That is why this study demonstrated that self-assessment can improve speaking fluency and help learners with the difficulties they face while having a conversation, through explanations, workshops and activities aimed to get better results and become autonomous.

Literature Review

Speaking Proficiency

According to Bailey (2005), speaking is a process of interaction where speakers intend to build meaning, by producing and receiving information. When teaching a foreign language, speaking is considered a skill students do not feel comfortable with, because it is hard to share their ideas and communicate.

There are a few points to focus on related to speaking proficiency: accuracy, pronunciation and fluency. These features have always attracted learners' and teachers' attention (Tavakoli & Foster, 2008). Fluency refers to the way the words are said, if the words and ideas are connected and with the correct intonation, On the other hand accuracy refers to the way the words are used, the correct and acceptable use of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Harmer, 2001).

The teacher's role consists in designing learning environments, providing students with opportunities to be involved in purposeful feedback activities (Carless, 2022), that is why communicative activities should be planned and designed properly, so they can offer an effective learning environment. If there is a lack of motivation, the students will not be able to continue with the learning process and achieve that proficiency, but if there is a high motivation it will be useful for learners even if the learning conditions are not appropriate (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). Through different activities such as games, pair work, small group work, and role plays, learners can develop self-confidence and reduce the stress focussing on the speaking skill. That is why, appropriate activities for oral communication are important in a class, these activities should be based on real life situations to improve learners' performance.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is a process where learners can judge their academic work, and this allows students to reflect upon their learning, performance, ability or progress (Moheidat & Baniabdelrahman, 2011). It is important to mention there is a difference between self-evaluation and self-assessment, the first one is used as a revision, the second one involves students grading their work.

Tholin (2008) defined self-assessment as an element of autonomous learning, helping learners to develop responsibility, gain more confidence and find motivation. Gardner and

Miller (1999) stated: “self-assessment as a self-monitoring device which provides learners with immediate feedback on their language proficiency and learning strategies” (p. 49). Self-assessment can be used as a tool for evaluation.

Zimmerman (2002) believed that if learners get engaged in self-assessment, they can transform their inabilities into academic skills. Learners are always self-assessing, thinking how good they did an essay, or reviewing a test before ending it.

Self-assessment should be embedded in the curriculum so that students can achieve desirable outcomes, developing skills and strategies for meaningful self-assessment (Brown & Harris, 2014; Yan, 2020). In addition, “the self-assessment process not only makes learning more effective, but also provides students with plenty of learning opportunities” (Yan & Boud, 2022, p.17). Remembering that most of the successful learners are the ones who are in charge of their own learning.

Despite all of these benefits, self-assessment has some limitations such as the different behaviors that are likely to happen depending on the assessment types, the misuse of feedback, and instructing people on desirable learning strategies is generally insufficient. (McDaniel & Einstein, 2020). Promoting accurate self-assessment will depend on the honesty of the students, the correct intervention and the willingness to change.

In order to train students to use the strategy, the lesson plan includes different techniques and the students are going to practice through different situations, talk about experiences to gain fluency, and receive feedback after every activity. According to Tomlinson's (2017) fifth principle, that stated “that the learners are given plentiful opportunities to use the language for communication”(p. 9). Interaction and meaningful communication are essential to stimulate the opinions, reactions and expressions among students.

There is a four-stage model that can be applied in a student's self-assessment. The first stage is to define the criteria that is going to be used. Second, students have to learn how to apply the criteria on their own work. Third, the students receive feedback about their self-assessment. Finally, the last stage is to guide the students to develop their action plans according to the goals (Rolheiser & Ross, 2001).

According to Indahyanti and Mursidin (2017), providing helpful information related to students' skills related to a learning process is known as feedback, and it is an important part of their learning process, that is why feedback is an important part of students life, providing explanations on their mistakes, and positive feedback when something is accurate, remembering that the idea of feedback is to leave a mark on students and encourage them to overcome any situation.

Good feedback helps learners to improve and achieve their goals, gaining motivation and developing a better understanding. Benati and Angelovska (2016) explained, "Output practice should help learners to use the target language for a specific purpose and intent rather than simply learning by rote" (p. 12). The learning practice can be maximized if feedback from teachers or peers is provided, however, external feedback can reveal biases, which might have a negative impact on academic achievement (Panadero et al., 2019).

Innovation

Through the lesson that I carried out, the students learned how to self-assess explaining first the importance of self-assessment, and started using checklists to assess themselves. This study was developed over 2 weeks. During this innovation, pre- and post-activity were taken into account. Each week had 4 hours divided from Monday to Friday, all the activities were developed through synchronous class hours. See the plan in Appendix 1.

The transfer goal was to learn phrasal verbs, linking words, and use them in improving speaking skills. During the first part of the plan, participants did different activities

that could be self-assessed, they recorded voice notes and videos. During the second part of the class, they discussed different topics using linking words and useful phrasal verbs. To finish with the post-test, they discussed the topic, provided information, and added ideas about what they thought. So that in the long run and on their own, they will be able to use phrasal verbs and the vocabulary learned to communicate and discuss a point of interest.

The students assessed themselves three times through recordings of different tasks as a practice. The students used a checklist for the assessment. It was based on the use of new grammar and appropriate vocabulary, the ability to interact by asking and answering good questions, and good pronunciation.

The students learned how to use the checklist and self-assess class by class with the teacher's help. The recorded discussion was sent through Google Classroom, after each recording feedback was provided.

All the activities the students did increased the difficulty in each intervention. This helped them find a relation between what the teacher explained and the implementation in real life. The checklist evaluated 5 categories with; Yes, Sometimes, and, No yet answer. The checklist was adapted following the CEFR B1 level.

Research Methodology

Brown and Larson-Hall (2012) summarized, "Explicit instruction plus lots of opportunities for practice lead to the greatest gains" (p. 148). Thus, this is an action research study because it allows change and improvement within the activities. It also helps students to engage with their practice. For the study, quantitative and qualitative information was collected to measure the changes. The study was carried out with a pre-post design. Stratton (2019) said that, pre-test and post-test design is "a form of experimental research that allows for uncomplicated assessment of an intervention applied to a group of study participants (p.574)". Data was collected through rubrics, the Pre-test and Post-test.

Since this study aimed at finding out the impact of self-assessment on learners' speaking proficiency, the following research questions were investigated:

RQ1: To what extent does self-assessment improve speaking fluency?

RQ2: What difficulties did students face while having a conversation?

Context and Participants

This research was undertaken in a private school in Daule, Ecuador. The participants were 14 students between 14 and 16 years old during the year 2023-2024. Their English level ranged between A1 to B1 which was confirmed using an online Cambridge placement test. Some students were new in the institution and rarely received English in their previous schools, that is why three of them were placed at the A1 level.

Instruments

Student's Survey

After each activity, feedback was provided through surveys using Google Forms, in this feedback participants answered some open-ended questions in order to gather the information during the process and obtain qualitative data. The questions helped them identify where and how they were going to improve the next time they were asked to record themselves.

Pre- and post-test

The students recorded two videos that were used as a speaking test and were evaluated through a rubric. The pre-test was a preliminary English test (PET) part 3, students had two minutes to discuss a topic given by the interlocutor and to record themselves. On the other hand, the post-test that was recorded at the end of the implementation had similar instructions as the pre-test. In this post-test, the preliminary English test (PET) part 4 was used. To calculate the student's speaking fluency improvement in the pre- and post-test video, a rubric (Appendix 2) was used, based on the Cambridge rubrics for assessing speaking

performance. The rubric had a range from 5 the highest to 1 the lowest. This instrument has been adapted based on the Cambridge Rubric PET: B1 level.

Data Analysis

All the information in the study was collected through an Excel spreadsheet, all the data was tabulated in order to compare it at the end of the study. To check for significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores, paired *t*-tests were used. The data analysis included tables to summarize basic descriptive statistics such as the mean, median, percentages and standard deviation.

To answer the question: What difficulties did students face while having a conversation? The students completed a Google form with a series of questions about the difficulties they faced during the pre-test and the post-test, later that information was gathered and organized to get all the ideas and comments the students had.

Ethical Considerations

During this study, some ethical considerations were carried out, to make sure that this research is safe for all the subjects. They included getting authorization, communicating participants, confidentiality, and academic honesty. The first part was sending a letter to ask for permission from the institution to carry out the innovation.

According to Chowdhury (2014), research ethics are a set of principles about how researchers and research organizations should conduct themselves when dealing with participants, other researchers and colleagues. Especially if we are working with human beings, in this case students.

During the study the researchers must be sure that is a non-harmful procedure, the informed consent from the child or parent should be complete, because the investigator should respect the child's freedom to choose if he wants to be part of the process or not.

Also, the anonymity of the records is important. Data was not disclosed, instead all the information was kept confidential and used for the purpose of the research.

Results

In answering the research question: *To what extent does self-assessment improve speaking fluency?*, a *t*-test was run to ensure the variance, and check the differences of the values at the different stages of the study.

The information was analyzed and shown in table 1; *t*-test showed a significant difference between pre-implementation (M=11.53, SD=4.17) and post implementation (M=14.32, SD=3.21) with an impact on students scores, showing a significance, less than 0.005; demonstrated that the improvements were due to the implementation. The results suggest that students improved their speaking fluency due to the implementation of self-assessment.

Table 1.

Paired Sample t-test Results for Pre- and Post-test

	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Sig(P)
Pre-test	14	5	17	11.53	4.17	
Post-test	14	9	18.5	14.32	3.21	0.00

Note: N= sample; M= mean; Sd= standard deviation; Sig(P): Significance

Table 2 shows aspects evaluated through the rubric, to calculate the student's speaking fluency improvement before and after the implementation. The rubric focused on four aspects of speaking: grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, interactive communication. Table 2 compares scores of pre- and post-test. The grades increased more than 0.5 in each aspect and checking the *p*-value, it was statistically proven that it was thanks to the practices, self-assessment and recording the interaction.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics in every aspect

	N	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	p-Value
Grammar and Vocabulary	14	2.89	3.39	0.00
Discourse Management	14	2.92	3.78	0.00
Pronunciation	14	3.07	3.60	0.00
Interactive Communication	14	2.71	3.53	0.00

Note: N= sample;

Finally, to answer the second research question, “What difficulties did students face while having a conversation?” A survey was carried out, based on the rubrics, checklist and feedback provided by the teacher.

The questions in the survey were asked before and after the innovation. Randomly, seven students were selected to complete the survey.

Before intervention:

Question N1: *what are your aspirations for this intervention?*

Almost 70% of the students mentioned that they were a little anxious and afraid of speaking English in front of their classmates due to mockery or mispronunciation of the words. A student stated, “*My classmates always make fun of me, that is why I do not want to talk in front of them*”

Question N2: *do you think it is important to be honest during the intervention?*

The students' answers to these questions were positive because they wanted to improve their performance and said that in order to improve everything, they needed to be as honest as possible.

Question N3: *Are you willing to put all your effort and attention during the classes?*

Only a couple of students answered the question without commitment, but the rest of them were willing to learn. A student stated, *"I know that this will help me get better grades and lose the fear of speaking in public"*

After the intervention:

Question N1: *Name one of the most important things you learned during classes.*

The students mentioned that what they found as the most important part was the self-assessment part, because they can apply that in different stages of their life. A student stated, *"Using self-assessment, I discovered my weak points and started working on improving them"*

Question N2: *Do you think you had enough preparation for the post-test?*

The students agreed that they had enough preparation thanks to the materials provided and the practices they did during the classes. A student said, *"The only problem was to learn how to apply the rubrics and being honest or objective at the same time"*.

Question N3: *What did you like about the classes/intervention?*

Most of them were happy with the outcome of the innovation and how they had the freedom to choose topics of interest and the different strategies or games they experienced through the learning process. One student said, *"I did not know that we could learn through fun activities"* another student stated, *"I felt comfortable talking about topics I like"*

Question N4: *Would you use self-assessment in different speaking activities?*

Most of them raised their confidence due to the self-assessment, even though they found it a little difficult at the beginning. They ended up using the process in other subjects such as social studies and arts.

Discussion

The implementation of self-assessment in this research study and the recording of the dialogues and discussions, using self-assessment, proved that through this innovation the

learners' speaking proficiency improved and raised their self-confidence in their oral production. Based on the results of the post-test, it is proved that the participants improved their speaking performance, demonstrating that through repetitions, meaningful activities and self-assessment A1 - B1 level students could improve their speaking fluency. The result of this study also supported the use of self-assessment for learning processes, proving its validity.

To answer research question number one, about self-assessment, Thornbury (2007) mentioned that in different language classrooms, students have restricted opportunities to participate in the interactive uses of languages, through the classes we identified that had lack of participation and started using different techniques to engage students in the activities. During the implementation all the students gained more confidence to talk in English, despite the errors they could say, teacher's feedback contributed to reduce the frustration the student showed at the beginning. The rubric and checklist used, helped them to reflect on their own work with honesty and ended up being an ally on their learning process.

To answer research question number two, the students that were surveyed demonstrated that they could improve their performance and gained enough confidence to start conversations in English, and started using more vocabulary and phrasal verbs learned. Students said that the practices and teacher's feedback helped them a lot during the process, as well as the self-assessment enhanced responsibility for their learning.

Conclusions

As stated in the introduction, due to the problem found, lack of speaking fluency, this study attempted to check the effects of self-assessment on learner's oral production. Just like other techniques, self-assessment has positive effects on the learners' independence. The intervention was a Master's degree project which objective was to improve the speaking performance of a group of 14 students. At the end of the intervention, all the results were

compared and contrasted with the previous studies, leading to a positive outcome, enhancing students competencies related to grammar and vocabulary, discourse management, pronunciation, and interactive communication.

This intervention demonstrated that teachers can apply self-assessment to help students improve their speaking performance. Besides this was a new process, all students learned about it and started using it correctly, they felt more confident to participate in classes and grade their own work. The pre- and post-tests results showed learning improvement outcomes and evidenced the importance of planning and feedback. Despite the limited time for the intervention, it was proved that recording monologues and discussions, teacher's feedback and self-assessment improved student's oral performance and helped them to feel more confident about what they know.

Limitations

Throughout the implementation of the pedagogical innovation, the most important limitation we faced was the way the classes were conducted, using the traditional way of teaching, some students felt too tired and bored to participate in that teacher centered mode, until the techniques were taught, and they understood they could be autonomous in their learning.

Recommendations

Some recommendations considered by the researcher are: First, to use a rubric, because it helped students pay attention only on what was necessary. Second, self-assessment fostered reflection on students, this can be applied not only in English but in every subject and situation.

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Appendix 1**Lesson Plan**

Available upon request.

Appendix 2**Rubric for Speaking Skill**

Available upon request.

Appendix 3**Checklist**

Available upon request.

Appendix 4**Transcripts of surveys**

Available upon request.

Appendix 5**Grades**

Available upon request.

Appendix 6**E-portfolio link**

Available upon request.