



Self-Assessment to Improve Speaking Skills in a Private Higher Education

Institute

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Research Report

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Effective communication skills, particularly in the area of speaking, are indispensable for academic and professional success (Yaseen et al., 2021). However, university students often face significant challenges in developing and demonstrating proficiency in this skill (Andrade, 2009). In this research study, students from a private college institute in Guayaquil found obstacles in producing and interacting during speaking activities, resulting in unsatisfactory performance in final evaluations.

One of the primary factors contributing to the difficulties faced by these students is the limited time available for focused speaking practice. Typically, they have only one month of speaking classes within their academic curriculum. Moreover, many of these students lead demanding lives, working in the mornings and attending classes at night. Consequently, they often struggle to allocate sufficient time and energy towards improving their speaking abilities.

The evidence of these difficulties are apparent in the students' performance during final evaluations. Despite their strong academic knowledge, their inadequate speaking skills hinder their ability to express themselves, engage in discussions, and convey their understanding of the subject matter. These shortcomings impact their grades, diminish their confidence, and hinder their prospects in future academic and professional activities. Hence, in this research project, it is proposed self-assessment as a strategy to improve students' speaking skills.

Literature Review

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In this literature review, it will be developed the basic concepts in order to understand this innovation: self-assessment, speaking skills and factors that affect reliability and effectiveness of self-assessment. This section explores various concepts using academic sources. Furthermore, definitions, past research, and its pros and cons were also considered here.

Speaking Skills

Speaking skills in language acquisition enable learners to engage in meaningful communication and express their thoughts (Saeed et al., 2016). According to Dos Santos and Ramírez-Ávila (2022), speaking proficiency is not only a fundamental aspect of language learning but also a key indicator of communicative competence. Shumin (2002) manifested that the development of speaking skills involves linguistic knowledge and the ability to apply this knowledge in real-life interactions, taking into account cultural nuances, pragmatic conventions, and social contexts. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of speaking practice in enhancing fluency, accuracy, and overall communicative effectiveness (Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2023). By focusing on speaking skills within the language learning process, educators can better support learners in becoming confident and proficient communicators in the target language (Sugiarto & Mega, 2020).

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment has emerged as a tool in facilitating active involvement and ownership among language learners, allowing them to evaluate their own progress and identify areas for improvement (Gillespie & Grishaeva, 2022). As highlighted by Coombe et al. (2020), self-assessment promotes learner autonomy and empowers individuals to take control over their own learning journey. A study from Duque and Cuesta (2017) reported the positive effects of self-assessment on language learning outcomes in a higher education

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setting. Particularly, there is a relation to enhanced motivation, increased learner engagement, and improved metacognitive awareness when this strategy is applied (Sintayani & Adnyayanti, 2022).

Reliability and Effectiveness of Self-Assessment

Andrade (2019) indicated that self-assessment contributes to more engaged and focused learners, who are better equipped to gauge their own advancements in terms of communication. Moreover, Ortega et al. (2022) discovered that self-assessment reduces the gap between perceived and actual proficiencies, minimizing instances of overconfidence or underestimating one's abilities. Furthermore, self-assessment enables students to scaffold their knowledge across multiple language skills, developing a holistic understanding of their strengths and weaknesses (Jamrus & Razali, 2019). Consequently, learners are encouraged to adopt a proactive stance toward their own learning, fostering long-term commitment and resilience in their pursuit of language mastery (Ma & Winke, 2019).

Tools for Self-Assessment

Checklists and rubrics are used for self-assessment. They offer structured frameworks for evaluating student performance and provide actionable feedback (Vasileiadou & Karadimitriou, 2021). Checklists, as described by Ukrayinska (2020), focus on the presence of specific elements in a performance, providing a straightforward way to assess whether criteria have been met. On the other hand, rubrics, as outlined by Dang and Le (2023), offer a more detailed evaluation by describing different levels of achievement across multiple criteria. Rubrics use descriptors to assess student mastery and performance levels, aiding in the provision of clear and comprehensive feedback (Hovsepyan, 2015). While checklists are effective for simpler assignments, rubrics are better suited for more complex tasks, allowing

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for a nuanced assessment of student work. These tools guide self-assessment and enhance students' understanding of expectations and facilitate continuous improvement (Huang, 2016).

Therefore, utilizing self-assessment as a tool can greatly improve the results of language learning. According to Birjandi and Tamjid (2010), this method increases learner motivation, engagement and independence. With the use of these techniques in education settings educators are able to foster an environment that encourages constant growth and development among students ultimately ensuring their continued commitment to learning languages (Munoz & Álvarez, 2007).

Authors who Applied Self-Assessment with Speaking Skills

The chart below summarizes authors and their research findings in regards to self-assessment and speaking. It is organized into the following categories: author, their research title alongside the method(s) applied to obtain information, and the results they got.

Table 1

Authors that Applied Self-assessment with Speaking Skills

Author	Research/Method	Results
Mendoza, M. P. M., & Ramírez-Avila, R. (2022).	“Self-Assessment to Improve Speaking Skills: a Brief Action research”/Quantitative and Qualitative	Students' anxiety about speaking is reduced, leading to them gaining the ability to evaluate their own speaking skills. In general, the students showed a better attitude as the unit progressed in contrast to the start. Mendoza and Ramírez-Avila (2022) observed a shift from doubt in the initial test to greater self-assurance in the final test through recorded data.
Alfianti, M. (2022).	The use of self-assessment in evaluating EFL students' speaking skills/ Quantitative	The implementation of the self-assessment of students' video recordings has positive effect for the students to improve their speaking performance in general (Alfianti, 2022).

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Cañete, G., & Inostroza-Araos, M.-J. (2022)	“Exploring the Contribution of Self-Assessment Checklists”/ Qualitative	People who used the self-assessment checklist did better on their presentations, especially on the checklist itself. People at first rated themselves lower than the official scores, but most official scores went up after using the checklist. They also felt less anxious and more confident after using it. Finally, the checklist helped people learn about themselves, find ways to improve on their own, and think about their skills for the future (Cañete & Inostroza-Araos, 2022).
Alghanmi, B. F. (2023).	The Impact of Self-Assessment on Saudi Arabian Students' Achievement, Self-Regulated Learning, and Critical Thinking in an EFL Speaking Classroom/ Quantitative and Qualitative	According to Alghanmi (2023), “the findings in this research indicate that the learners, who are used to traditional assessment and teacher-centered learning, are now more receptive to new strategies” (p.190).

Innovation

The lesson plan designed for this innovation was applied to 16 adult students from the Business Administration career from a private institution from Guayaquil. According to the Council of Europe (2018), their proficiency level was A1, as they were students who worked in the mornings and attended classes at night. The intervention lasted two weeks to be applied. Per week, they had just 2 hours of classes. Unit 1 was applied from their textbook, which was the one employed for the whole innovation.

Self-assessment and speaking skills were chosen for this group of students. The only materials they used were their textbooks, notebooks, whiteboard and the projector of the classroom. Besides, there were some materials that were brought by the teachers. For example there were anchor objects, such as word puzzles or drawings, flashcards, Plicker cards and worksheets.

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On the first day of the first week, there was a review of basic vocabulary words, as well as basic greeting expressions, the verb “to be” and the simple present tense. On the same day, they were taught about the use of the checklist, with some examples provided by Gemini AI, which is a large language model chatbot for research and educational purposes (2024).

On the second day, the lesson plan began with a fun pronunciation game followed by an explanation of its importance in communication. Students were introduced to the typical pronunciation difficulties associated with their' native language, as they used flashcards to demonstrate the correct way to pronounce words. Individual checks and interactive quizzes reinforced learning, while the teacher provided support and addressed difficulties. Finally, students practiced through short presentations and self-assess using a checklist, receiving feedback the next day. Also, the Pre-test was applied to the whole class during that second day.

After having explained to the students about how to use the checklist, their performance was scored through the rubrics previously designed. Then, from the third day until the sixth day, students practiced each of the aspects from the checklist.

The two-hour lesson from those days (day 3 until day 7) were about business administration vocabulary, numbers from 0-10, use of simple present tense (including verb to be), grammar related to preposition of places and tips for clear pronunciation. Every class started with a Plickers poll to gauge students' understanding. Key terms were then introduced with visuals and modeled sentences, followed by individual and group comprehension checks. A collaborative Quizziz review reinforced learning, and students practiced by creating video dialogues using the vocabulary in the platform Flipgrid. Self-assessment and teacher feedback on Flipgrid concluded every session.

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On the last day, students prepared for a one-minute video resume using Flipgrid, this was considered as a Post-test. A Mentimeter poll gauged their preferred job application method and desired company. Blooket reviewed key grammar and vocabulary, followed by an introduction to video resume phrases and structures using Bamboozle flashcards and examples. A comprehension check ensured understanding, leading up to the actual video recording. As part of their Module 1 Speaking grade from their Institute, students submitted their presentations, which were assessed based on their use of simple present tense, business administration vocabulary, clear pronunciation, and communication skills. Feedback was provided by the teacher the following day.

Research Methodology

This section details the research methodology employed in this study, investigating the impact of self-assessment on speaking skills in a business administration context. The research design follows the principles of Action Research, an iterative, cyclical approach that emphasizes reflection, collaboration, and action within a specific context. Through this framework, the study aimed to assess the intervention and to refine it based on the participants' experiences.

The study focused on several key variables related to speaking skills:

- Business administration vocabulary: Operationalized as the students' ability to accurately use vocabulary terms relevant to business administration contexts.
- Numbers from 0-10: Described as the students' capacity to accurately utilize and comprehend numerical and written forms ranging from 0 to 10.
- Simple present tense (including verb to be): The students' capability to correctly create and use simple present tense verb forms, including the verb "to be,"

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- Grammar related to prepositions of place: Described as the students' capacity to accurately use prepositions in order to demonstrate spatial connections.
- Clear pronunciation: In this category, students should speak clearly and completely understandable, focusing on mistakes that are related to pronunciation and intonation.
- Organized and interesting content: Students focused on the way they either persuade or inform other students and the teacher.

Qualitative and Quantitative methods were used to obtain information from students. Pre-test and Post-test were employed to obtain quantitative data. Prayoga (2018) mentioned that with this procedure, it could evaluate any change in speaking skills during any intervention.

Meanwhile, field notes were taken while students to obtain qualitative information. These notes were taken while implementing the innovation, including the students behavior during the self-assessment. Additionally, as Masruria (2021) manifested, these tools offered a better understanding of how students experienced and viewed the self-assessment.

In this research, two research questions were proposed according to Yahaya and Madzland concepts (2021). The quantitative question mentioned to what extent does the use of self-assessment improve speaking skills. This question was answered by analyzing and comparing the scores from pre-test and post-test data. On the other hand, the qualitative question asked what were students' limitations on self-assessment during the implementation. Likewise, in a similar research from Suparlan (2021), field notes, surveys and interviews were analyzed thoroughly so the results may show possible obstacles and opportunities.

Participants

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In this innovation, 16 students from a private institute in Guayaquil participated without problems. The students' English proficiency level, A1, was determined by using proficiency tests in accordance with the Council of Europe (2018). The intervention was developed at the institute located in the northern part of the city. The students in the Business Administration program were together with other students from other careers. The participants took class in one single classroom, their age ranged from 18 to 40 years old. Most of them worked during the day and only had a limited amount of time in the evening to study. The sample consisted of 11 females and 5 males.

Instruments

For this research, it was important to establish valid and reliable instruments as proposed by Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008). Pre-test and Post-test were important to obtain quantitative data, while field notes, surveys, and interviews were crucial to obtain qualitative data. Furthermore, both the Pre-test and Post-test were assessed using the analytical rubric that was created for this intervention.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the first research question and to accept or reject the stated hypothesis of this study, a paired *t*-test will be completed. The paired sample *t*-test allows for a contrast between pre-test and post-test (Dahiru, 2008). The analysis was done in Microsoft Excel using Analytics Tools Pack, taking into account descriptive statistics such as mean, mode, median, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation. Also, inferential statistics (*p* value) was calculated in this analysis.

In order to answer the second research question, the answers were obtained from the field notes, surveys and interviews. The information obtained from these instruments was

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used to better understand and to complement students' results in pretest and posttest. All the answers were read and classified into two categories: limitations and improvements. Some quotes will be used to complement the interpretation of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Govil (2013) stated that “a researcher is also responsible to the research community or colleagues. Research community to a researcher involves teachers, administrators, school managers and others working in this area” (p. 20). This research adhered to ethical guidelines by ensuring that the students were informed about the publication of the study's findings. Since all the students involved were more than 18 years old, there was no requirement to inform their legal representatives. Additionally, the institute administrators, coordinators from the research and language center, and the program coordinator were provided with information regarding the study and the utilization of the gathered data.

Results

The results obtained after the analyze the quantitative data for the first research question are:

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for each Criterion

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>PRETEST</i>				<i>POSTTEST</i>				<i>p value</i>
		<i>MIN</i>	<i>MAX</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>MIN</i>	<i>MAX</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
<i>Vocabulary</i>	16	2	4	3.31	0.74	3.5	5	4.71	0.48	0.10
<i>Grammar</i>	16	3	5	3.43	0.89	3	5	4.59	0.69	0.10
<i>Pronunciation and Organization</i>	16	3	5	3.06	0.85	3	5	4.12	0.53	0.14

Note: N = Sample MIN = Minimum MAX = Maximum M = Mean SD = Standard Deviation

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Table 2 shows the values of each criterion in the rubric that was used to grade the pretest and posttest. The first criterion considered in the rubric was Vocabulary. The increase between the pretest and posttest means in regards Vocabulary is 1.4 points. The standard deviation for Vocabulary is higher in posttest than in pretest, indicating a greater dispersion in the results of the posttest, as its difference is 0.18 points. For the Grammar criterion, the mean is slightly higher in posttest than in pretest, but the difference is not as marked as in the case of vocabulary; the difference between the means is 0.18 points. The standard deviation for this category indicates that it is higher in posttest than in pretest, although the difference is smaller than in the case of vocabulary; the difference in standard deviation is 0.21 points. Finally, the last category was Pronunciation and Organization. The increase in the mean was 1.06 points between the pretest and the posttest. In general, these results indicated that the intervention had a positive impact on each aspect evaluated during this intervention. The variables Vocabulary and Pronunciation and Organization show significant differences between the pretest and posttest, while the variable grammar only presents a significant difference in posttest.

Table 3

Pretest and Posttest Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>p value</i>
<i>Pretest</i>	16	6.00	14	9.81	2.26	0.00
<i>Posttest</i>	16	10.5	15	13.44	1.47	

Note: N = Sample MIN = Minimum MAX = Maximum M = Mean SD = Standard Deviation

In table 3, the pretest and posttest total rubric was compared. The average score on the posttest (13.44) is significantly higher than the average score on the pretest (9.81). This indicates an overall improvement in performance after the intervention. The standard

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deviation is smaller for the posttest scores (1.47) compared to the pretest scores (2.26). This suggests that the scores became more clustered around the mean after the intervention, indicating a decrease in the spread of scores. Regarding the p value, the results are lower than 0.05, which means that the results are statistically significant. Taking into account the results presented in Table 2, these results support that the use of self-assessment helps students to improve their speaking skills, which leads to a positive impact on the group's performance, as evidenced by the significant increase in the average score and the decrease in the spread of scores.

Regarding the second research question about the limitations of the students with the innovation, the data obtained from the participants showed that pronunciation and vocabulary were areas in which they were limited. Students mentioned that self-assessment helped them to detect those limitations and improve in those areas. Some of the answers were:

"I realized through self-assessment that my pronunciation was a limitation for me. The recordings made me aware of specific sounds I struggled with, and it motivated me to work on improving my pronunciation." (Participant 1)

"I learned that I need to learn more words. The self-assessment activities made me more conscious of the words I was limited to. Also, it showed me where I need to improve, and now I am working on it." (Participant 2)

The feedback from the participants indicates that using checklists after they practiced each day helped them identify specific limitations in their speaking skills and target areas for improvement. Participant 1 noted that reviewing recordings through a checklist made them aware of particular sounds they struggled with in pronunciation. This awareness motivated them to work on improving their pronunciation. Similarly, Participant 2 mentioned that the self-assessment checklists increased their understanding of vocabulary words they had

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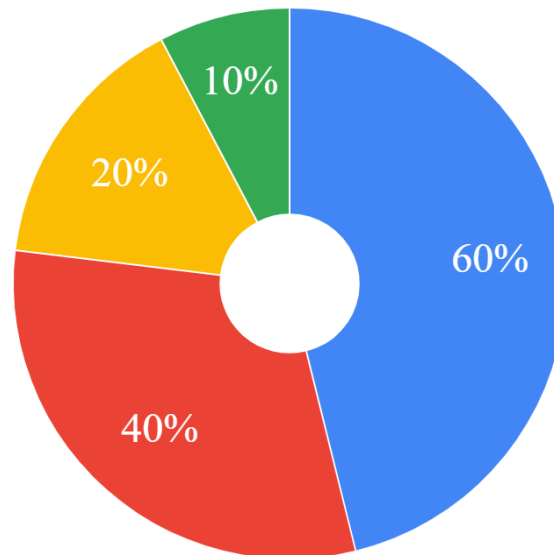
limitations with. It also provided clear guidance on aspects needing development. This guidance empowered them to address their identified limitations.

Participants were asked on which criteria they felt that they had improved after the intervention was conducted. The results are shown in Graphic 1.

Graphic 1

Distribution of responses

- I can speak with clear pronunciation.
- I can apply vocabulary related to business administration and preposition of places
- I can use simple present tense (including verb to be)
- My content is organized and interesting



Comparing Graphic 1 and Table 2, it is suggested that students found pronunciation (60%) and vocabulary (40%) to be the most challenging aspects after the intervention. This can be compared to the pre-test scores where vocabulary and grammar had similar average scores (3.31 and 3.43 respectively), potentially indicating a shift in difficulty perception after the intervention focused on those areas. While there is improvement, the post-test results and student feedback highlight pronunciation as an area requiring continued attention. This aligns with the distribution of responses, where a high percentage of students found pronunciation the criteria that they have improved the most.

Regarding the difficulty for the innovation, most students manifested that they did not have any problem applying self-assessment in their monologues. However, they were asked

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about any other way of improvement that may be useful along with self-assessment. These were some of their answers:

“Apart from the checklist, it would be great that someone else could evaluate us and also evaluate others, so that we would have more opinions on what we could use or improve on what we are right or wrong”. (Participant 3).

“Knowing how to write correctly or taking dictation in English could be on the list for us to evaluate ourselves”. (Participant 4).

Although students felt that the innovation had a positive impact on their production, they thought that there could be more ways to enhance their speaking skills along with the checklist. This information helped to discover the limitations and improvements that this intervention had.

Discussion

The findings of this intervention, along with the studies by Mendoza et al. (2022) and Cañete and Inostroza-Araos (2022), indicate a positive impact of self-assessment on speaking skills. Specifically, there was a reported improvement in areas like vocabulary and grammar, aligning with Alfianti’s findings (2022). After the statistical analysis conducted to answer the first research question, it is suggested a quantitative improvement in speaking skills after using self-assessment tools.

In regards to the second research question, field notes, surveys and interviews demonstrated that students faced limitations in areas such as pronunciation and vocabulary awareness. However, through self-reflection and recordings, students became more aware of their pronunciation errors, which aligns to Jamrus and Razali findings (2019). This qualitative insight sheds light on specific limitations students encountered during the self-assessment

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process. Similar to Alghanmi (2023), students were more receptive to new strategies that can lead to an improvement in their oral performance.

Conclusion

The findings of this intervention align with the broader research on self-assessment and its positive impact on speaking skills. It also meant to answer two research questions, a quantitative and a qualitative one. The quantitative question asked about to what extent does the use of self-assessment improve speaking skills. The qualitative question asked what were students' limitations on self-assessment during the implementation.

Concerning the quantitative question, self-evaluation did enhance speaking abilities in various manners. Students said that their pronunciation, vocabulary, and overall spoken language organization improved as a result. Analysis of pre-test and post-test scores indicates progress in all areas evaluated, with vocabulary experiencing the largest gain. The results align with previous research, demonstrating how self-assessment can enhance students' confidence, promote self-reflection, and enhance their oral communication abilities.

With respect to the qualitative question, students identified certain constraints that need to be considered. Even though self-assessment was helpful, a few students struggled to determine particular areas in need of improvement. This emphasizes the importance of receiving assistance and encouragement to utilize self-assessment tools and strategies effectively. Besides, the study's restricted time frame may have impacted students' complete development of their self-assessment abilities.

Limitations

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This innovation recognizes specific constraints. One potential limitation could be the limited sample size and its impact on the ability to draw broader conclusions. Moreover, the brief intervention time frame may not entirely reflect the lasting effects of self-assessment on oral communication abilities.

Recommendations

In future studies, it is suggested to explore larger and more varied samples to enhance the generalizability of results and gain a better insight into the effectiveness of self-assessment among diverse student groups.

The long-term impacts of self-evaluation need to be studied. Research with extended intervention durations or longitudinal methodologies can investigate the enduring effects of self-evaluation on speaking abilities and students' oral performance.

Finally, it would be effective to integrate self-evaluation with other tactics. Research could investigate how combining self-evaluation with additional learning methods like peer feedback or technology-supported pronunciation exercises can result in a more holistic method for enhancing speaking abilities.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Grades

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Consent Letters

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

E-portfolio

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

Diagnostic Questions

Available upon request.