



Peer Feedback of Students' Recorded Descriptions to Improve Speaking Skills

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In today's global world, English importance cannot be denied or ignored since this language is commonly spoken worldwide. It is used for many situations, such as business, culture, travel, government, and education. In the field of education, many countries include English in their school syllabus, and students start to learn English from six years old because it can help students to study abroad, increase their career opportunities, get a job in international companies, have a good salary or meet people around the world (Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador, 2016).

For these reasons, in 2016, the Ecuadorian government implemented English as a subject in public schools with a new curriculum, according to Ecuadorian needs. This curriculum goes from second to tenth grade of Basic General Education and from 1st to 3rd grade of Unified General Baccalaureate. It focuses on communicative, social and thinking skills to engage students to use the language in different situations. Topics are presented according to their age, needs and real-life to get a B1 level when they graduate. Sublevels are also stated on international standards (Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador, 2016).

In an interview, Rachel Baker, EF (Education First) Academic Director, explained that even though the government has implemented a new curriculum to improve English in the classrooms, level B1 has not been accomplished in Ecuador (Paucar, 2016). One reason for this, as Qutbi and Bashir (2013) mentioned in their research, is that teachers mostly practice traditional teaching methods. They focus on reading and writing skills, but productive skills, such as speaking, are not practiced as much as they should.

Also, Irawati (2016) reported that “many EFL learners have such personality problems; for instance, they are not confident, reluctant, and afraid of practicing and

using their English” (p. 46). In other words, most of the time, learners are afraid of making mistakes; they feel nervous about speaking English and lack vocabulary.

In the same way, Espinoza (2019), in a previous study about Peer feedback and its effect on speaking skills using Bubbly, stated that “one of the biggest limitations in EFL teaching and learning in countries such as Ecuador is that there are not enough opportunities to use the language outside the classroom” (p. 4). Similarly, Richards (2014) remarked that “time limitations; the school curriculum may only allow for a few hours for English instruction per week” (p. 2). In other words, students use L2 just for 40 or 50 minutes in English classes (inside the classroom) with the teacher and classmates. Therefore, they do not do it outside the school because they meet with people like friends, relatives or family who speak only Spanish and they do not know English. Another limitation that exists in our country, and teachers must face every day, is the number of students in public schools. It surpasses the average of 50 students per class. Richards (2014) claimed that “unfavorable class-size; classes of 50 or more represent lack of opportunities for authentic communication” (p. 2).

On the other hand, there are other researches, like Technology in teaching speaking skills (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014) and Improving the speaking skills of grade VIII students of SMP Negeri 2 Godean through pictures (Ginusti, 2014), which emphasized that the best way to enhance language proficiency and improve speaking skills in the students is using attractive tools and strategies. Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014) stated that technology engages and provides opportunities for students to have self-paced interactions, privacy and a safe environment in which feedback can be given. Also, Ginusti (2014) pointed out that pictures stimulate and guide the students to speak. They develop students’ imagination and interests to express ideas and make the learning process more exciting and entertaining.

In conclusion, there are some limitations that teachers and students have to face in an English class in Ecuador. This situation is reflected at a public high school in the city of Cuenca, where third-year students should get B1 when they graduate. This means that students in the lowest levels or courses must reach, at least, an A2 level at the end of the year. Nevertheless, on the final English grades of the school year 2019-2020, only 2% of students who passed to first and second years reached the B1 level; 20%, A2; and 78%, A1. This also showed that the lowest skill was speaking.

This study proposes that students describe pictures and give peer feedback using the app Showbie to determine if students improve their oral production. Thus, they can talk freely in a relaxing and exciting learning environment, leaving behind the stress and worry. Therefore, there are two research questions for this study:

1. To what extent do descriptions and peer feedback of the recordings improve speaking?
2. What are students' difficulties during this process?

Literature Review

This section includes some authors' definitions that demonstrate that describing pictures can improve spoken production abilities. The topics are spoken production abilities, pronunciation, fluency, describing pictures, vocabulary, peer feedback and Showbie; and the subtopics are the core principles established by the Ministry of Education of Ecuador (2016).

Spoken Production Abilities

According to Brown (1994), speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information. This skill lets people communicate with others by giving information, expressing opinions, feelings, or using it to express any real-life situation. Brown and Yule (1983) stated that

“speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real-life situations” (p. 96). It means that anytime an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) student faces situations where they need to speak, such as talking to someone else in person, answering questions, asking for information, among others. As a result, they must express all they want without memorizing phrases or expressions; this, because the conversation must seem spontaneous or unconscious (implicit learning acquisition), without nervousness or stress.

Likewise, Derakhshan et al. (2016), emphasized that "speaking is the production skill included in two main categories: accuracy and fluency. Accuracy consists of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation through some activities; fluency is the ability to speak spontaneously" (p. 178). In this sense, teachers must work with the two sections (accuracy supports the right pronunciation and the use of appropriate language, according to the situation and fluency favors the communication of practical ideas without confusion or a breakdown in the communication) and with authentic tasks or activities that actually work in real life.

Pronunciation.

According to Jahan's article (2011), “in the process of communication, pronunciation has great importance because successful communication takes place only with correct pronunciation” (p.36). This means that students' pronunciation of words and sentences must be clear and comprehensible in order to avoid misunderstandings in the ideas that they want to communicate or explain. Also, Jahan (2011) mentioned that “pronunciation includes supra-segmental features and they are: sounds of the language, stress and rhythm, intonation” (p.36). It refers to how students acquire the language and make it their own to expose real-life facts through communication. Likewise, it attributes to the correct pronunciation of vowels or letters (sound of language), the right

emphasis in the words to contrast one with another (stress), the speed in which words and sentences must be expressed, the short or long pronunciation (rhythm), and the use of the correct accent, according to the situation (intonation).

Similarly, one important element that Levis and Grant (2003) specified in their article is that teachers must integrate the pronunciation into the curriculum and show it in the speaking context. It can be accomplished by applying new and creative strategies, and these should be guided by the teachers through positive feedback to motivate students to improve their speaking skills easily.

Fluency.

On the other hand, Ramdani and Rahmat (2018), in their research called Promoting speaking spontaneity in large classes, argued that students can speak spontaneously using activities that they are familiarized with and according to their context and situation. In that sense, students can express themselves anytime without difficulty using some linguistic features that they know or have prior knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, or structured sentences.

Describing Pictures.

Nurdini (2018) demonstrated that “pictures can contribute a great deal to students in developing basic interactive skills that are necessary for life and at the same time can make their learning more meaningful and fun for them” (p. 162).

Likewise, Kano and Fardyansyah (2015) observed that "describing pictures can motivate the students to learn English, and it can help the teacher to make them interested and enjoy learning, especially speaking" (p. 93). In the same way, Nurdini (2018) mentioned that "pictures can be employed for very creative use in communicative language teaching” (p. 159).

Vocabulary.

Joklová (2009) remarked that “vocabulary teaching is one of the most important components of any language class. The main reason is that it is a medium, which carries meaning; learning to understand and express the meaning is what counts in learning languages” (p. 7). Consequently, vocabulary is an essential component to teach a new language due to increased production skills in students. Similarly, vocabulary helps to express correctly any situation. According to the context; its main purpose is to communicate different ideas, using the correct meanings and suiting the students’ level.

Peer Feedback.

Maarof et al. (2020) specified that “peer feedback is a learning strategy in which a student evaluates another student's work via feedback” (p.30). In other words, peer feedback is applied by students and used to express comments, judgements or advice about any task in order to enhance it. This way, students learn from each other and get a deeper understanding of the topic. Also, the authors remarked that “peer feedback is pitched more at the learner's level of development or interest and is therefore, more informative than teacher feedback” (p.31). Consequently, it motivates students to learn in a safe environment and gain the confidence to improve others’ performance since they show what they know without being afraid of making mistakes.

Showbie.

Chappelle (2005) emphasized in his research that "technology is changing the jobs of language teachers through the changes it prompts in the language itself, the opportunities for studying language, and the options available for teaching language." Nowadays, there are many platforms to teach and learn any language with interactive tools or activities; for example, Showbie. According to Bramm (2019), the creator of this platform, Showbie combines all the essential tools for assignment, feedback, and

communication to motivate and engage students to learn inside and outside the classroom.

Additionally, Bramm (2019) stated that Showbie lets students ask questions, evaluate, share, upload materials, pictures, videos, work with interesting and multifunctional tools, and make voice notes based on student learning and creativity. In the same way, teachers can provide instructions and resources for all students. Also, teachers can offer personalized feedback, connecting with each student in a way that is meaningful and individualized. This promotes confidence and ensures success in the teaching goals. It can be used in an iPad, tablet, cellphone, computer or any other technological device. This app aims to keep students' work organized and active, with the technology's actual learning process.

Core Principles.

The core principles mentioned by the Ministry of Education of Ecuador (2016) are based on the different learning styles, linguistic and cultural backgrounds that should be taken into account in the learning-teaching process. The learner-centered approach emphasizes the person who is doing the learning. Students are more active in their education; they construct their knowledge, make decisions, work collaboratively and monitor their learning. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) points out communication, production and understanding in a real context. Students can interact and use the language instead of studying the language. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) supports critical thinking and collaboration skills. It promotes education through construction rather than instruction because each student is different, each brings their own experiences, history, religion, beliefs, traditions, language and values (Ministerio de Educación de Ecuador, 2016).

Once having identified the difficulties of the EFL students in speaking skills, this innovation raises the possibility of improving it through peer feedback and describing pictures by using the platform Showbie. In this way, the two research questions will be answered: To what extent do descriptions and peer feedback of the recordings improve speaking? What are students' difficulties during this process?

Innovation

The proposal consists of using peer feedback to recorded descriptions to improve speaking skills via the platform Showbie. It will be applied to 30 students from a public institution. Most of them have an A2 level, based on the English Cambridge Ket test which was taken at the end of the school year 2019-2020; they also have similar backgrounds and interests. This innovation will take place as part of a regular learning unit (one of the six units required in the curriculum in the school year 2020-2021). Besides, it will be planned using the instructional backwards design for the unit, with a six weeks' duration and thirty hours of classes during the whole process (See Appendix A). It means that students will have 5 hours of English classes each week according to their school schedule.

All the lessons will provide students with authentic material to improve their spoken production abilities. They will be able to describe pictures of Ecuadorian landmarks in detail, including activities or additional information about them, which will let them interact with their classmates, produce, receive, process, express opinions, ideas or any kind of information. Also, the teacher will activate the student's prior knowledge about the topic by using brainstorming graphic organizers, slideshows, posters and students' recordings.

In the application process, there will be six assignments; which will be explained in detail to students, so that they can solve them without any difficulty. Among the

tasks, five of them will be recording and uploading to the platform to offer peer feedback in the form of comments. First of all, the teacher will train students on using the Showbie platform (download and submit tasks), give clues about how to provide appropriate feedback to their classmates. Additionally, teacher will explain how to evaluate to their classmates using the checklists to revise the brainstorm and writing guide, and rubrics to assess the graphic organizer and poster. Once the students manage all of these, they will be able to give or receive comments on how to improve their task. At the end of each task, the teacher will provide individual feedback in the recordings and the students' comments using rubrics and a checklist to enhancement the assessments (See Appendix B). Besides, students will use learning logs to describe their progress each week (six learning logs); this will be directed and supervised by the teacher to realize the students' difficulties during the application.

Finally, as a part of the summative assignment, students will prepare an individual recording and upload it using Showbie. They will describe some landmark pictures in detail, using all the phrases, words, grammar, and vocabulary learned. They will practice and record it as many times as they need; before uploading the final version of the recording in the platform. They will be creative while using the information based on their experiences. Finally, it will be evaluated by the teachers based on a rubric, and their classmates will share comments.

Methodology

The action research will collect qualitative and quantitative data to determine improvement in the spoken production abilities in the first year of baccalaureate. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the limitations that students have to face in an English class in a public school.

A pre-test (first recording) and a post-test (last recording) design will be applied to measure the speaking level of each student (before and after the application), which will be evaluated later on with a rubric and analyzed quantitatively. For qualitative data, a survey (open questions), six learning logs, and an interview will be used to know the students' perspectives on the study and how they develop their spoken production abilities during the application.

Research questions:

1. To what extent do descriptions and peer feedback of the recordings improve speaking?
2. What are students' difficulties during this process?

Participants

The participants of this research are students from the first year of baccalaureate at public high school. There are, in total, 30 students: 18 girls and 12 boys. It is a mixed level course: 2% has a B1 level, 78% has A1 and 20% has A2. They are between 15 and 17 years old, and most of them have very similar backgrounds. Also, there is one girl who was born in the USA, but she has been living in Ecuador for more than ten years, and one girl who is from South Arabia, but she has been living in Ecuador for about three years. They both speak English and Spanish. All of the students have similar interests, but different learning styles; besides, all of them have used educational platforms and social media, so they are all tech-savvy, which facilitates to work with Showbie and upload the recordings.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher will explain to the participants the purpose of the research and the responsibility of the use of the data collection according to ethical issues. Similarly, the researcher will contact the authorities and parents to get their consent about the

research procedures. Participants will be informed about how the new strategy is going to work in classes and the expected results regarding speaking skills. Besides, to conduct the research objectively and get more realistic results, the researcher will have to talk with another teacher who does not know the students to help to evaluate the Pre and posttest using the speaking rubric.

Instruments

The instruments proposed to collect relevant information about the students and to answer two research questions: 1) To what extent do descriptions and peer feedback of the recordings improve speaking? And, 2) What are students' difficulties during the process? are the following:

Survey.

A survey will be applied to answer the second research question because it will help to get students' personal information, English background and technology knowledge. It will support the teacher to realize which can be the possible problems during the process of project application related to the survey questions. The survey will point out demographic information to check if students have internet or the resources to work with the mentioned app. The survey will be created through Google Forms, it will be sent to students' emails and the respective link will be sent via social media or WhatsApp. Also, it will be printed for students who do not have internet (See Appendix C).

Interview.

Semi-structured interview will be conducted with each student to ask about their weakness regarding speaking skills, their English level and the environment influences that do not let them improve their spoken production abilities. Each interview will take from 10 to 15 minutes and will be recorded on Zoom, because of the quarantine (See

Appendix D). This interview will facilitate to answer the first research question because it will let to the teacher to get more relevant information about the students' issues, opinions, feelings and necessities related to speaking skills.

Pre-test and post-test.

To answer the first research question, the researcher will apply a pre-test and a post-test. The first recording or pre-test must be created by the students according to their prior knowledge. It will be completed during the first week of classes. On the other hand, the post-test will be recording at the end of the project to know what students learn from the application. The pre-test and post-test will be evaluated by the researcher and a second evaluator and scored with a rubric that includes the components of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (See Appendix E). Each component will be evaluated on five points and will use an adaptation of the A2 level evaluation scales of Cambridge (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996).

Learning logs.

To answer the second research question about the students' difficulties during the process, the researcher will use learning logs (See Appendix F). The students will write reflections about what they are learning, what they know about the topic, in which activities or tasks there are more difficulties, or what they would like to learn. The learning logs will be done each week and they will be used as a guide to know what is working or not during the application. Besides, the researcher can improve weekly their materials and strategies to enhance the teaching-learning process and get better results.

Data Analysis

Once the researcher collects all the proposed instruments in this innovation, he/she must analyze them either qualitative or quantitative. The pre-test and the post-test will be analyzed quantitatively using a spreadsheet in excel and the SPSS program

(statistical package for social sciences). It will help to examine and get statistic scores and descriptive data (mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum) about the research. On the other hand, the interview and learning logs will be analyzed qualitatively. Both of them will be transcribed and reviewed for general themes regarding speaking skills and analyzed using the Grounded Theory; open coding (identify, name, categorize and create tentative labels), axial coding (identifying relationships among the open codes), and selective coding (choose a category to be the main category). The gotten results will help the researcher to realize the speaking limitations or problems that the students have in class or during the project application. Moreover, the answers to the survey must be copied in excel and examined in the SPSS program. Then the researcher will know the personal and demographical information of each student and understand better their background.

Limitations

Despite the fact this innovation is supported by technology and advanced methods and strategies; the researcher can find some limitations. One of the principal limitations, it will be the lack of technology or the use of old computers or cellphones without the microphone and the low internet connection quality that students have at home. Another limitation will be the use of a translator to do the assessments, if it applies online because students work at home and the researcher does not have total control over the activities. Also, students will lose interest or feel frustrated during the process so that, the researcher must explore the reasons which will cause this situation and, he/she will motivate the students to continue working on the application.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Assessment Instruments

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Demographic Information Survey Model

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Available upon request.

Appendix E

Summative Assessment

Available upon request.

Appendix F

Learning Logs model

Available upon request.