



## **Self-assessment of Role-plays to Improve Speaking**

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Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-19-N°.140-2020. Cohort 2019 - 2021. Author's email: [nelly.bucheli@casagrande.edu.ec](mailto:nelly.bucheli@casagrande.edu.ec), Guayaquil, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

### **Grupos de Investigación**

Certifico que Nelly María Bucheli Amaga y Lady Liliana Quito Parra han cumplido satisfactoriamente su investigación-acción como pre-requisito de graduación de Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. Su investigación es titulada **SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ROLE-PLAYS TO IMPROVE SPEAKING** cuyo objetivo general es determinar la incidencia de la auto-evaluación de juego de roles para mejorar la habilidad oral de los estudiantes. La investigación-acción estuvo dirigida por el PhD. Carlos Chancay.

En esta investigación, cada participante reporta los resultados de la intervención en un contexto educativo diferente. Las secciones de introducción, literatura y metodología (instrumentos y análisis de datos) son las mismas.

Particular que comunico para los fines consiguientes.

**María Rossana Ramírez Avila**

**Coordinadora de Titulación**

### **Abstract**

This study describes the application of self-assessment through roleplays for the development of speaking skill in English. It was applied to 10 volunteer students of a public school in Moraspungo. Who were interested in improving their speaking skill. Despite being students of a public school located in a rural area, they mostly demonstrated a B1 level in the placement test. To collect information about their perspective of this innovation, some instruments were applied through the WhatsApp app. Students' responses were positive and a great contribution to this study. Students stated that self-assessment of roleplays helped them to develop their speaking skill using vocabulary according to the situation, correct grammar structure, proper pronunciation with the confidence and motivation necessary for learning English as a second language. This study is of a great contribution for English teachers, especially those who work in rural areas and require a useful strategy for the development of students' speech in EFL.

*Keywords:* Self-assessment, roleplay, speaking, EFL

### Resumen

Este estudio describe la aplicación de la auto evaluación a través del juego roles para el desarrollo de la destreza de hablar en inglés . La misma que fue aplicada a 10 estudiantes voluntarios de un colegio publico en Moraspungo, quienes mostraron interés en mejorar su destreza de hablar en inglés. A pesar de ser estudiantes de un colegio público ubicado en una zona rural demostraron en su mayoría un nivel B1 en el test de ubicación. Para recopilar información sobre su perspectiva de esta innovación se aplicaron algunos instrumentos a través de la aplicación de WhatsApp, siendo sus respuestas positivas y de gran aporte para este estudio. Los estudiantes manifestaron que la auto evaluación a través del juego roles ayuda a desarrollar la destreza de hablar del idioma inglés usando vocabulario acorde a la situación, estructura gramatical de manera correcta, pronunciación adecuada con la confianza y motivación necesaria para el aprendizaje de un segundo idioma. Este estudio es un gran aporte de los docentes de lengua extranjera en especial a aquellos quienes trabajan en zonas rurales y requieran una estrategia de mucha utilidad para el desarrollo del habla de los estudiantes en Inglés como lengua extranjera.

*Palabras claves:* Auto evaluación, juego de roles, hablar, Ingles como lengua extranjera

### **Self-assessment of Role-plays to Improve Speaking**

Education First (2019) stated that according to the last English Proficiency Index Exam, Ecuador placed 81<sup>st</sup> among one hundred participant countries. This study reveals undoubtedly, the necessity of doing something different to improve English education in Ecuador. The current Ecuadorian English curriculum emphasizes developing communicative competencies in our students. It implies that reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills are integrated to have effective communication. Cetinkaya (2005) manifested that it is essential to use the target language in a real-life context more than know the patterns or structures of a second language.

The present research study focused on the application of role-plays to enhance students' communicative abilities. Some researchers (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010; Neira, 2020) implemented role-plays to improve speaking skill. Other researchers (Dután, 2020; Ushca, 2020) conducted a study to assess oral communication improvement through peer feedback and self-assessment focused on WhatsApp and podcasts recordings.

A common factor is present in the studies mentioned previously, students who hesitate to speak, ask, participate, and turn nervous or fearful of using the target language to interact inside and outside the classroom. Krashen (1982) pointed out that "in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), many key factors of learners' success in language learning should be associated with the student's emotional condition" (as cited in Lin, 2008,p.115). Krashen theory looks for students' well-being in the learning process, suggesting teachers apply activities or classroom situations where students feel motivated and get into the subject.

Observing the aspects that lead students to struggle in speaking skill, this innovation proposes role-plays to enhance oral communication skill through self-assessment of role-plays. This study explored the following research questions:

1. To what extent will students' speaking skill improve with the application of self-assessment?
2. What are students' perspectives about the innovation?

### **Literature Review**

This research study focuses on enhancing oral communication skills using self-assessment and the performance of role-plays oriented to a real-life context. Related theories and studies are introduced in this section.

### **Speaking**

Speaking skills is considered one of the primary skills to be developed in education. Ur (1996) mentioned:

Speaking as the most important skill among four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) because people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language. It indicates that using a language is more important than just knowing about it because —there is no point knowing a lot about the language if you can't use it (as cited in Al Hosni, 2014, p.23).

Therefore, to make students develop speaking skills is necessary to provide students with the right tools and create situations in the classroom in which they can master the language without too much complexity.

Besides, there are two characteristics of speaking skills: fluency and accuracy. Hedge (2000) mentioned, "fluency is the ability to answer coherently by connecting the words and phrases, pronouncing the sounds clearly, and using stress and intonation". On the other hand, accuracy, according to Mazouizi (2013), "learners should pay enough attention to the exactness and the completeness of language form when speaking such as focusing on grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation" (as cited in Leong & Ahmadi, 2017, p.36).

According to some teaching theorists, students' fluency and accuracy can be developed through communicative activities such as information gap, a jigsaw puzzle, games, problem-solving, and role-playing (Oradee, 2012). As the author mentioned, role-playing can be an excellent technique to get students to improve their speaking difficulties, including the characteristics of this productive skill.

### **Role-play**

Oxford English Dictionary defines the word role-play as "the changing of one's behaviour to fulfil a social role". When this strategy is used in the classroom, the teacher provides the topic, and students have to develop a presentation according to the assigned role. Teed (2009) explained that "in most role-playing exercises, each student takes the role of a person affected by an issue and studies the impacts of the issues on human life and the effects of human activities on the world around us from the perspective of that person" (as cited in Ardriyati, 2009, p.220). Thus, it involves students' creativity and conflict resolution capacity to face roles that can be handled in real-life situations.

Richard and Rodgers (2001) presented some important principles about roles in EFL learners, which are relevant for this study:

1. Tasks provide both the input and output processing necessary for language acquisition.
2. Tasks activity and achievement are motivational. They are also said to improve learner motivation and therefore promote learning.
3. Learning difficulty can be negotiated and fine-tuned for particular pedagogical purposes (as cited in Aliakbari & Jamalvandi ,2010, p.19).

According to Harper-Whalen and Morris (2005), there are three types of role-playing: fully scripted role-play, semi-scripted role-play, and non-scripted role-play. In the scripted role-play, each word is given, and students should understand or memorize his/her role. The semi-scripted role-play includes a model conversation with some missing words, and students should know how to fill in the blanks in suitable words of these contexts (Livingstone, 1983). In the non-scripted role-play Pi-Chong (1990), said that keywords and information, or contexts and aims in less controlled and structure tasks, in this type, students establish a mini conversation based on keywords, materials or contexts are simply as filling in gaps (as cited in Krebt, 2017, p.865).

### **Self-assessment**

Most of the time, students who are learning a second language feel the need to know their weaknesses and straightness without being embarrassed. According to Gardner (2000), "self-assessment is the best way to help learners to monitor their progress and identify their language level" (p.49). In addition, it means that students become more conscious and autonomous of their learning because self-assessment also provides students to choose what, when and how to be assessed. Schwartsz (1989) mentioned that there are advantages and disadvantages of self-assessment. One of the advantages is "it encourages students to reflect on their role and contribution to the process of the group work". A disadvantage would be



“self-evaluation has a risk of being process of presenting inflated grades and being unreliable” (as cited in Ashraf & Mahdinezhad, 2015, p.112)

There are two types of self-assessment: formative and summative. Esfandiari and Myford (2013) stated that "formative self-assessment is considered as the student self-evaluation and summative self-assessment as the grading or student marking". On the other hand, Chen (2008) argued that "the focus shifts from summative to formative assessment and he also recommends self-assessment as an assessment procedure to involve students in monitoring the self-learning process" (as cited in Baleghizadeh & Masoun, 2014, p.26).

### **WhatsApp**

Nowadays, technology has developed new Apps that has become the latest social network for people, especially for teens. It is advantageous for teachers who work with young learners because they can use social media to enhance students' learning. As Sharma (2019) mentioned, "most EFL students regarded social media applications as useful tools for improving their English language skills as well as English learning motivation" (as cited in Yang, 2020, p.163). Students through this App can develop short videos that involve creativity and body language about any topic.

Using familiar applications like WhatsApp in EFL classes has become very popular in recent years, as it allows unique and versatile learning opportunities. According to Han and Keshin (2016), "while using WhatsApp, students have the chance to individualize their learning, especially the language they have been working on. For example, they can monitor and check their language output for mistakes and practice their pronunciation while rehearsing for the recording" (p. 32).

### **Innovation**

Because of the pandemic that the world is facing nowadays, this innovation was applied to 10 students of the first year of Bachillerato who manage a English level proficiency from A1 to B2. A WhatsApp group was created by the teacher for the application of the innovation in order to share the material to be worked on and give feedback to students in an effective way. Students worked with five topics that contain vocabulary related to known and familiar interactions for students in their daily lives: such as dialogues in the supermarket using vocabulary about food, shopping, applying vocabulary about clothes, at doctor's office with vocabulary about diseases, cinema learning vocabulary about movie genres, and the zoo with vocabulary about animals. The lesson plan included activities that allow oral production and give opportunities to go into the self-evaluation process. In addition, students created, performed, and recorded role-plays oriented to a real-life context.

The three types of role-play mentioned were applied in this study: fully scripted role-play, semi-scripted role-play, and non-scripted role-play. Those were used according to the lesson plan. For example, at the beginning of the lesson, a fully scripted role-play was shared with the students with the new vocabulary and phrases related to the topic so that the students could infer the situation and at the same time practiced the pronunciation of the dialogue with a partner. Then they received a semi-scripted role-play so that they completed and created a new conversation with the new vocabulary and phrases learned during the lesson in pairs. Finally, for the final presentation, students applied the non-scripted role-play since they had to do it in teams using the content previously practised according to the scenario required by the teacher.

Before the innovation, students performed a dialogue in pairs showing their current knowledge about their daily life. As part of the process, the teacher provided a model dialogue. Also, participants and the teacher studied the structure of the conversation together

and learn possible variations. Then, students made a WhatsApp video of themselves and a peer performing a role-play. Two hours of classes per day were divided as follows: first, the teacher provided students with a semi-script role-play as an example guide. Then students were given the topic with their respective vocabulary. After that, the students wrote their dialogue in pairs, and finally, students presented their role-play using the vocabulary learned. The whole process was carried out through the WhatsApp group until the 20 hours classes were completed according to the planning.

Besides peers' and teachers' feedback were provided as comments in the WhatsApp group. The self-assessment rubric allowed students to assess themselves and observe how they can improve in each recording with the teacher's support. The innovation aimed students to evolve in oral production in each class, aware of their weaknesses and strengths performing a role-play with a partner based on their preferences to present as the final project at the end of the process. This last work was considered to compare and contrast their improvement in oral production skills.

Finally, to evaluate the innovation, the two types of self-assessment was considered: formative and summative. In other words, at the end of each lesson, students, beyond receiving feedback from the teacher, they had the opportunity to develop a role-play that was self-evaluated by themselves. In this way, they verified their weaknesses and strengths in their speaking skill. On the other hand, in the final presentation, the teacher applied the summative assessment to assess the final result of the innovation.

### **Methodology**

This study followed an action research process because the investigators collected data, analyzed it, and took actions to solve a problem. It is said that "action research is the idea that teachers will begin a cycle of posing questions, gathering data, reflection, and deciding on a course of action" (Ferrance, 2000, p. 2). This action research applied qualitative

and quantitative instruments to explore how self-assessment of role-plays (independent variable) improve speaking skills (dependent variable).

### **Participants**

This study, with 10 students (3 males and 7 females), was carried out in a public high school. Students' ages were between 15 - 17 years old, attending the first year of Bachillerato. Most of them belong to low-income suburban populations, thereby they have limited access to an internet connection (cell plan). Due to this limitation, the researcher used the WhatsApp platform to interact and foster active participation in this study.

Participants share the English level from A1 to B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). To know students' English level, a placement test was applied before the innovation. Students took this online placement test from an English Language School accredited by California's Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE); Language Scholastic (LASC).

### **Instruments**

The instruments applied for gathering information were a pre and post-test and an interview.

#### **Pre and Post-test**

A pre-speaking test was taken before the innovation to know students' previous knowledge. This test was a semi-scripted role-play in which students had to complete some missing words to develop the dialogue with a partner. Teachers used a rubric to evaluate important aspects that involve speaking skill in role-plays like vocabulary, grammar, confidence, motivation and pronunciation.

Before and after the innovation, to measure students' speaking skill, participants were asked to create and perform a role-play with a partner through a video call with the researcher and a fellow EFL teacher

The rubric aimed to identify important aspects that involve speaking skill in role-plays. "Fluency" criteria were removed from the original one because due to the level of the participants, it needs more time to be improved. The same rubric was used for the self-assessment strategy replacing the rating scale with: Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Poor, in the same order. Learners used the rubric for each task that involved role-play performance.

In the same way, after applying the innovation, a post-test was developed based on the 5 topics planned for this innovation. Students chose the topic and role-play in pairs using the vocabulary learned during the innovation related to the lesson of their choice. For this evaluation, teachers applied the same rubric as the pre-test to later analyze and contrast students' speaking skills improvement. This instrument answered the first research question: To what extent will students' speaking skill improve with the application of self-assessment?

### **Interview**

Gillham (2000) said that an interview is “to obtain information and understanding of issues relevant to the general aims and specific questions of a research project” (p. 2). Based on this innovation, an individual pre-interview of 9 demographic questions was applied to get information from the students' background and after a post-interview of 7 questions was taken individually to know students' perspectives of the innovation. This instrument answered research question 2: What are students' perspectives about the innovation?

The teacher conducted Semi-structured interviews at the beginning (9 questions) and the end of the research project (7 questions). The pre-interview contained demographic questions (name, age, place of living) and open-ended questions related to the field of study

(fears, strengths, weaknesses about the target language, experiences, prior knowledge, expectations). The post-interview focused entirely on students' perspectives and conclusions towards implementing self-assessment to improve their oral skills. It aimed to know the enhancements, outcomes, challenges, learners found through the innovation. This instrument came out with the answer for question 2: What are students' perspectives about the innovation?

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The data collected in the pre and post-tests were computed in a Microsoft Excel document to get the mean, standard deviation, minimum value, and maximum value. The Cohen's *d* was done in an online calculator with the values of Mean and SD. On the other hand, the data of the pre and post interviews were organized and analyzed into categories. Students' answers were detailed according to the questions related to self-assessment, roleplays, and speaking.

**Ethical Considerations**

To carry this study the respective authorization from authorities and students' parents were asked. They and students were informed about the procedure of the study and they also knew that the information collected is for academic goals.

**Results**

To answer the first research question: *to what extent will students' speaking skill improve with the application of self-assessment?* The data was computed in Microsoft Excel getting the following results as shown in the table:

Table 1

*Pre-Test and Post -Test*

N	MEAN	St. Dv.	Min.	Max.	<i>p</i> value
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Pre-Test	10	8.45	1.07	7	9.5	
Post-Test	10	9.75	0.26	10	10	0.00

The pre-test results showed that most of the students got grades less than 10 with a mean of 8.45 before the innovation because they needed improvement in vocabulary knowledge, use of the grammar structure, confidence, and pronunciation according to the rubric. Even though they developed a dialogue with a partner they chose, the results were not good enough.

After the innovation, the results varied. Students got 9.5 as a minimum grade in the post-test with a mean of 9.75. The difference is evident in the Stand Deviation values both in the pre-test and post-test there was an improvement after the application of the innovation. The  $p$  value is 0.00 was less than 0.005 considering favorable results on the self-assessment of the roleplays to improve speaking skill in EFL.

About research question 2: *What are students' perspectives about the innovation?* The answers of the 10 participants in the pre and post interviews were analyzed and grouped by categories. The first category was self-assessment, for which students answered the following question: *Do you consider self-assessment a good way to know your weaknesses and strengths?* Their answers were positive about the application of self-assessment because students mentioned that it helped them to realize what they needed to improve during the innovation process. For example, S1. said, "Yes, because it helped me to realize what I was doing wrong and what I was doing right.". On the other hand, S2. contributed that "Yes, self-assessment allowed me to evaluate myself consciously".

Regarding the application of roleplays, the following question was asked to the students: *Do you believe roleplays improve speaking skills? In which ways?* In response to this question, students mentioned that this strategy was very helpful in improving their English speaking skills. Like S3. stated that "Yes, because with roleplays I can practice

pronunciation and improve my English”. Also, S4 said, “I consider roleplays helpful to speak English easily and fluently”.

Speaking was the third category of the data analysis with the question: *Do you feel more confident to speak in English now?* For this students considered that despite the short time of the innovation, they had overcome their fear of speaking in English. Feeling more confident now than they used to be before the innovation. They also felt more motivated to learn the language. S7 said " Yes, because at the beginning I was ashamed to speak English but now I am not”.

### **Discussion**

After two weeks of the innovation, it was possible to obtain that the Self-assessment of role-plays to improve speaking English skills. It was evident that in the post-test, the students obtained a high score compared to the pre-test. In addition, the students, during the self-assessment time, recognized their strengths and weaknesses in terms of grammar, vocabulary, confidence, motivation, and pronunciation.

On the other hand, Krashen's theory about acquiring a second language was noticed in this innovation. There was an emotional part fundamental to the learning process. Since the students said they felt more confident developing a role-play with a partner, they considered doing a better job in this way. Also, the teacher's process on the application of the innovation on teaching a topic and giving feedback to the students was beneficial.

Despite the change in education due to the pandemic, technology made it possible for students and teachers to continue with the teaching-learning process. For carrying it out, WhatsApp was a handy tool in the educational area. Thanks to the advantages of this app, like creating WhatsApp groups of students to share information, it was possible to apply this innovation and the application of data collection instruments.



Regarding the first research questions of this innovation: To what extent students' speaking ability will improve with the application of self-assessment? The data analysis of the pre-test and post-test found that the application of self-assessment of role plays improves the English speaking skill in students. As Gardner (2000), mentioned "self-assessment is the best way to help learners to monitor their progress and identify their language level" (p.49). It made students reflect on their performance and improve their second language function.

About the second research question: What are the students' perspectives on innovation? The interview after the application of the innovation answered this question. Students considered that they had improved their vocabulary, confidence, and grammar knowledge. Also, their opinions about recommending this innovation to others were favorable results for this study. Hedge (2000) mentioned, "fluency is the ability to answer coherently by connecting the words and phrases, pronouncing the sounds clearly, and using stress and intonation". On the other hand, accuracy, according to Mazouizi (2013), "learners should pay enough attention to the exactness and the completeness of language form when speaking such as focusing on grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation"

### **Conclusion**

This innovation aimed to improve speaking skills through self-assessment of role-plays. Obtaining positive and favorable results in the students mentioned in the interview after the innovation, students said they had improved their English-speaking skills and they even lost their fear of speaking English. The self-assessment made them reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, improving their ability to speak in English. They also expressed that they would recommend this innovation to their friends, family, and acquaintances because of the great results they have noticed after the innovation. Besides, students stated that they had achieved their expectations mentioned in the interview before the innovation.

In addition to the advantages before mention, it is clear that Whatsapp has become a handy and essential tool in educational institutions in Ecuador during the pandemic. It has allowed the teachers of the different subjects to contact students and parents, imparting knowledge about the other topics proposed by the Ministry of Education.

### **Recommendations**

This innovation was applied during students' vacations with only ten volunteers. Also, due to the pandemic, the activities were shared through a WhatsApp group, being this, the technology tool used for work during the 2020-2021 school year period. Despite its easy accessibility in the rural area, there were problems recording students' oral participation, such as external noises and connectivity issues.

In addition, in the online test that the students took, most of them got a B1 level. It is considered that they did it with help. It would not have happened if the test had been taken in the classroom.

### **Limitations in this study**

As researchers, we faced the following difficulties in this research project—first, the small number of volunteer students who participated in this innovation. Second, the internet issues and outside interference interrupted both the interviews and the reception of the roleplays. Third, some students' responses in the interviews were short, so they were not so relevant to answer the second research question. Also, it is important to add that the time to apply the innovation is not enough. At least 16 synchronous hours are needed to achieve the goals proposed in the action research.

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**Appendix A**

**Lesson Plan**

Available upon request.

**Appendix B**

*Rubric to assess speaking skill (pre and post-test)*

Available upon request.

**Appendix C**

**Interview**

Available upon request.

**Appendix D**

**Diagnostic dialogue**

Available upon request.

**Appendix E**

**SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ROLE PLAY**

Available upon request.

**Appendix F**

**Results of interview**

Available upon request.