



Self-assessment of Role-plays to Improve Speaking

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Proposal

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There are some difficulties that EFL learners encounter when trying to speak English. Ur (1996) stated that the usual problems that impede the oral production of the language are: 1. Inhibition: Students are concerned about making mistakes, being criticized, or having to talk to people; a situation that generates fear; 2. Nothing to say: Students do not have a reason to express themselves; 3. Low or uneven participation: Large classes and students that know more English make the others participate very little or nothing at all; and, 4. Mother-tongue use: Learners tend to use L1 rather than L2. This is because students consider that speaking their mother tongue is easier since communication flows smoothly. Also, Ur (1996) and Cameron (2001) emphasized that the lack of a target language environment results in a lack of involvement in real-life situations.

There are some other factors that cause learners to struggle with the target language. Rabab'ah (2003, p. 187) mentioned that inadequate teaching strategy with no emphasis on speaking, vocabulary items that are taught in isolation, and the non-usage of listening materials adversely affect learners' oral production. Littlewood (1984) pointed out that some learners just lack the motivation to speak English.

Whatever the factors are that cause difficulty for learners to speak English, Kumaravadivelu (2003) highlighted that "language is best learned when the learners' attention is focused on understanding, saying and doing something with language, and not when their attention is focused explicitly on linguistic features" (p. 27). That is why one technique that can be considered effective to stimulate speaking skills is role-playing.

According to Killen (2007), “Role-play can be used as a means of achieving a wide variety of outcomes, including the acquisition of knowledge, application of knowledge to develop further understanding and skills, and attitudinal change” (p. 282).

However, when it comes to assessing students’ learning, traditional assessment methods are very limited in providing students the opportunity to know their abilities, their weaknesses, how much progress they have made, and what they should do with the skills they have acquired (Quyen, 2019).

Therefore, authentic assessment tools should be used. Tangdhanakanond (2006) stated that the assessment reform now draws its attention to authentic testing methods since they mainly focus on the active participation of the students as well as their classmates and their teachers. She finally pointed out that this switch to authentic assessment occurs in the attempt to remove the use of rigid and static tests so that teachers can move to the implementation of real-life tasks based on real-life situations. Following this line, the implementation of self-assessment as an authentic assessment tool to improve the oral production of the language on learners is necessary.

There have been related studies using self-assessment on EFL students to enhance speaking. In a study done by Marzuki et al. (2020), Indonesian students’ conceptions towards self-assessment to improve their speaking skills were enriching since they claimed that self-assessments were useful and helped them realize their capabilities towards speaking. In another similar study conducted by Muñoz and Álvarez (2007), 91% of the students ensured that self-assessment was very beneficial to assess their oral performances. Moreover, a study conducted in Iran by Ariaifar and Fatemipour (2013) guaranteed that self-assessment boosted students’ speaking skills generating positive attitudes towards self-assessing their oral performances as

well as provoking a willingness to continue having self-assessment practices from this time forth. Regarding local studies, equal results have been reported. A research study conducted in the Galápagos Islands by Romero (2020) reinforced the positive impact of self-assessment to improve speaking and proposed role-playing activities as tasks that contribute to the improvement of oral skills.

During my years of expertise as an English Teacher, self-assessment to strengthen students' skills has been seen by many EFL Ecuadorian teachers as an easy task that learners can do without the guidance of a teacher. Having said that, Brown and Harris (2013, as cited in Harris & Brown, 2018) claimed that students' self-assessment is not about forming an opinion about their work because then these inaccurate opinions can lead to a misconception to the point of underestimating their abilities. As a matter of fact, Boud (1995, as cited in Wride, 2017) argued that it is of great importance that students identify the standards and/or criteria to be applied to their work and make judgments as to the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards (p.12).

The same difficulties discussed from the very beginning in regards to speaking have been detected in this group of local students from a private institution in the city of Guayaquil. Evidence in class shows that their oral production is poor due to the low rates of class participation, fear to express themselves, lack of opinions or comments, and hesitations in conversations. That is why, role-play is proposed in this master's proposal since role-play is not recognized by many teachers as an adequate task to enforce speaking resulting in a bad appreciation of its advantages and which unfortunately leads to being a misused learning strategy. Therefore, my intention with this proposal is to help students apply self-assessment of role-plays to determine their impact in their oral skills.

Literature Review

Speaking

Nunan (2003) remarked that speaking is the most difficult of all four language skills since it demands oral communication in real-time. However, it cannot be denied that there are some interferences that impede learners from making progress in their oral production. Derakhshan et al. (2015) claimed that the lack of interest from teachers to know what are learners' likes and dislikes as well as their needs is another subject that contributes to the failure of strengthening pupils' speaking.

Nunan (2003) stated that tasks that provide opportunities for learners to work in pairs or groups will definitely increase their oral production in performing tasks that involve negotiation for meaning.

Research suggests that learners make progress by communicating in the target language because interaction necessarily involves trying to understand and make yourself understood. This process is called negotiating for meaning. It involves checking to see if you've understood what someone has said, clarifying your understanding, and confirming that someone has understood your meaning. By asking for clarification, repetition, or explanations during conversations, learners get the people they are speaking with to address them with language at a level they can learn from and understand (Nunan, 2003, p. 55)

Nunan (2003) also mentioned that speaking activities must be planned in accordance to interactional and transactional speech. According to him, interactional speech is communication

that primarily serves the purpose of social interaction. It can be formal or casual speech depending on the situation and in which the answer is conventional. Meanwhile, transactional speech is communication that primarily serves the purpose of transferring information and which implies a result. It merely happens for specific reasons.

Brown (2000) asserted that motivating learners is another technique that raises speaking in learners. Learners' needs and interests must be language teachers' main concerns so they can be implemented in classroom activities. Also, telling learners the benefits of doing a certain task contributes to the increase in pupils' motivation rates.

Likewise, this researcher emphasized that the aim is to develop authentic language and that can possibly happen in meaningful contexts where listening comprehension can power up too. Another technique that Brown (2000) made emphasis on is the delivery of feedback and appropriate correction at times. He indicated that both feedback and correction must be given properly.

Brown (2000) added that it is not a matter of having teachers initiating conversations just to illustrate an example. It is, on the contrary, a matter of letting students have the capability to initiate spoken language. Brown (2000) asserted that one last technique is the encouragement of speaking strategies. These strategies must be practiced in class so that learners can be aware of them in order to develop better speaking skills. He mentioned some like "asking for clarification (*what?*), asking someone to repeat something (*Hub? Excuse me?*), using mine or nonverbal expressions to convey meaning, or using fillers (*Uh, I mean, Well*) in order to gain time to process" (p.276).

Fluency


Hedge (1993, as cited in Abad, 2020) asserted that EFL learners' fluency can be measured by the amount of frequent pauses, repetitions and self-corrections they can make. Hedge (2000, as cited in Abad, 2020) later stated that speaking fluency is an ongoing communication that does not encompass anxiety or unnecessary hesitation. For this latter, Nunan (2003, as cited in Abad, 2020) affirmed that it is inevitable that EFL learners struggle to speak fluently due to hesitation. Richards (2009, as cited in Lopez et al, 2021) concluded that fluency is the skill that helps learners use a language naturally and functionally without many fillers and pauses.

Furthermore, Segalowitz (2010, as cited in Lopez et al, 2021) split fluency into three stages. They are: cognitive, utterance and perceived fluency. Cognitive fluency refers to the mental processes the speaker makes to communicate properly. Whereas, utterance fluency relates to speed, breakdown, and repair. The speed is the mean of syllables he pronounces, the breakdown is the number of the silent and filled pauses, and the mean length of silent pauses he makes. Repair is the number of repetitions and corrections he makes. Meanwhile, perceived fluency refers to the reaction the listener has towards the linguistic and nonlinguistic aspects of the speaker's speech.

Vocabulary

Scrivener (2011) proposed some useful tasks that can help pupils keep in mind the lexical items studied in class. The following chart shows different categories that students can fill in every time they learn new important words. This type of activity works like a mnemonic learning trick because of the visualization of pictures, sentences, and other details related with the new piece of vocabulary.

Table 1*Alternative lexical item list.*

| Lexical item | Pronunciation | Translation | Grammar | Collocations | Example | Idea |
|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|----------------|--|---|---|
| <i>motorcycle</i> | <i>/'mɑʊtəsaɪkəl/</i> | <i>pikipiki</i> | <i>noun</i> | <i>ride a ~ get on my ~ ~ maintenance, ~race, ~courier</i> | <i>She's just bought a 600cc Suzuki motorcycle.</i> |  |

Taken from Scrivener (2011)

A different task that can also be done consist of providing a picture where students label objects that belong to a certain category (in the example things that can be found in a kitchen)

Figure 1*Kitchen vocabulary*

Taken from Scrivener (2011)

Role-play

Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011, as cited in Ampatuan & San Jose, 2016) proposed role-plays as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) tasks that can be used to improve learners' communicative competences. To understand what role play is, Ladousse (1987) suggested analyzing the words 'role play' separately. When students assume a 'role', they play a part, that is, they can either be themselves or any other person within the situation to which they are

exposed to. ‘Play’ is to take part in an unharmed environment in which they can be creative and have joy. To illustrate an example, Ladousse (1987) compared a group of students doing a role-play inside a classroom with a group of children playing on their own doctors and nurses in the park. In both situations, she affirmed that both groups of kids are unintentionally creating their own reality. By doing this activity, kids are encouraged to use all the knowledge they have gained through the experiences they have had from the real world when interacting with others. Moreover, Ments (1999) affirmed that Role-playing gives students the opportunity to practice and interact with others in certain roles. Regarding its purpose he says, “their aim is to feel, react and behave as closely as possible to the way someone placed that particular situation would do” (p. 9).

Ladousse (1987) and Mayasyarah (2017) emphasized that role -play has the effect of lowering shyness and/or anxiety, which commonly arise when trying to communicate into the target language, and pointed out that these affective traits will not inhibit learners to role-play if the activity is gratifying and builds up self-confidence. Furness (1976) agreed with this and added that role-plays also contribute to an increase in social consciousness, independent and high-order thinking skills, and self-esteem among pupils.

Ladousse (1987) pointed out the importance of using role plays in the classroom by listing the reasons.

1. There are plenty of situations that can be explored and role-played. Here, all the grammar points, vocabulary, and oral skills excel in their high potential. Teachers can also instruct students in developing speaking skills in any situation.
2. Role-plays enable students to develop their social skills facilitating interaction and communication with others. Therefore, it is of high importance to build up social skills

from a very low level to a higher one. So that it does not seem tactless or direct later on as it did at the beginning when there was no instruction of good social skills.

3. It is necessary that those students who are studying English for specific purposes (travel or work) have prior experiences with the target language through role-plays. That is because they will not only use sets of phrases they learned previously in class but learn how to interact with others in any real-life context.
4. Shy students do not reject the idea of participating in role-plays since these activities help them feel comfortable and do not compromise their own personalities.
5. Role-play is fun. Students expand their imagination. Most language teachers can strongly agree that enjoyment leads to better learning.

In addition, Ladousse (1987) claimed that:

role play is one of a whole gamut of communicative techniques which develops fluency in language students, which promotes interaction in the classroom, and which increases motivation. Not only is peer learning encouraged by it but also the sharing between teacher and student of the responsibility for the learning process (p. 7).

Some researchers (Rao & Stupans, 2012; Maier, 2002, as cited in Hidayati & Pardjono, 2018) concluded that role-play fulfills the three domains of learning: affective, cognitive, and psychomotor. Hoque (2016) guaranteed that the cognitive domain refers to intellectual skills. That is why Hoque (2016) and Rahman and Manaf (2017) coincided that the utilization of Bloom's taxonomy in the classroom definitely helps students learn higher-order thinking. While the psychomotor domain, according to Sari et al. (2020), is related to "physical movement and coordination behavior, motor skills and physical abilities" (p. 228). Hope (2016) indicated that the affective domain involves feelings, emotions, and attitudes.

Self-assessment

Andrade (1999, as cited in Mohamed & Razali, 2019) suggested some features of instruction for adequate self-assessment like the awareness of the value of self-assessing. This is crucial since metacognitive processes are not regularly practiced in class. Along with this, Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (TEAL, 2010) argued that it is important to illustrate how cognitive and metacognitive processes work:

Cognitive strategies are the basic mental abilities we use to think, study, and learn (e.g., recalling information from memory, analyzing sounds and images, making associations between or comparing/ contrasting different pieces of information, and making inferences or interpreting text). They help an individual achieve a particular goal, such as comprehending text or solving a math problem, and they can be individually identified and measured. In contrast, metacognitive strategies are used to ensure that an overarching learning goal is being or has been reached. Examples of metacognitive activities include planning how to approach a learning task, using appropriate skills and strategies to solve a problem, monitoring one's own comprehension of text, self-assessing and self-correcting in response to the self-assessment, evaluating progress toward the completion of a task, and becoming aware of distracting stimuli (p. 1).

Whereas, cueing refers to the assistance the teacher gives to the learner in order to grasp the when, the how, and the why of self-assessment so that the learner can think metacognitively to self-regulate their learning. Another is modeling. Here, learners see their teacher how to apply self-assessments properly. Another is to transfer. Learners must be able to take the knowledge they have acquired in order to put into practice when self-assessing their own work. Remedial or corrective tactics is another one. Students sometimes do not self-assess rightly because they have

trouble thinking. Thus, instruction in metacognitive strategy use should be combined with instruction in the cognitive techniques and strategies of the subject matter.

Furthermore, TEAL (2010) indicated that self-questioning, reflective journal writing, and discussing their thought processes with other learners are some of the strategies that teachers can encourage learners to do in order to develop metacognition. In fact, Fogarty (1994 as cited in TEAL, 2010) claimed that in order to develop metacognitive processes, students have to follow three steps. The first one is planning. Here, the learner plans on how to approach a learning task adequately, that is, he comes up with strategies he has acquired through his learning experience that can help him do better in the learning task he is dealing with. The second one is monitoring their understanding. In case the learner does not understand, he needs to find out strategies that can help them comprehend what the learning task is about. The last one is evaluating, that is, the learner has to evaluate his/her entire thinking processes after (s)he has finished a certain class activity.

Andrade (2019) had drawn the conclusion that “Self-assessment is the act of monitoring one’s processes and products in order to make adjustments that deepen learning and enhance performance” (p. 10). Whether it should be a summative or formative assessment, she pointed out that both achievement and self-regulated learning are enhanced when “self-assessment is used formatively and supported by training” (p. 10).

Furthermore, Ross (2006, as cited in Mohamed & Razali, 2019) stated that self-assessment can turn to a successfully task if teachers fulfil the following: explain to students the criteria they will base on in order to assess their work, teach students the proper application of the criteria in order to assess their work as well, give students feedback on their self-assessments and encourage them to take that information provided in their feedbacks to improve their

performance next time. Moreover, Mohamed and Razali (2019) highly recommended not to convert students' self-assessment into self-evaluation to grade later.

With this research study, the researcher wants to answer the following research question:

- To what extent does self-assessment of role-plays improve EFL learners' speaking skills?

Innovation

The lesson plan (Appendix 1) encompasses the different class activities as well as the innovation proposed for this grade. This innovation consists of carrying out self-assessment of role-plays to enhance speaking in the students. It will work as an instrument for students to assess their role-plays and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses towards the language in order to improve their speaking while interacting with others. Learners will be encouraged to self-assess their work three times. To do this, the teacher will model the correct application of it and present the criteria from which students will be evaluated on. That means that students will be trained to use the checklist during classes so that they can, at the end, self-assess their summative task independently and effectively.

The checklist (Appendix 2) has eleven different items that are related to fluency, interaction, and aspects of the language (grammar and vocabulary). To illustrate some: "I am fluent in speaking", "I had fun during role-plays", "I use air travel vocabulary in my speech", "I can start a conversation with others with ease" are the statements that are included in the checklist and are asked to students to reflect on and finally circle YES or NO if they accomplish or do not accomplish them yet.

This innovation will take place as part of a regular learning unit in which role-plays and self-assessment checklists will be incorporated. A role-playing rubric (Appendix 3) will be used to examine several aspects like: participation in preparation and presentation, presentation of

character, achievement of purpose, use of non-verbal cues (voice, gestures, eye contact, props, costumes), and imagination and creativity. The band ranges from one to four. One is the lowest and four is the highest. No adaptations were done since the descriptions of each indicator fulfills what this researcher expects from the students to achieve when doing role-plays. A rubric for speaking will be included (Appendix 4) to assess students' speaking skills.

Moreover, this innovation will last 2 weeks with a class-hour of 40 minutes per day. Students will work on the activities proposed in this lesson everyday since students have English classes from Monday to Friday.

Air travel vocabulary (Appendix 5) will be taught to the students so that they can also know how to communicate whatever issue or concern they might have when being at the airport. Just to illustrate a couple of examples: The student does not know where he can find his baggage after the flight, or the student does not know when the agent tells him to leave his carry-on luggage with the rest of the luggage. This being said, the attempt to teach this vocabulary is for students to improve their fluency in speaking as well.

Methodology

The present work is an action research, a process in which the teacher does research on an issue of his concern with the intention of improving his own and his students' learning as well as sharing his findings with the members of a school community that might be interested in taking advantage of it to improve the quality of education (Koshy, 2010 as cited in Clark et al, 2020).

The instrument is the Cambridge Flyers speaking test (Appendix 6) that students will take as a pre and posttest. The pretest will be taken before the application of the innovation to assess students' speaking skill first hand. The posttest will be taken after the application of the

innovation to evaluate the improvement students had made. In both tests the same speaking rubric (Appendix 4) will be applied to grade fluency and vocabulary since these two were the ones that this researcher planned to enhance in students. The rubric is a quantitative instrument. It contains the following indicators with points: needs improvement (2 points), satisfactory (3 points), good (4 points), and excellent (5 points).

Once this proposal is conducted, it is expected to collect all the quantitative data in the SPSS statistics program to compare and contrast the results in both speaking tests.

Participants

A convenient sample is, according to Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016), a non-random and accessible sample from which you can conduct a research of your interest. Therefore, in this opportunity, the convenient sample was made of fifteen students in seventh grade Middle Basic of Education. Of the fifteen participants, nine are boys and six are girls. They belong to a private school in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The students are between eleven and twelve years old and come from middle and high socioeconomic status.

According to local authorities (Ministerio de Educación, 2019) for this grade, students should be A2. So, to corroborate the proficiency level of English these groups of students took the Flyers test from Cambridge to evaluate the other language skills (listening, writing and reading) and it demonstrated that 100% of the students were A2. No adaptations were done to the test. Also, it was evaluated with its official rubric and the teacher was the examiner during the examinations.

The students have hardly ever done role-plays in class and these role-plays have been about switching roles and simulating conversations that are in the book only. They have never filled out self-assessment checklists before.

Instruments and Data Collection

For the purpose of the study, the independent variable is role-play using self-assessment as a tool, and the dependent variable is speaking, specifically the component of spoken fluency and vocabulary. The instruments were designed to obtain data and find an answer to the research question as follows:

1. To what extent does self-assessment of role-plays improve EFL learners' speaking skills?

Pre and posttest.

A pretest and posttest (Appendix 6) will be taken by the students to evaluate speaking. This test will be from Cambridge English qualifications for kids named Flyers. The speaking tasks are split into four parts: 1. Finding the differences, 2. Information exchange, 3. Picture story, and 4. Personal questions.

In the first task, the examiner (teacher) and the candidate (student) will have two similar pictures. The examiner will begin by giving statements based on his picture, and the candidate will have to find the differences between his and the examiner's and will say them aloud. In the second task, the examiner and the candidate will have the same paper with incomplete information, that is, if the candidate has the information of a restaurant, then the examiner will have to ask for that information and vice versa. In the third task, the candidate will have to describe each picture in turn to make a story. In the last task the examiner will ask two personal questions to the candidate. The tests will be audio recorded for later evaluation. All the four tasks will involve interaction between the examiner and the candidate.

Besides, a rubric to assess speaking (Appendix 4) will use bands between two and five. Two will be the lowest score meaning that the learner needs improvement and five will be the highest score meaning the learner is doing quite good. Each task will be evaluated according to the bands of the rubric. Then the total sum will be divided by two to get a score over ten. The minimum score the student could get will be eight over ten.

To reduce bias in the information, another teacher will grade this section of the research. The speaking rubric was adapted from (Viteri, 2019) to fit with children from Elementary School and it considers descriptors of two components like vocabulary and fluency.

Data Analysis

The results of the instruments will be reported and listed in charts making it easy to answer the research question. Descriptive statistics include mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation will be performed after the experiment has been implemented.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are part of any qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research, therefore, Israel and Hay (2016, as cited in Creswell, 2014) highlighted that “Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them: promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and improperly that might reflect on their organizations or institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems” (p. 132).

For this research study a consent letter will be sent to parents to authorize their kids’ participation in this study. Since the study is addressed to children, the level of confidentiality is higher and therefore the collection of data will be available for the researcher. Pictures and names of the participants will not be included. Their names will be replaced by a different label like “Participant 1”, “Participant 2”, “Participant 3”, and so on. Outcomes of this study will be given to

the institution and participants once implemented. All the data gathered will only be used for this research study and it will eventually be further disposed of after the study is completed.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study are having students with an unstable internet connection. It can be highly expected to see students losing track of the tasks they are supposed to do in class due to their poor internet connection. Another limitation can be having students diagnosed with Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or Autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The role-plays and the rubrics to assess speaking and role-playing as well as the checklist for self-assessment proposed in this study will need to be adapted to their special needs.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan
Instructional design of units for transfer of learning to real-life contexts

Available upon request.

Appendix 2
Self- assessment

Available upon request.

Student's name: _____ **Appendix 3**
Role Play Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 4
Speaking Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 5
Air Travel Vocabulary

Available upon request.

Appendix 6
Speaking test.

Available upon request.

Appendix 7
Flashcards

Available upon request.

Appendix 8

FLASHCARDS

Available upon request.

Appendix 9
WORKSHOP

Available upon request.

