Universidad Casa Grande

The Use of Self-Assessment in the Development of Speaking Skill in B1+ Level

Students

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Modality: Proposal

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Students

Ecuador is a small but very interesting country in South America. As it grows

and develops, it becomes known worldwide. This development creates different needs.

One of them is communicating in other languages. It is known that tourists arrive from

all over the world and the global language is English. As it was said by Mastin (2011),

"English is the nearest thing there has ever been to a global language." (p. 2).

Learning foreign languages is the key to a better future and it is more common

to find English speakers in the country as tourists or residents. According to the

National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) in 2020, about 469.000 foreign

people visited the country, from that total 30% were from the USA. These statistics

increase the importance of learning English as a foreign language.

Learning a foreign language is not as simple as it looks. The correct materials,

techniques, methodologies, and strategies are needed. This need motivated the

government to apply different programs at all educational levels in order to improve and

encourage the acquisition of a foreign language. That is the reason why the Asamblea

Constituyente de Montecristi (2008) on Ecuadorian Constitution, art. 26 says:

"Education is a right of all the people during their life and a duty of the state." (p. 4).

English is taught in schools, high schools, and universities. Each institution

needs to accomplish an objective. For example, according to the English Teachers

Standards, at the end of high school, (3BGU) students should have a B1 level. The

highest authorities in higher education, Consejo de Educación Superior del Ecuador,

(2019) mentioned that "by the end of university a B2 level will be required" (p. 22).

These goals are not always achieved. Sometimes students from the university do

not even get an A2 level, and just a few get a B1-B2 level. This reality is known by

everybody, authorities, professors, and students. According to a study made by EF Education First (2021), "Ecuador is in 90th place from 112 countries evaluated, with a grade of 440" (p. 7). The statistic proves that changes in education need to be done.

As it is known, a language is composed of four main skills which are the base when learning a foreign language but are not always taught correctly. As Nan (2018) said "Four language skills should be improved at the same time in language learning, but their development is sometimes in imbalance." (p. 1). From those four skills, speaking has become the most complicated and is often left behind.

Nunan (1992) mentioned that teaching oral skills in an EFL class can present different obstacles like low motivation and the preference of the first language. Sintayani & Adnyayanti (2022) also mentioned that some obstacles can be that students sometimes do not know how they are assessed, feedback is not given, or they do not understand what they are being asked to do. All these obstacles are reflected in students' low grades and low speaking performances.

As a result, it is important to improve speaking skills with different and suitable techniques. So far researchers have worked on speaking skills through the application of peer feedback (Espinoza, 2019), oral recording (Oña, 2019), or feedforward (Salazar, 2022). All of them have had good results but none of them have worked on Self-assessment, so the students will be able to improve on their own.

On the other hand, self-assessment has also been studied but in other fields, for example, to improve writing (Mera, 2020) and reading (Chávez, 2020). Romero (2020) worked on self-assessment to improve speaking but through role-play, which in researcher's experience can turn into a very controlled activity, normally students learn their lines by heart.

It is important to teach students how to self-assess so that they can identify their flaws and learn how to improve them. Students normally find rubrics boring and impossible to understand. That is the reason why this research is aimed to make those rubrics more effective and understandable.

The group that the researcher will work with has some problems when speaking. They do not feel confident enough, they are afraid of talking, and most of the time they do not know how to recognize their mistakes or how to correct them.

The aim of this study is to determine the extent to which self-assessment improves students' spoken fluency. This proposal is aimed to answer the following research questions:

1) To what extent does self-assessment improve students' spoken fluency?

2) What are students' perspectives of self-assessment to develop English spoken fluency?

Literature Review

This research is addressed to students with a B1 level of oral production through the application of self-assessment which includes rubrics and an action plan to improve spoken fluency. This innovation is based on the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, self-assessment, and Understanding by Design with the application of a lesson plan.

Communicative Language

Language is the way people communicate and express feelings and ideas. Chomsky (2000) defined it as the inherent capability of native speakers to understand and form grammatical sentences. This concept was then the base of a new learning method, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). From a communicative perspective language is composed by competences, which is defined by Tuğrul (2018),

as the "ability to understand and use the language effectively for communication purpose" (p. 163). There is also Sauvignon (1972) who defined communicative competence as "the ability to function in a truly communicative setting" (p. 8).

According to Council of Europe (2018) Language has three competences, linguistics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. Linguistics refers to the language's structure, the rules, and functions of the words. Sociolinguistic involves the culture of the language that students are learning, also the rules of politeness, the relationships, the modals, folk wisdom, and traditions, among others. Finally, there is Pragmatics which refers to the irony, sarcasm, parody, among others related to the new language.

On the other hand, Canale & Swain (1980) established four competences, grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. A more recent division is the one from Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) who mentioned five competences, linguistic, strategic, sociocultural, actional, and discourse competence. The linguistic competence is historically the most discussed which includes the structure, morphological inflections, lexical resources, phonological, and orthographic systems.

Speaking

It is widely known that speaking is the way that humans communicate the most. Hence, in our EFL world, speaking will be the most performed skill when communicating in English. Lascano & Altamirano (2020) defined speaking as the "ability to share ideas or opinions using the structures and concepts of the language" (p. 902).

According to Brown & Yule (1983), "Speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real-life situations", and given this, it is important to work on its improvement. Likewise, Nazara (2011) stated that "The need for speaking mastery in

English has been dramatically increasing due to the strengthening position of English as a language for international communication" (p.29).

Another contribution referring to speaking is what Nunan (1991) wrote "Success [in speaking] is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the [target] language" (p, 39). Tuğrul (2012) agrees with Nunan by describing speaking as "being capable of speech, expressing or exchanging thoughts through using language" (p. 1). From the communicative perspective, this ability has two major characteristics accuracy and fluency. The second one is considered to be the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously.

Fluency

First of all, it is appropriate to start highlighting that "The goal of learning an additional language is to use it naturally" (Yang, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, "Speaking fluency refers to the ability to produce the spoken language without undue pausing or hesitation" (Skehan, 1996, p. 22), exactly like in a natural way. Also, authors like Namaziandost et al. (2019) and Wang et al. (2018) agreed by saying that fluency is the ability to spontaneously speak a language without pausing, hesitation, and reformulation.

This fluency is achieved through recurrent activities, practice, and exposure to real-life-situations tasks. This is well-explained by Wang (2014), "While speaking, learners need to be given time and space to mainly develop their fluency, with full attention to express their meanings" (p. 115). Fluency can be measured in different ways. According to Nasri et al. (2019) and also Namaziandost et al. (2019) fluency can be measured through the duration of the speech, words per minute, and pauses per minute. However, pauses are needed to let the speaker breath and to emphasize punctuation.

Fluency has been defined by Ellis (2004) as "the extent to which the language produced in performing a task manifest pausing, hesitation, and reformulation" (p.342). Mizera (2008) states that "fluency is defined as the ability to spontaneously speak a language quickly and comprehensively without an undue number of formal errors that distract listeners from the speaker's message" (p.3). According to Hedge (2000) fluency is the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness of hesitation.

All things considered and in the aim of acquiring a satisfying speaking fluency in EFL contexts, "a lot requires to be done not only from the learners themselves but also from the instructors who are to help and guide the learners to use and have exposure to authentic and appropriate materials in- and out-side the classroom" (Bahrani, 2011, p. 164). Here is where rubrics prepared by teachers are going to help students to accomplish their goals.

Pronunciation

An important aspect of speech is pronunciation. Pronunciation involves the creation of sounds of a language, the places where the sounds are produced and the parts of the body that are used. Bai & Yuan (2019) and Al-Ahdal (2020) agreed in the importance of pronunciation. They mentioned that without pronunciation, students might experience difficulties in verbal communication. While that if they improve pronunciation, it could increase self-confidence and motivation. This will lead to a positive impact on language learning.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment is defined by Boud & Falchikov (1989) as "The involvement of learners in making judgments about their own learning, particularly about their achievements and the outcomes of their learning" (p. 1). This process gives positive

results for learners since they can observe the aspects where they have to improve and where they should keep working the same way. Like Christianson, et al. pointed out: "the self-assessment process engages students in the analysis and evaluation of their performance" (2009, p. 10).

Baleghizadeh & Masoun (2013) confirmed the value of self-assessment and established that "self-efficacy is regarded as a significant element in the process of language learning" (p. 53). Besides, "students' perceived capability to learn English as a foreign language increase by assessing themselves on a regular basis" (p. 53), and "this form of assessment is regarded as an optimal method of measurement for authentic communication" (Baleghizadeh & Masoun, 2013, p. 54).

One of the benefits of self-assessment is the confidence created in the learner which can produce a better performance in their speaking skill. Ariafar & Reza (2013) affirmed that "teachers may also find it beneficial to adopt self-assessment as an effective means for the development of foreign language learners' speaking skill" (p. 10).

Furthermore, "through self-assessment the students can increase their motivation to achieve the learning goal [...] and their communication with the teacher" and it "could stimulate students to learn individually in order to achieve the learning goal and improve students' capability for future performance" (Marzuki et al., 2020, p. 213).

In addition, and to sum up, Christianson & Hoskins (2008) emphasized that "student self-assessment provides significant advantages to the students in terms of deepening the learning experience, positively engaging students in taking an active role in their own development" (p. 11).

Self-assessment has many advantages, however there are also some limitations in the application of these idea. First of all, Andrade (2019) concluded that self-

assessment can be used in summative and formative activities, but it is still not very clear how or why it works. Sintayani & Adnyayanti (2022) also concluded that self-assessment can have a high positive impact in students' learning process since it allows them to "identify their weaknesses and strengths" (p. 88). They mentioned that it can be difficult for students to know how self-assess, so it is suggested that teacher give clear and explicit assessment criteria to help them to understand.

Another limitation is the lack of time to give feedback to all students as it was concluded by Khonamri et al. (2021). Besides this lack of time, there is still the fact that students are not always interested in self-assess. As the result of Marzuki et al. (2020) suggested that some the students in their research thought that self-assessment "was not useful because they did not interest using this kind of assessment since they are not sure that they can assess their own capability correctly" (p. 211). For some students, the duty of assess should be only for the teacher.

Teachers have an important role in the self-assessment process. Teachers are the guides and who give the tools to understand how to self-assess. Marzuki et al. (2020) and Sintayani & Adnyayanti (2022) agreed that teachers must give clear and specific instructions when using self-assessment. This guide will be less used once students learn how to self-assess. The final goal is to give students the tool to self-assess at any moment inside and outside the classroom.

Innovation

The innovation consists of using self-assessment to improve fluency in students. It will be developed in a regular Unit lesson plan. This will last twelve teaching hours and will be divided into three weeks. Each class will have two hours, twice a week. The participants will receive regular classes including vocabulary, grammar, and other skills like writing, reading, and listening, but with a special aim in developing speaking skills.

All the students will have access to a lab once a week. The use of this lab is aimed to practice through the use of technological tools like quizizz, Mentimeter, and YouTube. Besides this, students can use their own cell phones and connect to the internet through Wi-Fi from the institution's servers.

Students will create four task-based activities which will develop speaking and fluency. Students will use the creation of videos as a technological tool to present most of the tasks. The first task will be to create a video introducing a hotel and its characteristics. The second task will be to choose some news and present them using connectors correctly. The third task will be to create a brochure with rules and examples of relative clauses and record a tutorial explaining the same information. The final task will be to talk and present the tourist places and activities from any city in Ecuador. They will record a video and upload on the Internet, the video must include tourist places, activities, and an interview with a native English speaker. After each task students will use a rubric to control their progress and correct mistakes. At the beginning of the program, the teacher will explain how to use the rubric and will control students while they self-assess. Each rubric will be adapted to a comprehensible language; therefore, it will be easy for the students to understand and use.

Students will use platforms like YouTube to upload videos and to be in real contact with English speakers through the creation of authentic videos. YouTube is a worldwide known platform used to share videos about everything. This platform will give students the opportunity to have real contact with people all over the world. The rubrics they will use will contain a simple use of language and will be used in each activity to reflect the improvement.

The lesson plan will be divided by day, each day will have a specific objective and these objectives will lead to a goal which is to learn the vocabulary, grammar structure, and fixed expressions to talk fluently and present with confidence the touristic places and

activities from any city in Ecuador so that in the long run and on their own they will be able

to record and upload a video presenting a city, its touristic places, activities, and interview a

native English speaker, so they will attract the attention of foreign people to visit our

country.

During the implementation of the lesson plan student will acquire knowledge in

how to describe a place (hotel in this case); to use connectors of time, cause, contrast, and

addition; to use relative clauses; to structure and write an essay; and finally, to apply

everything in the introduction of a city on a video. Students will use different rubrics for

speaking. These rubrics will evaluate pronunciation, use of grammar, vocabulary,

coherence, fluency, and originality.

Methodology

This study is action research because the authors are involved in the study. The

research design is quantitative due to the type of instruments to collect data. According to

Sax & Fisher (2001) action research helps teachers find several strategies that they need to

implement as a teacher in their classroom in order to build experience-based knowledge.

Participants

This research will be conducted at a university. The participants will be EFL

students from the seventh semester of the program of language and linguistics with a +B1

level. The participants are adults from 18 to 25 years old who study to become English

teachers. According to Etikan et al. (2016) a convenience sample is a type of non-

random sample in which participants have been included because of accessibility.

Instruments and Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, the independent variable is self-assessment using

rubrics as a tool, and the dependent variable is speaking, specifically, the component of

spoken fluency. Four different instruments to collect data were designed.

Survey.

Students will answer a 14 statements survey (Appendix 2) to determine their perspective towards the proposal. Each statement will use the Likert Scale with five options, totally agree, agree, indifferent, disagree, and totally disagree. The analysis of this survey will answer the second research question, what are students' perspectives of self-assessment rubrics to develop English spoken fluency? The statements are about the relationship between speaking, fluency, and the use of rubrics, and how they feel about them.

Pre and post-test.

At the beginning of the project, students will take a pre-test (Appendix 3) to establish the students' level before the application of the lesson plan. This test was taken from a standard evaluation, is divided into three parts, and will be taken in pairs. In the first part, the teacher will ask basic questions about the students' identity. In the second part, the teacher will present a picture to each student, and they will describe it and give their opinions. In the third part, the teacher will give a situation to both students and they will interact with each other and give opinions.

In the end, students will take a post-test (Appendix 9) to evaluate the students' improvement. The structure will be the same as in the pre-test, however, it will have other pictures and situations. Both tests will be compared to find out if the students improved their spoken fluency.

Self-assessment rubrics.

During the development of the project, different rubrics (Appendix 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8) will be used to evaluate and improve students' use of the language. These rubrics were modified to make them easy to understand. The language used is very simple and in first person, so students will feel more comfortable to use. Rubrics will evaluate grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse management, fluency, and originality. Points will be

assigned from 1 to 4 points. The highest grade will be for the best performance in all the components.

Reliability and Data Analysis

The results from the instruments will be analyzed and reported in charts and graphics to answer the research questions. The answers to the survey will be analyzed through statistical programs like SPSS to show the students' interest. The results of the pre and post-tests will also be analyzed and compared to show the student's improvement in their spoken fluency.

Ethical Considerations

According to Zyphur & Pierides (2017), a significant question emerges when doing research, what components are known as sensitive data? That is the ethical consideration. Researchers know that particular methods are treated with strict scrutiny. For instance, the personal data of the participants must be confidential. The level of delicate data is higher, and it will be only available for the researcher. That is the main reason why in this study participants will use pseudonyms. No pictures of learners will be taken because that is forbidden by educational laws. Outcomes of this study will be given to the institution and participants once implemented.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study are that sometimes students do not attend all the classes. This prevents them to work at the same speed than the other students. The lesson plan can take more time due to the absence of students. Another limitation is that internet access can fail in the institution as well as the lab schedule.

To conclude, this study is aimed to find consistent results for the research questions. This study looks to give other teachers another tool to improve students' spoken fluency and give an example that using self-assessment can have a positive impact on students' speaking skills.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Instrument: Survey to students

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Pre-test

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Rubric: Speaking Rubric for formative assessment in week 1.
Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Rubric: Speaking Rubric for formative assessment in week 2.
Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Rubric: Speaking Rubric for formative assessment in week 2.

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

Rubric: Speaking Rubric for formative assessment in week 2.
Available upon request.

Appendix 8

Rubric: Speaking Rubric for Summative Performance Assessment Task

Available upon request.

Appendix 9
Post-test

Available upon request.