



Peer Assessment of Audio Recordings to Improve Oral Skills using WhatsApp

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Nowadays, the English language is considered the lingua franca for communication worldwide. Rao (2019) mentioned that English had been a helpful communication means in different fields such as technology, science, arts, business, and education, among thousands of speakers. Nevertheless, the learning of this language has not gotten the same results in all the countries. According to Education First (2021), some countries in Latin America have the lowest level of English. In the case of Ecuador, findings demonstrated that the proficiency in the last year placed it in position # 90 of 112 countries. This is why it is necessary to improve English learning in the current learners.

In 2013, English teaching in Ecuador was optional. However, the knowledge level in students needed to improve. In an agreement, the Ministry of Education established a new Curricular Reform to include some periods of classes in primary and secondary education (Ministerio de Educación, 2014). In March 2014, the periods of English classes were regulated as mandatory. Five periods for secondary level and two for primary school, beginning at the second grade (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). The Ministry of Education prepared this plan to improve English as a foreign language (EFL) in every single skill (writing, listening, reading, and speaking) with the goal to increase English competencies in learners.

Most of the students believe their proficiency in English could be affected by the lack of improvement in their speaking skills. Hossain (2015) stated that many learners consider speaking the most complicated skill since it needs training and effort to communicate the language effectively. Students have many reasons for not developing speaking skills. Al-Eiadeh et al. (2016) expressed that some causes that prevent their

speaking learning are confusion, embarrassment, difficulties in pronunciation, limited vocabulary, fossilization, lack of confidence, and anxiety. For these reasons, it is necessary to engage students in the learning process and connect the educative contexts with the current and innovative changes that learners are experimenting based on collaboration and peer-assessment to help each other to do a better job.

Double et al. (2020a) showed the use and importance of peer-assessment in student learning and development, and how these authors conducted their research. The analysis done in 54 studies of experimental and quasi-experimental studies evaluated peer assessment's effect on academic performance in primary, secondary, or tertiary students in different subjects. An overall (s) small to (m) medium effect of peer assessment was found ($m = 0.31, p < .001$). The results suggested that peer assessment improves academic performance compared with no Peer assessed learners, and the effectiveness of peer assessment was remarkably robust across a wide range of contexts.

Liu and Lee (2013), in their study investigated the influence of various forms of peer observation and feedback on student learning. The participants were twelve graduate students at a university in northern Taiwan. Students were first required to learn the content and complete homework assignments through online peer assessment activities. Data were collected from interviews and student journals for content analysis. The results demonstrate that the quality of feedback improved from the first peer assessment to the second; however, the amount of advanced feedback decreased. Although students adjusted their homework according to the feedback provided by their classmates, they did not fully accept this criticism. Students valued specific feedback more highly than scores. Nevertheless, the desire to obtain high scores motivated many students to modify their papers.

Safitri et al. (2020) mentioned that they supported their research on the notes and findings obtained from the initial data on the students' speaking skills. It showed that students had problems in speaking due to inadequate knowledge of the language. This weakness made the students feel unconfident to talk because they were not familiar with various speaking activities that hindered them from speaking. The authors stated that students could read the text to convey the ideas, but they lack strategies when speaking. It makes learners struggle with the language.

In the local context, Moreira (2020) conducted an action research and found out how peer assessment enhanced speaking skills in a group of 40 four-grader children with an A1 English level. The study measured the effect of peer-assessment strategy in speaking at a private school in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The overall scores improved according to the test taken at the end of the study. The effect size was 2.3, indicating, that the increase in the students speaking level positively influenced in their knowledge improving their performance in oral tasks. The students indicated that they look forward to using peer-assessment in speaking tasks.

According to the Office of Educational Technology (2017), nowadays, students live in a technological age; the internet manages their relationships, business, studies, and interests. They use many applications to be updated in all changes and innovations. Today, the internet, technology, the media, and English virtual social networks provide more opportunities for meaningful and authentic language use as stated by Richards (2014). Educational mobile tools have emerged and show great potential to help students construct and share information and knowledge for learning through computers or mobile devices (Pence, 2007). The most suitable for them according to students' experiences is WhatsApp, which has been demonstrated that is very helpful even in the educative field.

The researcher believes that working through some technological apps, the group of 25 second-year baccalaureate learners will engage in the classes and improve their oral production. Students are struggling with their learning, and their proficiency in the English language is lower than required for their level. Additionally, the demotivation for virtual classes is bigger every time. That is why this proposal looks to improve the oral skills focused on peer-assessment in high school students. This strategy will allow students to improve in their competencies by recording audios using the WhatsApp as a technological tool.

Literature Review

In this section, readers find concepts and theories of primary authors and investigators that have contributed to reinforce the interaction for improving the speaking skills. In this review, readers can find sections as speaking English, peer-assessment, and the communicative language teaching to enhance learners develop their oral production facilitated by WhatsApp.

Speaking Skills

Speaking is perceived as the most complex skill compared to the three other language skills: reading, listening, and writing. People can be called 'the speaker of language' when they speak it as if they included all different kinds of knowledge (Ur, 2012). The author also expressed that speakers use their linguistics knowledge and background knowledge to convey the ideas, negotiate meaning, and explore thought.

Many advanced English learners face the difficult challenge to become highly skilled English users despite fossilized errors, insufficient learning opportunities, and a few contact with proficient English speakers who are able and willing to provide helpful

feedback (Dormer, 2013). This is why it is necessary to develop some speaking strategies that help learners to make their language more communicative (Castillo et al., 2014). Firstly, it's worth to implement accuracy in the major part of any language teaching course. Without an accurate knowledge of their target language, students will never be able to understand the contexts.

Oral Production

Robes (2013, as cited in Jaramillo & Luzardo, 2015) stated that when the language teaching process is a matter of constant drillings of memorizing and re-doing things, it immediately becomes a tedious process for students. For this reason, the author focused on creative an attractive teaching through quality in the input. It could be the music or the interaction among peers in real situations in a conversation, emphasizing their active participation. Students' fresh minds could internalize the knowledge to make it flow in a relaxed way, suggesting more openness to learning.

Several models of speech processing have been put forward (Donald, 1993; Levelt et al., 1999) to explain how humans produce language, a highly complex process, at such a fast rate with the minimum of error. The L2 production is fundamental for oral proficiency of language processing in speech production. Levelt's model of speech production (1993) is today's perhaps most influential model which describes the process of speaking from intention to articulation. Speech production process consists of several relatively autonomous components: conceptualization, formulation and articulation, and mental lexicon (Levelt, 1993).

The previous author mentioned that Conceptualizing is primarily deciding on what to say or express. Levelt (1993) stated that the Formulator converts the pre-verbal message into a speech plan. The Mental Lexicon is seeing as a huge container of

language knowledge. According to Clark (1994), mental lexicon is organized as a dictionary, a mental list of lexical items together with detailed information about it. The Mental Lexicon is also the place where the formulaic language is stored. Formulas can be of different types (idioms, multiword phrases, and collocations; Kormos, 2006, p. 45).

Pronunciation.

Speaking is known as the basic element when there is a type of communication, pronunciation is seen and discussed by many authors and teachers that have come across it (Prodanovska, 2017). EFL learners face speaking as a mere difficulty in acquiring the desired level, often depends on the level of pronunciation. Pronunciation plays an important role in intelligibility (Goh, 2007). Mispronouncing a single sound causes the listener's misunderstanding, and various uses of stresses as well as intonations result in very different meanings.

In addition, English differ a lot in sounding systems, so if learners often make mistakes in sounds, stress and intonation, their speaking accuracy can be greatly affected. Cook (1996, as cited in Gilakjani, 2016) expressed that pronunciation is the production of encompassed English sounds, and it is learned by repeating sounds and correcting them when produced inaccurately. When learners start learning pronunciation they make new habits and overcome the difficulties resulting from the first language.

Accuracy.

The accuracy-oriented approach that accepts that grammatical errors (grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation) cannot be neglected, that is because they can result in fossilization. Instant error-correction is necessary to avoid fossilization (Dincer et al.,

2012). This approach focuses on repetition of newly introduced forms and grammatical structures in speaking (Willerman, 2011). Accuracy is conceptualized as the characteristic that defines the learner's usage of a foreign language (Murray, 2018). The author mentioned that accuracy notices how the learner follows the use of correct structures considering grammatical mistakes. There are some remarkable inaccuracies in the use of grammar, or in the choice of vocabulary, and in the pronunciation that can help the facilitator to measure a learner's progress and as such are often used in various assessments (Hancock, 2018).

Fluency.

Fluency in speaking is the ability to communicate a spoken message to each other, and it can be understood by the listener or the speaker himself (Hariyanto, 2016). Fluency is defined as the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably, accurately and without too much hesitation (Olive-Iglesias & Pupo-Almarales, 2014). The fluency-oriented approach which believes that grammatical or pronunciation errors are insignificant, especially in the early stages (Dincer et al., 2012). The authors also mentioned that correction can hinder learners' development in speaking. This approach stems from the Natural approach and regards errors as tolerable and probable and they are signs of natural language development.

Kumar (2013) stated that accuracy and fluency have been always closely and related for a successful communication. Fluency considers the percentage of understanding that people have about what the speaker says, meanwhile accuracy is about the exactly and correctly use of grammar in the speakers speech. Accuracy (linguistic competence) is the ability to manage the rule or grammatical structures of the language, and fluency (communicative competence) is the ability to use the language in

context considering mechanical skills as pauses, punctuation, speed, rhythm, and sentence length (Rojano, 2017).

Peer-assessment

Some peer assessment investigators mentioned the benefits of using this learning strategy. In this case, peer assessment allows students to connect and involve themselves with the materials to assess; learners compare their work with their partners' ones identifying possible mistakes in their performance (Topping, 1998). In addition, peer assessment provides some support and suggestions to learners for improving their work. A helpful strategy is implementing an inclusive language and making partners understand messages creating an appropriate environment accepting the possible evaluations and revisions (Double et al., 2020b).

According to Ossenberget al. (2019), one of the best peer assessment strategies is providing efficient feedback to the partner with helpful comments taking into consideration different components and factors that could include specific aspects related to the environment and learner situation knowledge be displayed. In this part, it is necessary to check all the details and support the results; the researcher and students will scaffold evidence of progress.

Learners require specific training in the assessment techniques to make their work valid and trustworthy (Hanrahan & Isaac, 2001). The design of a meaningful activity needs to follow some specific directions. They are written below:

1. Defining assessment criteria
2. Giving feedback for future learning
3. Writing a qualitative assessment report.

In this model, self and peer-assessment are interpreted as learning activities instead of scoring or ranking tools (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2001).

Peer assessment training might positively affect the development of content related skills if the training is embedded in the existing course material (Mehrens et al., 1998). In this view, the assessment skill is not trained in isolation but is directly linked to course content. If a teacher for example integrates a training of the assessment skill “defining criteria” in his/her course on presentation skills, students will learn to negotiate about criteria for a good presentation. Understanding these criteria helps the students to improve their own presentations, and thus the assessment training will support students’ development of their presentation skills (Orsmond et al., 2000).

To assess their own work or that of a peer, students have to employ reflection skills to recognize strengths and weaknesses. In this view, self and peer assessment are strongly related: analyzing the work of peers can lead to an improved awareness of the quality of one’s own work (Freeman, 1995). Reflection is already a familiar concept in teacher training (Korthagen & Wubbels, 2000).

Speaking assessment is a type of evaluation that works in pairs, or even groups. It has become the object of a growing amount of attention from both researchers and language assessment practitioners (Ducasse & Brown, 2009). The procedure is often referred to as “paired orals” or “group orals.” Such formats are argued to hold potential for increased interactivity and authenticity relative to a one-on-one interview; however, the added complexity complicates rating. Nevertheless, paired and group oral assessments have successfully incorporated into large-scale assessment programs (Van Moere, 2006).

Feedback

Feedback is any type of information that learners receive from the facilitator or from peers about their performance. Sackstein and Berkowicz (2017) said that Feedback is the moment in the learning process when students get the most personalized instruction possible to improve their competencies. Feedback can be corrective focusing on students' errors, or non-corrective, simply giving a piece of praise or encouragement. The feedback can also be about the performance of peers (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Actually, some learners benefit more from hearing this kind of feedback than feedback which concerns them more directly (Kerr, 2017).

Teachers or partners keep a note of language items which they wish to focus on while the students are speaking. Later, they select specific aspect to check or review the recorded materials with a limited number of items to provide feedback to their peers (Harmer, 2007).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Naya and Katemba (2017) stated that "the communicative approach" is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. This approach aims to enable students to read and appreciate foreign language. The "communicative method in the teaching of foreign languages" emphasizes learning a language through genuine communication. By introducing CLT, teachers are able to catch up with the modern development of English teaching methods in the world.

Nevertheless, the application of CLT has faced some troubles and resistance in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Ellis, 1996). The author expressed that not all the learners acquire the language in the same form. This situation could produce incompetent users of the English language in real situations. For instance, in

China, where the call for adoption of CLT was not accidental, it came from the educational problem that needed to be solved. This problem was the existing unsatisfactory teaching results of the traditional grammar-oriented method (Liao, 2000). In the current time, there are reports of strong support of CLT in many contexts; a lot of CLT in EFL contexts innovations that could face a large number of challenges where EFL teachers have to deal in implementing CLT in their classrooms, but it is necessary and helpful to make students reach their goals (Heng, 2014).

Richards (2006) defined a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners can acquire a language, the types of classroom activities that best facilitate and enhance learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. The author gave some pieces of advices that can help to improve students do their learning more significant: Interaction between the learner and users of the language, collaborative creation of meaning, creating useful and purposeful interaction through language, and negotiation of concepts as the learner and his or her interlocutor arrive at understanding among others.

WhatsApp

WhatsApp (from the English phrase "What's up?" meaning "What's new?") is an instant messaging application for smartphones (Barhoumi, 2015). WhatsApp allows users to exchange images, videos, and audio or written messages using their internet connection. The author also mentioned that the app facilitates online collaboration and cooperation between online students connected from school or home in a blended mobile lecture. Groups linked to WhatsApp for example, using Teams, Google meets or Zoom. Finally, the information and knowledge are easily constructed and shared through WhatsApp instant messaging.

Learning occurs when a learner interacts with knowledge sources to gain a new understanding, concept, or new skills. It can take place in formal or informal settings. Students who interact for learning from a community of practice, in many cases strengthen people more to debate a different topic, and also they could have the advantage of finding solutions as well (Wenger, 2010). The community of practice tries to dominate the understanding process by deciding on the contents of the learning activities, and efficiently involving themselves and actively participating in the learning process (Kapucu, 2012).

In learner-centered approaches, students learn and apply collaboration and teamwork skills by engaging in jobs defined and supervised by a facilitator (McLoughlin & Luca, 2002). WhatsApp Messenger enhances interactions, collaborations, and teamwork (Aburezeq & Ishtaiwa, 2013). This application can encourage collaboration, participation, and cooperation among learners in the learning process (Abraham & Anikpo, 2019). The investigation showed how WhatsApp Messenger supported student-centered learning. Expressly, the study was aimed to:

- *Evaluate the level of exchange of scholarly information resources among students through WhatsApp Messenger.
- *Determine how WhatsApp supports student-centered learning.
- *Assess challenges influencing students when using WhatsApp Messenger in acquisition.

WhatsApp connects people worldwide; users of WhatsApp can create groups and share images, texts, videos, documents, and audio with different individuals just giving a click. The application can work on both computers and smartphones. The official website of WhatsApp indicated that by the year 2020, more than two billion

people from 180 different countries used this application for communicating multimedia content to each other (WhatsApp, 2020).

With the objective of overcoming speaking difficulties in learners in a meaningful way, this proposal has included theories that will help learners to improve their foreign languages competencies, especially with their speaking skills development, this proposal aims to answer these following research questions:

1. Does peer assessment facilitated by WhatsApp improve speaking?
2. Does peer assessment facilitate speaking skills?
3. What are students' difficulties in speaking?

Innovation

This proposal will implement some communicative tasks directed to develop speaking skills using peer-assessment facilitated by WhatsApp to improve yes/ no questions in speaking. This study will take place in a public school in Arenillas city from El Oro province. The participants of this proposal will be twenty-five students from the second year of baccalaureate, whose English proficiency level is A1. The researcher will implement this proposal for two weeks of regular classes during ten learning periods, five hours per week. The Understanding by Design (UbD; Appendix A) is a lesson plan created with different activities that follows the course book and it will be developed to work. There will be four complete activities in this plan aimed to engage students in their second language learning. These activities will have the CLT component to make the activities communicative to the learners.

During this time, participants will be provided with materials and vocabulary related to different contexts such as daily routines, holidays, and future plans. Students

will internalize specific target language to apply in classes. Additionally, real-life situations and experiences focused on communicative activities. Students will be measured in their English knowledge. At the beginning of the study, they will try a pretest (Appendix B), and at the final part, they will use the posttest (Appendix C).

The students will analyze and interpret every component of the speaking rubric (Appendix D) in English and Spanish to peer assess their partners. During the training, students will learn and compare different models of peer assessment that will be essential to provide peer assessment and practical feedback to their partners through the WhatsApp tool. The rubric will help students to provide an accurate peer-assessment to their pals.

In the following sessions, students will be introduced to the unit contents through listening and speaking activities that will make them work individually and in pairs. Then, they will be able to record their audios tasks to send their partners for giving and receiving peer assessment and feedback. In this part, students will use a checklist (Appendix E) to revise if the partner is meeting the required standards of improvement in their spoken accuracy or not. Their tasks will be the creation of some conversations that learners will develop, work on them and send by their cellphones using WhatsApp to provide peer assessment to their partners.

Learners will be free to use different types of resources and technological platforms to improve their pronunciation, accuracy, and their listening. The use of recordings implies the creation of some dialogues in context to improve speaking skills. Some of their creations will be short pieces of speech that partners will send by WhatsApp, where the other partner will check the content and will revise the product. In some case, the pair of students will try to record their conversation to check the

understanding of their pronunciation and vocabulary usage. To finish the innovation the researcher will have a meeting to develop an interview (Appendix F) with students where the questions will be related to the difficulties and challenges that learners face during the learning process.

Methodology

This proposal will be based on action research that will involve qualitative and quantitative data, the author will look for specific facts as the possible improvements taken from the results check and analyze students' perspectives about their difficulties for learning. According to Stringer (2008), an action research is a process of systematic inquiry that seeks to improve social issues affecting the lives of everyday people. An action research involves a systematic process of examining the evidence; the results of this type of research are practical, relevant, and can inform theory. An action research is different than other forms of research as there is less concern for universality of findings, and more value is placed on the relevance of the findings to the researcher and the local collaborators (Klein, 2021). In a research approach, investigators collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data within the same study (Shorten & Smith, 2017).

Quantitative data is conceptualized as the value of a specific piece-set that has a unique code associated with it. This input is any quantifiable information that can be used for calculations and statistical analysis, such that real-life decisions can be made based on these mathematical derivations (Stevens, 2021). Quantitative data is used to answer questions such as “How many?”, “How often?”, “How much?”. This information can be verified and can also be conveniently evaluated using numerical techniques.

The Qualitative input is known as the type of information that describes a piece of evidence. It is investigative and often open-ended, allowing respondents to fully express themselves. Additionally, it is known as categorical data, this data type is not necessarily measured using numbers but rather categorized based on properties, attributes, labels, and other identifiers (Pickell, 2021). Numbers like national identification number, and phone number, for example, are identified as quantitative, but in some cases, they can be applied as qualitative information.

Participants

The participants are students from the second year of baccalaureate whose ages range from 15 to 18 years old. Most of the participants' English proficiency is A1.1, and some own the A2 and A2.1 levels. There are three students with B1. Proficiency tests were taken in a free online and trustful platform (<https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/>) applied in English classes with students. Students are very motivated to participate and improve their English skills.

Instruments

The instruments to apply will be the pre and posttest. The speaking rubric will be used to grade the Appendixes B and C. Students will fulfill the pretest (Appendix B) the beginning of the innovation, and at the last part, they will test their knowledge with the posttest (Appendix C) to check their possible improvement. The pre and posttests will be similar. They are adapted to challenge and measure the different students' skills throughout the study. In the pre and posttest, students will try to answer six groups of questions divided in three parts. Students also will watch and listen to one audio in every part. The test is focused on measure students' competencies.

During the innovation, students will be engaged to increase their learning and knowledge. To grade the tests, students follow the descriptors written in the Rubric (Appendix D). The rubric has some valuable components as fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and specific details that the teacher-researcher will need to understand to compare and contrast the possible responses done in the tests to check the possible improvement. The intention here is trying to obtain the most reliable results from students' tests.

The next instrument is the checklist (Appendix E). Students will fulfill it when they check their partners' recordings and mark all the improvements, failures, and steps seen during the revision. Using the checklist, students will be able to measure their partner accuracy improvement. The checklist has ten items which will determine the possible improvement through the innovation. Students can use the checklist as many times as required to improve their peer-assessment skills.

The next instrument to apply will be the interview (Appendix F). The facilitator will have a short interview with eight students using a semi structured design which has seven questions, where they will interact with the researcher and will talk about the innovation, the challenges and difficulties spent through the innovation. Additionally, the last instrument to apply is field notes report (Appendix G) that will be the perfect support for the teacher to write the answers from qualitative research questions. This document will have a clear format where the researcher will keep all the possible news and situations happened during the innovation. There will be all the observations done in every session of class, and there will be written all the possible students perspectives about the learning process.

Data Analysis

To answer the first question: *Does peer assessment facilitated by WhatsApp improve speaking?* Descriptive statistics of the tests will be used for analysis. The pre-test and post-test results will be analyzed in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to obtain descriptive statistics (minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation). First, the grades will be uploaded in an Excel worksheet to get the possible improvement of each component. Grades will be taken from this rubric.

For the second question: *Does peer assessment facilitate spoken accuracy?* The accuracy in English is different to just speak English. The learner will implement the checklist to measure the possible accuracy improvement in his/ her partner. The facilitator will monitor and examine the students' checklist results to notice if there are any participants' accuracy improvement about if peer assessment and the work maintained during the training.

For the third question: *What are students' difficulties in speaking?* The instrument apply will be the interview. It will allow the researcher to know students' difficulties faced during the implementation of this proposal. The perspectives will be the limitations and challenges to overcome during and after implementing this innovation. Additionally, the teacher will use field notes report to write some specific details that can appear during the innovation.

Ethical Consideration

It is necessary to implement some ethical considerations in research. The principles of ethical considerations are a set of resources that guide the plans, designs and practices in an investigation or action research (Bhandari, 2021). The author mentioned that scientists and researchers must always adhere to a certain code of conduct when collecting data from people. In this case, the facilitator will communicate

to the institution the intention to develop an action research with a group of learners who currently are in second year of baccalaureate. The implementation of this proposal will report the possible improvement of students in their speaking skills through peer assessment.

Students should participate on the basis of informed consent. The principle of informed consent involves researchers providing sufficient information and assurances about taking part to allow individuals to understand the implications of participation and to reach a fully informed, considered and freely given decision about whether or not to do so, without the exercise of any pressure or coercion (Saunders et al., 2019). The majority of the participants of this proposal are minors, so they will need a consent letter from their parents. Additionally, they and their parents will be informed about the implementation to develop. Everyone will know that the performance will be free and every student will have the opportunity to participate on the study.

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Appendix A

Backward Design. Lesson Plan.

Available upon request.

Appendix B and C

Pretest & Posttest

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Speaking Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix E

Checklist

Peer – assessment Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix F

Interview

Available upon request.

Appendix G

Field Notes Report.

Available upon request.