



Applying Self-Assessment to Improve Speaking Skills in a Secondary School

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Nowadays, COVID-19 forced the educational system around the world to be developed virtually. Addressing the class through electronic devices instead of physical contact into schools generates challenges in the teaching and learning process. In Ecuador, teachers must adapt and apply methods, techniques, or strategies that let students achieve their language goals in their second language acquisition. One of these instructional tools is self-evaluation. According to Thawabieh (2017), “Students’ self-assessment is a type of assessment which involves students in evaluating their work” (p. 16). In fact, enhancing speaking production requires the study of techniques like self-evaluation.

Low development of speaking production in students in the first year of high school of A2 level is affecting their performance. The majority of activities that students accomplish in class contains a low level of oral interaction. Moreover, there are activities that they perform just once. As a result, they cannot identify their weaknesses, evaluate their work, and improve their gaps. The lack of awareness of their performance also affects their accuracy and performance in their speaking production.

The challenges faced through virtual classes and the activities related only to reading, writing, and grammar affect the speaking development. Most of the students do not have the internet to access their virtual classes. Moreover, each week students only have two hours of 40 minutes of English per week. This short time is not enough for oral activities and the lack of physical interaction also affects it. Similarly, the “Curriculum Priorizado de Emergencia” used during these last two years does not contain speaking activities. Thus, the performance of students in this language ability is low.

One of the main aims of the National English program is to make students be autonomous and independent learners to be able to interact effectively in a globalized world.

This research, which was carried out during four weeks in a secondary public school, intends to examine how much self-assessment influences the improvement of speaking skills in English.

Literature Review

This section explored the independent variable which is self-assessment. First, professional studies related to this research were presented to demonstrate how relevant this topic is within the educational field. Then theoretical concepts, as well as definitions, were quoted to support this innovation with reliability and professionalism. After that, the benefits and challenges of self-evaluation were presented. At the end of this section, the process of how to train students to apply this strategy for their own evaluation was described.

Related Studies

Investigating related studies of self-assessment gave a clear picture of how it is relevant to enhance speaking skills. Khonamri et al. (2021) and Marzuki et al. (2020) in their innovations studied self-assessment as a strategy that facilitates the teaching and learning of language. They also explored the effectiveness of self-assessment in the oral performance of EFL learners. Both studies reported positive results where the majority of students considered self-evaluation as a very useful strategy to evaluate themselves.

Self-Assessment

Knowing about self-evaluation allowed having a better understanding of this important topic. Saeed et al. (2018) pointed out that self-assessment is a relevant strategy within educational development that allows students to estimate their achievements based on an established rubric. Dolosic (2018) defined self-assessment as a personal assessment of own accomplishments and competencies of students. Shatri et al. (2022) established that the auto-regulation of learners is an elemental issue of formative evaluation that inspires students to study progressively. Masruria and Anam (2021) considered self-assessment as a way of

evaluation that learners can carry out in discovering, increasing, and improving their performance.

Jamrus and Razali (2019) stated that self-assessment is characteristically focused on explicit duties. For instance, established conditions and representations or examples are supplied. Thus, students previously know the requirements to accomplish the activity. Moreover, self-evaluation incentivizes students to become independent learners. They are capable of identifying their strengths and weaknesses in their oral performance based on the determined criteria. All in all, this strategy allows students to be aware of which areas they have to improve to achieve the learning speaking goal.

Zimmerman and Moylan (2009) argued that the development of abilities in SA involves active participation in following previous instructions. Individual engagement, creativity, and constancy are also required. The cognitive prototype of self-assessment shows the relationship between metacognitive events and the motivational opinions of students.

Benefits of self-assessment

Applying self-assessment (SA) gives learners some benefits and advantages in their learning process. Panadero et al. (2018) said that when students are given the opportunity for applying SA in their learning process, they are able to develop their learning abilities. “There are three main effects of self-assessment on EFL students’ speaking performance that can be seen. They are (1) identifying students’ strengths and weaknesses, (2) increasing students’ self-efficacy, and (3) improving their speaking performance” (Sintayani and Adnyayanti, 2022, p.87).

Dolosic (2018) mentioned that Self-Assessment can be a standard for learners that are improving the abilities they require to be effective language users. SA can increase the accuracy of students; teachers are more capable to identify their lack of understanding or their achievements based on different ways of instruction. Dolosic (2018) also commented that the

learners enhance meaningfully the precision of SA because they were kept in practice before this process. But this does not happen with students who are not trained previously.

Wolf and Stevens (2007) said that when learners are provided with the evaluation indicators while they are developing an activity, they can assess their own knowledge. Jamrus and Razali (2019) concluded that SA strategy provides students with clear information about what they need to do to accomplish the activity. In this way, instead of the lack of understanding about the learning goals, students have well established how to achieve them. Moreover, when students have real knowledge about the self-evaluation process and when they are supported with scripts, samples, or mentor texts they show interest in their own work.

Challenges of self-assessment

Identifying the challenges of self-assessment letting teachers look for strategies to help students to overcome and avoid them. Gurbanov (2016) stated that self-assessment can give negative results. For example, when learners have a huge amount of independence and individual concern related to self-regulation, lack of engagement, supervising, and applying recommendations instead of the guidance of the teacher.

Siarova et al. (2017) established that negative self-evaluation can be associated with the social atmosphere within the class, where the overvalue of individual knowledge or the obligation to improve can provide an overrating of the capability of students or even erroneous scores. In short, self-evaluation validity depends on the knowledge of the teacher and the training of students before applying it.

Gavin et al. (2016) said that it is challenging to know which is the level of certainty or veracity of the self-evaluation of the learners over their individual work. In fact, honesty and trust are required to have an effective self-evaluation of learners. Karpen (2018) indicated

that a frequent example of partial self-assessment is a poor relationship between skills evaluation and the real achievement.

The process of training students to use self-assessment

Applying self-regulation requires the need of teaching students how it works. They must have the basis to accomplish this process. Andrade (2019) said that the aim of SA is to provide feedback that helps the acquisition of knowledge and achievements in learning. Andrade also explained that three main issues have to be accomplished when applying SA: what to assess (competence, process, or product), why to assess (formative or summative), and how to assess (methods, including or not standards).

Anh et al. (2022) argued that self-assessment with adequate practice is considered relevant in supporting students to enhance their own learning. Raaijmakers et al. (2019) established that monitoring, evaluation, and control are the main elements of self-regulated learning. Zimmerman and Moylan (2009) pointed out that the cognitive model of SA follows three recurring phases. The forethought phase involves the activity examination procedures and the foundations of self-enthusiasm. The performance phase includes auto-control and auto-observation procedures. The self-reflection phase makes references to self-judgments and self-reactions. Indeed, training students with modeling samples before applying all the phases of self-assessment improves its precision.

Bueno (2021) argued that SA is a challenging metacognitive ability that needs enough preparation and training to reflect on individual work. Raaijmakers et al. (2019) stated that learners who are trained develop a high level of cognitive self-control and their outcomes are better than students who are not trained on how to assess themselves. Masuwai et al. (2021) indicated that teachers have to include self-assessment as a tool of evaluation, to instruct learners to acquire new knowledge, be interested, and enhance their performance. Raković et al. (2022) argued that backwards design engages students in SA and enhances their outcomes.

In fact, backwards design requires modeling the final task, providing samples, and establishing and explaining the checklist and the rubric used for an efficient self-evaluation.

In conclusion, analyzing related studies, definitions, benefits, challenges, and the process of training students to use self-assessment was relevant to support this study. Based on all this information, it is pertinent to explore, how much does self-assessment influence the production of speaking skills in students of A2 level in the first year of high school?

Innovation

The innovation demanded the development and application of a comprehensible lesson plan that supported the self-assessment process. This lesson plan contained relevant information, the succession of related activities, and the resources to carry out the implementation.

First, the topic of the unit was “Technology and Beyond”. It was planned for two synchronous hours and one asynchronous hour each week for four weeks. Real time classes were developed through Microsoft Teams and the four oral descriptions of the innovation related to ancient cultures, health, arts, and communication were posted through WhatsApp. The transfer goal was established in order to reach the objective of the unit. Based on this, at the end of the lesson, students were able to independently solve similar activities inside or outside the class.

The learning content of the lesson plan was vocabulary related to technology and inventions, grammar about simple past structures, regular verbs rules for past tense, time expressions, and transition words. It also had instructions for self-assessment and the mentor text as examples of the target descriptions. Furthermore, the lesson plan included the summative performance assessment task and the standards for grading the task.

Second, the instruments used for the innovation were the checklist for the self-assessment of students and the rubric applied for the teacher to grade the work of learners.

The checklist scale had 4 levels: “very well”, “well”, “a little”, and “nothing.”. The process of self-assessment consists of their evaluation. Students had to evaluate their vocabulary and grammar (words related to the target topic and rules for regular verbs in simple past, structure for affirmative and negative sentences, questions, and answers), cohesion (use of transition words, and past time expressions), pronunciation (pronounce understandably and with proper intonation), and fluency (speaks fluently and without pauses).

The rubric was developed taking into account the Cambridge rubric of speaking assessment for A2 flyers which validated its application. In this case, for grading vocabulary and grammar I had to pay attention to range, control, and extent. For cohesion, I focused on the use of simple linkers. For pronunciation, individual sounds, stress, and intonation were graded. For fluency, hesitation and pauses were evaluated. The scores established were very well (2.5), well (2), some features of 1 and some of 2 (1.5), a little (1), some features of 0 and some features of 1 (0.5), and nothing (0). After each self-assessment process students were supported with feedback by the teacher to improve their weaknesses.

Furthermore, the English Pedagogical Module 2 for the first year of High School A2, audio records to practice vocabulary pronunciation, and audio messages to record the descriptions were also used. Similarly, students had to research for information about the specific weekly topic.

Third, the role of the teacher and the students was relevant within the innovation process. The teacher was the guide who had the responsibility to plan and select the activities and materials, give a clear explanation of the proposed learning, explain the process for an effective self-assessment, provide on-time feedback, and support students with their learning needs. While the role of the students was to participate as famous lecturers to describe their favorite events related to technology and inventions through audio messages in the classroom WhatsApp group. Additionally, their role was to be independent learners, be responsible for

their assigned activities, develop self-monitoring skills to judge their own learning, practice and achieve the innovation task.

In order for students to develop an individual responsibility for their learning process, the concept of Gradual Release Responsibility (GRR) was explained. The GRR allowed students to assume all of the responsibility for their learning process; after the teacher instructed them to achieve a sequence of activities to accomplish the main task. Frey and Fisher (2013) indicated that this model has four elements: focus lesson, guided instruction, productive group work, and independent learning. In the first element, the focus lesson, the teacher models the activity with the text mentor. In guided instruction, the teacher employs strategies like questioning, stimuli, and indications to allow students to comprehend. In productive group work, teachers organize students in workgroups where they can work collaboratively to achieve a goal. The last element is independent learning, students have to demonstrate the knowledge they acquire by themselves for different situations.

Ndoye (2017) established that a better comprehension of the importance of responsibility originates confidence and enthusiasm to regulate and lead the learning progress of themselves. Similarly, a desire to accomplish the mandatory and essential knowledge for an advanced learning development.

Fourth, the learning activities were planned for four weeks and based on the transfer goal. “Teachers begin establishing a transfer goal” (Guilott et, al., 2020, p.24). Thus, the activities were: activities to bring prior knowledge (watch videos about the target topic), activities to present new vocabulary words related to the topics (ancient culture, health, science, and technological advancements), activities to teach grammar structure (simple past tense, signal words, transition signals), and activities to reinforce knowledge (different tasks for practice). Moreover, in the first week, students were instructed on self-assessment because during the four weeks they had to self-evaluate and determine their progress.

In conclusion, the development and application of the innovation required a detailed lesson plan that supports the self-assessment procedure. Furthermore, it was relevant to determine the sequence of activities and the materials needed to accomplish the final task. It was also important to determine the specific role of the teacher and students within this process.

Research Methodology

This innovation was focused on self-assessment to improve speaking skills. A lesson plan (Appendix 1) that supported it was designed, developed, and applied following the Understanding by Design methodology. This study was carried out with 16 male students of A2 level in the first year of High School who had the consent of their legal representatives.

During the four weeks of the innovation, learners had to record, self-assess the audio messages over the studied topic of the week (ancient culture, health, science, and technological advancements), and publish them on the WhatsApp group of the class. I also graded their recordings to provide the feedback considered necessary for each case and monitor their improvements. However, the first recorded audio message about ancient culture and the last recorded audio message about technological advancements were considered as pretest and posttest respectively. They were graded according to the indicators established in the rubric (Appendix 2) vocabulary and grammar, cohesion, pronunciation, and fluency.

The independent variable of this study was self-assessment and the dependent variable was speaking skills. The main aim of this innovation was to explore the research question 1 (quantitative), how much does self-assessment influence the production of speaking skills in students of A2 level in the first year of High School? and to answer the research question 2 (qualitative), how did students improve in speaking after this implementation? The innovation was an action research carried out based on quantitative and

qualitative approaches. Creswell (2015) research is a set of phases applied to gather and examine data for a better comprehension of a problem.

Participants

In this innovation, a total of 31 students enrolled in the first year of High School in automotive electromechanics specialization at a secondary technical public institution were invited to participate. However, only 16 students were authorized by their representatives and they constitute the total population of the study. In fact, the 15 were not able to participate because they as minors needed the approval of their parents. Of the 16 learners, 9 of them were 15 years old representing 56.25 % while 7 were 16 years old corresponding to 43.75%.

Furthermore, 100% of the participants were male students. From the 16, 12 identified as a member of the mestizo group and 4 as indigenous which corresponded to 75% and 25% respectively. Additionally, 4 of them (25%) spoke Spanish and Quichua while the 12 (75%) spoke only Spanish. From this group, 13 (81.25%) students come from rural areas and 3 (18.75%) from urban areas. The 16 (100%) participants indicated that they belong to the middle socioeconomic level. According to the course they are enrolled in and the modules they use, all of them correspond to the A2 English level.

Instruments

In order to answer the research question 1 (quantitative), how much does self-assessment influence the production of speaking skills in students of A2 level in the first year of High School? The pre and posttest (self-assessment checklist, Appendix 3) were applied to collect data and they were graded using the rubric. This process involved the audios sent by the students to assess them correctly.

To answer question 2 (qualitative), how did students improve in speaking after this implementation? a questionnaire in a Word Document (Appendix 4) that contained four open-ended questions was applied to collect the data.

Data Analysis

To evaluate the impact of self-assessment on the production of speaking skills, it was necessary to apply a paired-sample *t*-test. This test allows making a comparison between the grades obtained in the pre and posttest for every single student. The analysis of the data required the use of Microsoft Excel and its Analytic Tools Pack. With descriptive statistics, the mean, mode, median, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation can be determined. Similarly, the *p*-value was calculated through inferential statistics. Whereas, the data collected through the questionnaire to answer the qualitative research question was analyzed to report the responses of students.

Ethical Considerations

For Bassey and Owan (2019), ethical contemplations involve the principles which have to be applied in the correct way. Creswell (2015) pointed out that people who take part in innovation have to be granted their rights. These people must have knowledge about the goals of the innovation, the way the achievements are going to be used, and the effects of the work in their environment. Individuals can leave the innovation at any time without a problem. Moreover, the information of each participant must be kept anonymous.

In fact, the development and application of this study required the authorization of the principal of the school. In a formal document, the researcher explained the procedures and the objective of the study to the principal and the parents to get their agreement. Then students were also well-informed about the whole process of the innovation. Moreover, the right to privacy was guaranteed because their names were reserved anonymously. Finally, it was clarified that all the information collected, analyzed, and obtained is considered private and used only for academic purposes.

Results

To explore the research question 1, how much does self-assessment influence the production of speaking skills in students of A2 level in the first year of High School? The pre and posttest audio recorded messages allowed assessing the outcomes of students in their speaking skills. They also determined that there was an enhancement in the speaking production of participants. See table 1. The pretest (first audio recorded message) reported an average of 3.3 and the posttest (last audio recorded message) showed an average of 6.9. Likewise, comparing the minimum and maximum grades the improvement was obvious.

Table 1. Pretest and posttest comparison

Instrument	# SS	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pretest	16	1	5	3.3	1.12
Posttest	16	3	8.5	6.9	2.22

Based on this data, the p -value was obtained and its result was $p=0.00$. It showed statistically significant results which means that the innovation had a positive impact on the improvement of speaking production.

Besides, in order to explore research question 2, how did students improve in speaking after this implementation? four questions were analyzed.

Question 1: What did you enhance during the innovation? Most of the students indicated that the innovation allowed them to enhance vocabulary and grammar, cohesion, pronunciation, and fluency. Furthermore, they considered that the recordings helped them to identify their grammar mistakes and the mispronunciation of specific words. They also expressed that they felt comfortable recording their descriptions because they had the opportunity to record as many times as they considered it was good to post in the WhatsApp group.

“I spoke clearly and without a lot of pauses” (S8).

“I felt comfortable because I did not talk in front of my classmates” (S12).

Question 2: What did you do to improve? Some students indicated that they follow the mentor text to do their descriptions. Others said that to improve pronunciation they practiced the audios of the vocabulary words as many times as they needed. Few students used the Google Translator to listen and practice the pronunciation of complete sentences.

“I followed the mentor text to do my description in a correct way” (S15).

“I repeated the vocabulary words before to record the audio” (S1).

“I used Google Translator to listen to the correct pronunciation” (S8).

Question 3: What did you like about the innovation? Some students expressed that they liked the checklist because it allowed them what was expected to do.

“I liked the checklist and the mentor text because they were useful to understand what I had to do for the task” (S16).

“I liked the use of the cell phone because I recorded and listened with my sister and when I believed it was correct, I sent it” (S3).

Question 4: What were the challenges you faced? Some students considered that pronouncing a complete sentence was a challenge. Others said that learning the vocabulary words for each topic was difficult.

“For me it was difficult to pronounce a complete sentence” (S4).

“My challenge was to pronounce the words seismograph and papyrus” (S6).

All in all, after the implementation students improved in their speaking skills. They were aware of their mistakes in pronunciation and by themselves they practiced the pronunciation of vocabulary words, small phrases, and complete sentences before recording and posting their descriptions. In fact, their advancements demonstrated the effort and the responsibility they developed to accomplish the final task.

Discussion

The research question examined the effectiveness of self-evaluation in the improvement of speaking skills. Therefore, the positive results obtained exposed a great impact on the development of speaking production like the findings of Khonamri et al. (2021) and Marzuki et al. (2020) in their innovations. Those studies were centered on the analysis of self-assessment as a strategy that facilitates the teaching and learning of language and explored its effectiveness in the oral performance of EFL learners.

This study also showed that supporting the learning process with specific instructions, prompts, and models help students understand what they have to reach at the end of the task. Jamrus and Razali (2019) said that providing learners with explicit duties, established conditions, representations, and examples allowed students to achieve the activity with success.

In this innovation, it was also evident the relevance of the checklist and rubric. These tools helped students to self-assess their learnings and allowed the teacher to grade their job respectively. Saeed et al. (2018) established that students can enhance their outcomes with the use of the rubric developed for self-regulation.

Training students in self-regulation permitted learners to reach metacognition achievements as Bueno (2021) and Raaijmakers et al (2019) encountered in their studies. After training, students gathered high levels of cognition and developed self-reflection skills.

The problem with the innovation was the lack of connection because the majority of them live in rural areas. To complete the weekly task required, students had to search the internet for information to do the description. Moreover, the lack of understanding about the self-assessment in the first class was a barrier at the beginning. Students did not clearly understand the mentor text to create their oral description. After the first feedback, students comprehend and for the next week, they improved a lot. Bueno (2021) stated that SA is a complicated ability that requires enough training to replicate individually.

Conclusions

The low performance in speaking production of learners in the first year of the High School of A2 level in a secondary school was affecting their achievements and grades. To solve this problematic issue the self-assessment was applied and it showed positive results for speaking production.

Based on these results, it can be concluded that self-assessment significantly improved speaking skills. It gives students the opportunity to judge their learning and identify their weaknesses and strengths. This process is helpful not only for students but also for teachers because learners become autonomous and develop a high level of responsibility for their tasks.

Supporting students with clear instructions facilitated their understanding and allowed them to know what is expected at the end of the task. This is a benefit because when students achieve a deeper knowledge and a deeper understanding of the rubric and its indicators, they are able to reach the established goal with success.

Training and monitoring processes are fundamental in the first steps of the innovation. Continuous feedback helps students enhance their weaknesses and progress in the acquisition of the second language. Providing students with the mentor text, samples, models, or prompts facilitates accomplishments and improvements.

Incorporating audio-recorded messages engaged students and made them more responsible. The use of the WhatsApp group allowed students to feel comfortable and develop an interest in participating with their descriptions. For instance, learners post their descriptions on time and according to the weekly topic. Similarly, a better understanding promotes positive feelings and attitudes in learning English. Students increase their

confidence when they comprehend smaller tasks and validate their improvements by themselves.

Limitations

The limitations faced to carry out the innovation were principally the lack of permanent access to the Internet. Students only worked with recharges for their cellphones because most of them live in rural areas where there is no internet connection. It affected the accomplishment and delivery of the activities on time.

The time was another limitation. Only two hours of synchronic classes per week is not enough because the activities for the innovation and the activities required for the school were carried out at the same time. It affected the time to provide feedback.

Moreover, the lack of knowledge about voice recorder applications and how they work was a challenge for students. Many of them have never used that kind of application.

Recommendations

Before starting an innovation first be sure participants have access to technological devices and have a stable internet connection to guarantee they can work without this kind of problem. The innovation should be addressed for more time to have better results because four weeks are not enough for students to acquire self-assessment as a habit to improve their learning. Take into account and integrate extra activities into the lesson plan. These activities let you train students in the use of different apps they need to have knowledge.

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Appendix 1

Lesson plan.

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

RUBRIC OF SPEAKING ASSESSMENT FOR A2 FLYERS

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Questionnaire

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Link Portfolio

Available upon request.