Influence of Self-Assessment in Developing Speaking Skills

María Carolina Espinoza Zambrano

Guide: María Rosanna Ramírez

Modality: Research Report

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Speaking may be the most essential skill when learning a language and is also the most difficult to teach or acquire (Burns, 1998). Helping students develop their speaking abilities to communicate in a foreign language is challenging for teachers, especially when the learners' exposure and interaction with the language happen only at school.

English is considered a foreign language in Ecuador; thus, it is taught in schools, institutes, and higher education. However, according to Castillo (2021), "Ecuador remains one of the two countries in Latin America with the worst level of proficiency in the English language, only above Mexico" (par. 1). Students from tenth grade usually do not develop the speaking skills needed to start the first year of high school. That happens because oral interaction is one of the least accomplished skills due to the lack of correct approaches and authentic practice in and outside the classroom.

Therefore, to improve learners' pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and oral interaction, the design and application of innovation were proposed to enhance students' spoken abilities using self-assessment. Therefore, the students were trained to become familiar with self-assessment as a strategy that permits them to participate in their learning process.

The project's purpose was to measure the influence of self-assessment in developing speaking skills. For that reason, a lesson plan was designed with a specific topic. Students had to describe future plans using the present continuous with appropriate vocabulary, correct grammar, and intelligible pronunciation. The participants employed checklists to self-evaluate their progress. Finally, the study's results compared students' pre- and post-test performance.

Literature Review

This research focused on improving students' EFL (English as a Foreign Language) speaking skills through self-assessment. To carry out the innovation project, it was necessary to explore concepts of self-assessment and speaking to support the research. The procedure of assessing students has changed over the years, and other alternatives that emphasize students' skills improvement are being used more often. Butler and Lee (2010) mentioned that self-assessment has gained supporters in educational contexts, explicitly learning a foreign language. It helps to self-regulate learning and change instruction by focusing on the student. In addition, self-assessment is considered a tool that promotes students' consciousness of the level of their tasks and the criteria used to judge their work (Masruria, 2021).

In their article, Sharma et al. (2016) mentioned that self-assessment is an indispensable element in the learning process because it permits students to collect and analyze information, which develops the ability to become an autodidact. Similarly, Alek et al. (2020) stated that self-assessment encourages learners to keep track and reach their purposes by increasing students' awareness of their individual learning.

According to Chalkia (2012), "Self-assessment has a motivational effect, which is essential when teaching young learners" (p. 228). Moreover, self-assessment permits students to do feedback which guides them through specific suggestions to meet their objectives (Chalkia, 2012).

Several studies directed on self-assessment pointed out that applying self-assessment in the student evaluation process enhances learner autonomy (Başak, 2019). Consequently, when a student can self-assess accurately, it indicates study independence because the apprentice does not rely exclusively on teachers' assessments or feedback. For example, Engelhardt and Pfingsthorn (2013) cited in their article,

"Self-assessment can enable learners to see gaps in their learning and support them in their willingness to take linguistic risks." (p. 76).

Speaking is a productive skill that allows learners to use the language realistically, improving the ability to communicate in day-to-day life (Hussain, 2017). Therefore, speaking self-assessment permits students to realize the enhancement of their linguistic skills throughout the process, encouraging learners to adopt measures to accomplish the aims pursued, appraise their learning, and establish a plan to improve. (Babaii et al., 2016). Indeed, according to Joo (2016), assessing speaking is challenging and entails a deep comprehension of the evaluation criteria to be precise in the scores. Moreover, it often depends on the subjective decisions of instructors or peers, making impartiality and reliability a complex task.

Therefore, self-assessment of students' speaking skills by self-recording is an alternative and has its advantages. First, teachers and students can see the performance as often as necessary to revise the presentation carefully. Second, and more essentially, the learner can analyze his/her performance, reflect on their positive and negative points, and establish goals for improvement (Christianson, 2009).

Jamrus and Razali (2019) indicated that self-assessment assists language learners to remain encouraged to learn and helps them reflect on their learning, promoting critical thinking and self-recognition of their progress in learning English. Moreover, a study done in a school in Hong Kong concluded that using self-assessment diaries improves students' learning attainment, which helps develop confidence in one's own abilities (Yan et al., 2020).

Self-assessment practices consist of determining how efficient is one's own work considering a rubric or feedback from the teacher (Brown & Harris, 2013). However, the accuracy of self-assessment has been discussed by experts. Some aspects are

considered such as (1) students may be idealistically optimistic about their own aptitudes, (2) wrong interpretations that make students believe they are good or weak in some discipline which can deceive or harm the learner in the process, and (3) lack of competence in understanding the key indicators to self-assess (Brown & Harris, 2013). Therefore, it can be said that applying self-assessment has good intentions to help students develop their learning skills, but at the same time, it has its weaknesses and restrictions.

Innovation

The innovation aimed to improve the students' English speaking skills by using self-assessment with checklists as instruments (See appendix A). The innovation was focused on speaking since it was a shortcoming detected by the teacher that needed improvement.

Therefore, after permission from the school's director and the students' parents, the project started on November 22nd with tenth-graders whose level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), was A2. Twelve students participated in the innovation as volunteers for two weeks, eight hours (four per week) divided into synchronous and asynchronous hours. The classes were carried out virtually via Teams.

The unit's topic was "Talking about my plans for weekends or holidays". The design and application of a lesson plan (See appendix B) were intended to provide students with interactive resources and information that allow them to accomplish the transfer goal. For instance, YouTube, Kahoot, and Mentimeter were some tools used for practicing in class. These applications help students interact and ask questions receiving feedback which is an aspect of formative assessment.

At the beginning of the innovation, students were given a mentor text as a guide of what the teacher expected after every class (See appendix C). According to Tabrizi (2017), mentor texts are viewed as a source of knowledge that provides students with a correct model. Moreover, using mentor texts decreases students' stress levels since they suggest a real piece of work to learners from which they can replicate using their own ideas. Additionally, students were informed and trained about using a checklist to self-assess their performance from the first class.

The students learned new grammar and vocabulary. In addition, they modeled pronunciation and organized ideas to discuss their plans in each class. Similarly, participants practiced in class in groups, pairs, or individually. After every class, as productive tasks in the asynchronous hours, the students worked asynchronously in pairs creating dialogues using the grammar and vocabulary learned. For that task, students needed to practice all the knowledge acquired in class to accomplish the specifications. Then, students recorded their conversations, self-assessed their work using a checklist, and forwarded all the information to the teacher via WhatsApp.

The students did the same practice four times; the first and the last were the pre-test and the post-test, respectively. Once the participants finished the innovation project, the researcher sent a digital questionnaire throughout Forms to gather their opinions and comments about the experience.

Research Methodology

The study used action research since the teacher executed the investigation based on self-reflection about a common problem identified in the classroom (Clark et al., 2015). In addition, it is mixed research given that it considered quantitative and

qualitative data. *Action research* can be defined as "A self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach" (Burns, 2010, as cited in Banegas & Consoli, 2020, p. 177). As Miskovic et al. (2012) reported, action research is an effective means to transform the school environment because it is practical and proposes solutions to the situation.

According to Salman (2015), action research improves learning because educators constantly analyze, investigate, and find solutions to overcome shared classroom issues. Moreover, Salman (2015) mentioned that action research entails researchers putting theory into practice to achieve accurate results for everyday problems.

Therefore, once the students finished the innovation, the teacher used the checklists to transform them into rubrics (See appendix D) to re-grade the pre and post-tests. As Brown et al. (2015) stated, to check students' self-assessment accuracy, the results should be compared with the revision of a capable agent (teacher or peer). Consequently, the pre and post-test grades and the questionnaire responses were taken as data to study the progress in speaking skills using self-assessment.

Quantitative research question:

- Does the implementation of self-assessment influence speaking skills performance among tenth-grade students in a public school in an urban area of Portoviejo?

Qualitative research question:

- What are students' points of view or perspectives toward using speaking self-assessment?

Participants

The innovation project was held in a public school in the Northwest urban area of Portoviejo, Ecuador. The class had thirty-five students who were invited to

participate in the study, but only twelve joined as volunteers for the project for two

weeks. The participants belonged to tenth grade, were all Ecuadorians, and were

fourteen years old. There were eight males and four females, all from the Coastal

Region. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

(CEFR), their level was A2.

Instruments

The instruments were aimed to gather data to answer the following research

questions: 1) Does the implementation of self-assessment influence speaking skills

performance among tenth-grade students in a public school in an urban area of

Portoviejo? and 2) What are students' points of view or perspectives toward using

speaking self-assessment? Therefore, the teacher created a rubric to evaluate students'

pre and post-tests to answer the first quantitative question and determine students'

speaking skills improvement. In the pre-test, students had to record a short conversation

about their plans for the weekend; likewise, in the post-test, they had to converse about

their vacation plans.

The rubric was based on the checklist students used to self-assess. However,

contrary to a checklist, rubrics should be explicit and detailed, so students can know the

indicators they are meeting and what they need to improve to step up (Brookhart, 2018).

The rubric was structured, including the five criteria: Grammar, Vocabulary,

Organization, Interaction, and Pronunciation. Each band had three descriptors, one the

lowest and two the highest score. The rubric was adapted from the A2 level Cambridge

Assessment chart.

According to Jonsson and Panadero (2016), the rubric comprises two parts. The

first contains information about criteria to seek in student performance, and the second

contains descriptions of different quality ranks regarding students' performance. Then, combining both with a scoring strategy, the rubric fulfills its purpose: to provide a mark.

First, in the grammar criterion, the highest band was described as students demonstrating a good grammar level to talk about plans. In contrast, the lowest band was described as students showing inadequate grammatical forms to discuss plans. Second, in the vocabulary section, the highest band was defined as students using an extended and appropriate vocabulary when discussing plans. Opposite that, the lowest band was explained as students using poor vocabulary words and phrases to talk about plans.

Third, in the organization criterion, the highest band was designated as students using connectors and cohesive devices as sequence adverbs. However, the lowest band was described as students who do not link their ideas and rarely use connectors. Fourth, in interaction, the highest band was described as students following the conversation with an easy flow after each exchange. In contrast, the lowest band corresponded to students who did not follow the dialogue after each exchange. Finally, in pronunciation, the highest band was defined as mostly intelligible students with some control of phonological structures at both expressions and word levels. In contrast, the lowest band had minimal control of phonological features and was often unintelligible.

A second English teacher trained in using the speaking rubric evaluated the pre and post-test to verify the instrument's reliability. Then, both scores were averaged to obtain a final product. Reliability refers to the stability and consistency of a study result (Taherdoost, 2018). Moreover, for the validity of the speaking rubric, the researcher used the Cambridge A2 level speaking assessment chart as a model and adapted it. According to Scholtes et al. (2011), validity relates to "The degree to which the instrument measures the construct(s) it purports to measure" (p.239).

To answer the second research question: What are students' points of view or perspectives toward using speaking self-assessment? The researcher created a questionnaire using Forms and applied it to 6 students. The participants were chosen randomly among the group. The questionnaire contemplated open questions related to the student's experiences during the innovation to know students' perspectives and feelings (See appendix E). The participants were asked: What is your point of view or perspective toward the use of speaking self-assessment?

Data Analysis

To evaluate the influence of self-assessment on English language speaking grades, a paired-sample t-test was conducted. The purpose of the paired-sample t-test was to compare pre-tests and post-tests scores. To calculate the maximum, minimum, mean, standard deviation, and p-value was done in Microsoft Excel using the Analytics Tools Pack.

To analyze the responses to the research question: What are students' points of view or perspectives toward using speaking self-assessment? The researcher organized students' outlooks into positive and challenging perceptions.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher contemplated different aspects during the innovation process to fulfill ethical considerations. Pillay (2014) stated that educational research must include a sense of morality and values to protect participants from any injury during the study. Therefore, permission from the institution's authority (See appendix F) and consent from students' parents (See appendix G) were requested to carry out the innovation. In addition, the participation was voluntary, and the identity of the students was confidential and anonymous, supplying participants' names with numbers. Alike,

objectivity, honesty, and integrity were essential aspects in the data collection, analysis,

and publication of results.

Results

To answer the first research question: "Does the implementation of self-

assessment influence speaking skills performance among tenth-grade students in a

public school in an urban area of Portoviejo?" The results from the pre and post-test

were used to reckon basic descriptive statistics (maximum, minimum, mean, standard

deviations, and p-value).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Pre-test and Post-test

	N	Min	Max	M	SD	p-value
Pre-Test	12	5.50	8.50	6.96	1.010	0.000
Post-Test	12	8.00	10.0	9.00	0.738	0.000

Note: N= Sample. Min= Minimum. Max= Maximum. M= Mean. SD= Standard Deviation.
Table 1 shows the general results collected from the pre and post-tests after

applying the innovation project. The standard deviation in the pre-test is 1.010, which

means that students' grades were not so far from the mean. On the other hand, in the

post-test, the standard deviation is 0.738, demonstrating that participants' scores were

closer to the mean.

According to the paired-sample t-test, it was shown that t-statistic is greater than

the critical value of t (two-tailed), and the p-value is less than 0.05 (see Table 1).

Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected since it has been proven that the difference

between the two means of each test is statistically significant. Consequently, the

quantitative results showed that students could improve in every descriptor of the

innovation, which determined that students could be more proficient in speaking skills when discussing plans.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of the theoretical constructs

Construct	N	Pre-Test		Post-Test		MD	%	*p*-value
		M	SD	M	SD			
Grammar	12	1.38	0.22	1.79	0.25	0.41	20.5%	0.000
Vocabulary	12	1.58	0.28	1.76	0.25	0.21	10.5%	0.000
Organization	12	1.38	0.37	1.92	0.19	0.54	27.0%	0.000
Interaction	12	1.38	0.22	1.88	0.22	0.50	25.0%	0.000
Pronunciation	12	1.25	0.26	1.63	0.22	0.38	19.0%	0.000

Note: N= Sample. M= Mean. MD= Mean Difference. SD= Standard Deviation. %= percentage.

Table 2 shows the results for each descriptor of the speaking rubric in the pre and post-tests. First, the descriptor organization has the most significant improvement with a mean difference of 0.54, which represents 27% of enhancement. The descriptor vocabulary reveals a mean difference of 0.21, representing 10.5% which denotes the lowest improvement. This may be because vocabulary obtained a high score in the pre-test compared with the other descriptors, leaving a margin of lowest improvement for the post-test in this label.

For the second research question: What are students' points of view or perspectives toward using speaking self-assessment? The researcher took excerpts from students' responses to analyze the qualitative data from six participants. The answers were divided into good insights and challenging aspects presented during the innovation. For instance:

Good insights

"I feel my pronunciation improved because when I listened myself, I could realize my mistakes and correct them for the next time" (S. 3)

"My speaking improved with all the activities and tasks done in class. I liked to self-assess because it was a great opportunity to analyze my good and bad points" (S. 4)

"I learned a lot. I felt happy to compare the first and the last audio. That is the proof of how I improved. It motivated me" (S. 5)

"This project helped me improve my speaking using self-evaluation which was new for me but helped me to improve my pronunciation" (S. 6)

Challenges

"I think I learned during the innovation but sometimes I was confused about how I should have self-assessed my work" (S.1)

"I believe that I still need to improve my pronunciation and to lose the fear of speaking. Regarding the self-assessment, I think it is important to be honest with ourselves" (S. 2)

Consequently, most of the students did a good review of the innovation. They are conscious that using self-assessment allows them to reflect on their work and permits improvement based on their weaknesses. On the other hand, the challenges indicated that even though the training, some participants were unsure how to self-assess their work. Moreover, they felt nervous and were afraid to talk.

Discussion

Considering the results of the pre and post-tests, this study found that self-assessment positively influences speaking skills improvement. This responds to the first research question, "Does the implementation of self-assessment influence speaking

skills performance among tenth-grade students in a public school in an urban area of

Portoviejo?". These findings support what Alek et al. (2020) mentioned about the effect

of self-assessment on motivating learners to improve and achieve their academic

purposes.

During the innovation, students recorded the dialogues to self-assess their work.

As Christianson (2009) referred to in his article, recording the students' performance is a

good strategy in the improvement process. It allows learners to revise, examine and

evaluate their production repeatedly. Consequently, students recognize their flaws and

reflect on them to advance. In the same way, the positive results pointed out that self-

assessment also helped develop learners' autonomy which coincides with Başak (2019),

who stated that self-assessment enhances students' self-sufficiency in the learning

practices because they do not depend entirely on the teacher's feedback.

For the second research question: What are students' points of view or

perspectives toward using speaking self-assessment? The findings exposed that students

felt they up-graded their speaking skills after participating in the study; thus, they felt

motivated. Therefore, the results ratified what Chalkia (2012) expressed in her article,

referring to how self-assessment allows students to be conscious of their successes and

failures to improve from there; and the stimulating influence that self-assessment

provokes in learners. Similarly, the outcomes coincide with Jamrus and Razali (2019),

who indicated that self-assessment encourages students to learn and reflect, promoting

critical thinking.

On the other hand, a student manifested confusion to self-assess, which agreed

with Brown and Harris (2013), who stated that self-assessment' accuracy could be

affected by the lack of comprehension of the instrument used. Moreover, according to

another response, the participant referred to the integrity needed to self-evaluate. Again,

Brown and Harris (2013) alleged that sometimes students might not be accurate when reporting results overestimating their grades.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether self-assessment helped students to enhance their speaking skills. After analyzing the data collected, the findings indicated that the use of self-evaluation impacts the student's speaking skills positively.

Implementing the innovation allowed students to participate in their learning and self-reflect on their performance. Likewise, students felt motivated and responsible for their decisions to improve. For those reasons, it can be concluded that self-assessment is an effective strategy to use when teaching-learning a foreign language since it helps students improve their speaking skills and, at the same time, promotes learner autonomy to develop their potential for future academic challenges.

Limitations

The size of the sample limited this study. Twelve students participated in the project as volunteers from a class of thirty-five. Moreover, the time employed to develop the innovation was short, only two weeks. Additionally, as the classes were virtual, students' connectivity problems sometimes impeded developing the lessons as planned. For example, some students could not open links to practice, interact online, or observe videos presented.

Recommendations

In accordance with the number of participants, it is recommended to conduct a similar study with a more significant sample to obtain results more representative of the entire population. Furthermore, employing more extended periods to perform research to contrast results is suggested. Moreover, to avoid connectivity issues, it is

recommended to apply the innovation in face-to-face classes with all the resources

needed. Thus, students can participate appropriately in the designed activities.

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Appendix A

Self-assessment checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Mentor text

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Rubric for summative assessment by the teacher.

Available upon request.

Appendix E

Complete transcriptions of students' answers to the questionnaire.

Available upon request.

Appendix F

Request of permission of the authority of the institution.

Available upon request.

Appendix G

Parents' consent

Available upon request.

Appendix H

E-portfolio's link

Available upon request.