



**Use of Self-Assessment to Upgrade the Speaking Skills of A1 Level Students in a  
Virtual Classroom.**

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## **Use of Self-Assessment to Upgrade the Speaking Skills of A1 Level Students in a Virtual Classroom.**

Evaluate and grade spoken English during virtual classes has become a tremendous work at public schools. Most teachers have identified adverse factors such as: limited learner proficiency, lack of previous knowledge of English, learner dependence on the teacher, limited exposure to English outside the classroom, lack of learner's consistency, and teachers' limited expectations of what learners can achieve.

Speaking is expressing thought, ideas, and feelings, but seems to be difficult for English learners because they must produce sentences on the spur of the moment. Trying to produce those sentences without learning the grammatical structures and having proper knowledge of vocabulary is quite difficult. Since speaking ability plays a dominant role in communication, teachers are trying to enhance it.

This action research took place over four weeks in an English virtual class. A group of young learners weren't confidence enough to speak in English during virtual classes and the teacher was not able to give individual feedback to each student, considering the participation of more than sixty students per class. As the Ecuadorian program demands that students learn English and become more fluent, teachers need to implement successful activities to achieve this.

Findings have revealed that feedback and a supportive learning environment are mechanisms which contribute to student's learning, giving them the opportunity to take corrective measures on their learning. The main purpose of this action research is to improve English language proficiency in students by using Self-Assessment with the collaboration of "Flipgrid", an online tool that allows users to create audio recordings and short videos. The participants were students of A1 level in a Language Center in a technical college in Babahoyo, Guayas, Ecuador.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Speaking ability.**

Every language has receptive and productive skills. Receptive skills involve listening and reading, while productive skills involve writing and speaking. According to Sreena and Ilankumaran (2018, p. 492-498), productive skills are also known as active skills because learners can generate language to communicate ideas either in text or speech.

In today's globalized world, "speaking ability is recognized as essential for international mobility, entrance to higher education, and employment" (Fan & Yan, 2020, as cited in Fulcher, 2015a; Isaacs, 2016). Speaking is an art of communication that must be mastered in learning foreign language. Most often the first impression of a person is based on his or her ability to speak fluently and comprehensively.

### **Technology in developing the speaking ability.**

Flipgrid is an application meant for asynchronous video-based discussions. Video length can be limited from thirty seconds to five minutes, which encourages more focused, less ambiguous responses. Students can reply to instructor videos with their own videos. The ability to pause and re-record videos helps students to practice communication before posting (Green & Green, 2018, p. 128-130).

Fixmer (2017) stated that Self-Assessment using "self-voice recordings help a lot in improving melodic singing and the pronunciation of the words". This app allows students to interact and engage with each other in ways not possible before. Flipgrid helps increase social presence in online courses and may support the sense of connection between students. According to Lowenthal (2020), if students are aware of what they are learning, the possibility for transfer and understanding increases highly (p. 28-41).

**Self-Assessment**

The purpose of Self-Assessment is to provide the students with an idea of their learning progress and allow for improvement of achievements of the learning outcomes. As Tholin (2008) states, the self-assessment method is “natural element of autonomous learning since it gives the learners a sense of consciousness of the learning” (p. 9-12). According to Al-Sinan (2008), the results of applying this tool have led learners to gain significant control over their learning, establishing strategies to make improvements in the areas they need.

If applied correctly, “Self-Assessment can promote intrinsic motivation, internally controlled effort, a mastery goal orientation, and more meaningful learning”, as McMillan & Hearn (2008, p. 40) put it. Speaking of which, these authors state that one of the limitations of Self-Assessment is that students are more likely to overestimate their abilities when assessments are used as part of their grades (McMillan & Hearn, 2008, p. 40-49).

Two research studies reported by Kostons et. al postulate that students may not benefit from this method because they lack the ability to accurately use the tools to assess themselves (2009, p. 932-940), especially when students are adolescents who lack the cognitive maturity to focus on self-assessment and the learning process simultaneously without being distracted (2012, p. 121-132).

**Self-Assessment to improve Speaking**

Speaking assessment in any foreign language is one of the most difficult testing tasks teachers face due to class size, test time, and testing environment (Parmawati, 2018, p. 21-25). In addition, some students do not pronounce any word as they are afraid of mispronouncing them (Marzuki, 2019, p. 53-64). In research by comparing learners' use of different types of rating scales: checklists and rubrics, Ibberson (2012)

attempted to explore the validity of those rating scales both devised with the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) for oral production.

The checklist consisted of one statement per CEFR level, on which the participants, fourteen English language learners at a UK university, could simply tick one of two options: able to use or difficult to use. The second was an analytic rubric based on the four construct variables (range, accuracy, fluency, and coherence) of spoken language as defined by the CEFR. Each CEFR level had a detailed description of the criteria for each variable.

Participants were trained to use both types of rating scales to rate their own recording of a two-to-three-minute monologue, and rating data were collected each week. By week five, agreement between teacher rating and self-rating reached 73.7% when the detailed rubric was used, a considerably high level of agreement compared to 42.2%, the agreement rate when the checklist was used.

Ibberson (2012) suggested that the well-crafted analytical rubric has a positive effect in generating self-assessment ratings comparable to those of teachers. This research focused on the impact of well-designed grading criteria, but it should be noted that the study did not consider a potential confounding variable: the effect of training.

This study provides training on how to use the grading criteria, which poses a challenge in distinguishing whether the results are due to the provision of the criteria, or to training that could have led trainees to be better feedback providers. Therefore, the study isolating the effect of training as an explanatory variable can be reviewed.

### **Backward design.**

This innovation was implemented after seeing the problems that ESL students have with their oral presentations during virtual classes. Understanding by Design is an approach to designing a curriculum that allows instructors to focus on the desired

learning outcomes and provide structure for student learning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

### **Innovation**

The learning process of teaching speaking skills to A1 level students of the Language Center of the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo follows the backward design. Activities are developed in synchronous and asynchronous sessions, and teachers give general or specific feedback according to the objectives of the unit.

This innovation started the first weekend of March 2021 and ran for about four classes (weekends). The time dedicated to the innovation was synchronous classes on the videoconference platform “Meet” as well as asynchronous activities. Six hours per week were set aside and were structured as followed: three hours via Meet with the entire group of sixty-five students (synchronous) and three hours of autonomous work (asynchronous). During these four weeks, the total was 24 hours.

In the first week, the teacher began to explain to the students how to apply the self-assessment and how to score each component of the checklist. The following week, the students had to log into “Meet” where the teacher reviewed the speaking activity. After practicing the self-assessment section during the first week, the teacher asked the students to record an audio to practice pronunciation, new adjectives and new vocabulary.

In the second and third classes, the students recorded audios about hobbies and more vocabulary. The last task was to record a one-minute video in which they described themselves, what they do, where they live, and what activities they usually do in their neighborhoods.

The students were introduced to the Flipgrid application, which was not challenging for them. Learning the self-assessment was more difficult for the students.

After the first week of class, and different activities, students managed to apply self-assessment effectively in each activity. This final activity was considered as the posttest, which was self-assessed by students but graded by the teacher.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology of this study was action research, according to Barcelona (2020, p. 517-523) “Action research is a cyclical process that may be used to improve instructional practice, assessment tools, and student outcomes with focus on specific problems”. Students were introduced to Self-Assessment to upgrade their speaking skills. The present research looked to answer: Does Self-Assessment with the support of a video-recording tool would upgrade Speaking skills in A1 level students of a virtual class?

#### *Objectives of this innovation:*

- Implement Speaking Self-Assessment in a virtual classroom.
- Teach students to become autonomous learners in speaking activities.

### **Participants**

The participants who worked with this project belonged to a public college in Los Rios, Ecuador. This institution offers technical careers with English classes as part of their curricular mesh. There were 65 students and their ages ranged from 17 up to 19. The participants’ language level was A1, according to CEFR standards, which means that in spoken production they could produce isolated phrases about people and places and can interact in a simple way. All students were willing to participate in this project.

### **Instruments**

#### **Rubric for writing.**

The innovation began with a pretest and ended with a posttest applied after three weeks. The activities are described in Appendix One. According to the previous

research by Ibberson (2012), he suggested that a “well-crafted analytic rubric has a positive effect in generating self-assessment ratings comparable to those of teachers”.

The rubric in this study was used to quantify the speaking activities used for student assignments (audio recordings and video recording).

The rubric contained 4 categories to evaluate: Vocabulary, Grammar, Organization and Pronunciation and Fluency. The rubric was on a scale of 1 to 5, with one being the lowest score and five being the highest. The full rubric can be seen in Appendix Two. It was designed following the principles of backward design and was reviewed by a subject matter expert from Casa Grande University.

The pretest consisted of a five-sentence composition in which students were to describe themselves. The next step was to record an audio (30 seconds) of them reading those sentences.

The Posttest was a video recorded by students using Flipgrid, which was self-assessed by them. Although all the activities were self-assessed by students, (including the Posttest), only the final activity (recorded video) was graded by the teacher, applying the scoring rubric to give the final grades to the students and make a comparison of the results of this innovation.

### **Data Analysis**

This was a quantitative analysis because it measured the improvement in the speaking ability of students before and after implementing Self-Assessment in a virtual class. To test the impact of self-assessment grade a paired-sample *t*-test was completed. For the results obtained comparing the pretest and post-test, it was analyzed the mean, minimum, maximum, mode and standard deviation. The analysis was performed on Microsoft Excel.

### **Ethical Considerations**



According to Patthey and Thomas-Spiegel (2013), Action research must be based on respect, honesty, and constant awareness of ethical dilemmas around action and decisions, and teacher's and learner's interests.

This is my first time applying an Action Research project in my classroom and each activity has been carried out in a very organized and structured way. Beforehand the implementation of this innovation, it was asked for the authorization of the director of the Language Center of the Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo, who gave his consent.

In this study was not necessary to ask for parental permission. The students were informed of the innovation, and they agreed to participate. It was explained to all the participants that their names and personal data were confidential. In addition, the student's honesty was requested. The students were given a talk prior to the innovation about the reliability of the results only if they were completely honest.

### **Results**

The results of the pretest according to the expected level of the students, the maximum score was 7 over 10, and the minimum grade was 4.10. the result of the posttest according to the expected level of the students, the maximum score was 10 over 10, and the minimum score was 7.10. The results shown in Table 1 correspond to the pretest and posttest scores.

From a sample of 65 participants, the mean difference is 3.17, which determines the increase in the result of posttest ratings. In addition, the obtained values of the standard deviation in both pretest and posttest show that the data are concentrated near the mean. As the  $p$  value is less than 5%, which refers to a lower number than 0.05, it is evident that the innovation is statistically significant, showing an improvement in the sample after implementing self-recording audios and a video recording to improve speaking skills.

**Table 1***Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Pre-test and Post-test*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (Average)	Std. Deviation
Pretest	65	4,10	7,00	5,5731	,81500
Posttest	65	7,10	10,00	8,7400	,80890

The innovation addresses two important aspects, the use of self-assessment and the application of a technological tool to improve oral expression. Both circumstances directly change the way students learn. Some of them found it difficult to apply the rubrics and to evaluate themselves objectively. Finally, the self-assessment was well received by all students.

The Flipgrid application faced similar challenges, at first, some students rejected the use of this tool, the difficulties of using this application on a cell phone made them feel annoyed. In this case, after practicing several times, all students understood the importance of a technological tool to help them in the self-assessment process and learned to use this app on cell phones, without setbacks.

In the statistical part we see how speaking skills improved significantly. This aligns with the theories of self-assessment and backward design. If students provide themselves with feedback and use a tool to correct their oral presentations, they will improve their skills and feel more confident.

### **Discussion**

The results examined demonstrate that self-assessment helps students to improve their speaking ability. In relation to the research question: Applying Self-Assessment of recorded audios of A1 level learners in a virtual classroom will help improve their speaking ability, students are now aware of the importance of being able to self-assess

their speaking skill. Giving students the opportunity to self-assess their recording can have a huge impact on meeting their learning targets (Morgan & O'Reilly, 2001).

By engaging in the process of reflecting on and evaluating their own work, students act on the evidence of their own learning and take responsibility for it (Tholin, 2008). This is consistent with the findings of Ibberson (2012), who obtained a considerably high level of agreement using a detailed rubric rather than a checklist. In the research, agreement between teacher rating and self-rating reached 73.7% when the detailed rubrics was used, a considerably high level of agreement compared to 42.2%, the agreement rate when the checklist was used.

Ibberson suggested that the well-crafted analytic rubric has a positive effect on generating self-assessment ratings comparable to those of teachers. The provision of quality feedback is crucial for learning, studies on self-assessment have employed different methods to control the quality of feedback. Studies of correlation of teacher and student ratings primarily employed a rating scale as an instrument to control for extraneous variables.

While a well-conceived rating criterion can guide learners to rate performance consistently (Ibberson, 2012), the use of grading scales in isolation can deprive learners of the opportunity to share open-ended comments, which could provide valuable information conducive to learning.

### **Conclusions**

This study suggests that when conditions are met, learners do have the ability to assess oral performances of their own. These conditions include: the clear provision of task-related criteria, sufficient training, considerations of the learner traits and their perception, as well as the strong integration with the curriculum. Not only the product

of assessment but also the process of being involved in self-assessment practices can enhance ESL speaking ability.

### **Limitations**

The innovation was applied in only one course. One of the limitations was that most of the students live in the rural sector. This implies poor Internet connectivity and that students use data from their cell phones to attend virtual classes. The virtuality of the current education was not the best scenario to measure the use of a technological tool; many students did not have the appropriate devices or internet access to use the technological tools in the best way.

But the biggest problem regarding the study of English is the lack of motivation or negative attitude towards the language. The weakness in learning English stems from the fact that is imposed as a standard of study and some students do not like it.,

### **Recommendations**

Referring to English classes where students have limited access to technology, I recommend doing any activities in web applications asynchronously and not for long periods of time, so that students can get to a place where they have access to the internet.

Surveying or interviewing students would allow for a better understanding of how self-assessment helps students improve their speaking. It would also help the researcher understand how students are studying between pre-test, self-assessment, and post-test time points. I recommend recording each English class to facilitate students repeating the video explaining each part of the innovation. The interviews would also help identify why students may have a negative attitude towards the language.

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**Appendix 1**

Lesson plan.

Available upon request.

**Appendix 2**

Rubric for Innovation

Available upon request.

**Appendix 3**

Checklist

Available upon request.

**Appendix 4**

**Consent Letter**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 5**

Eportfolio

Available upon request.