



The Implementation of Self-assessment to Improve Pronunciation through WhatsApp Audios.

Erika Eliana Silva Campuzano

Guide: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

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Developing English speaking skills helps people get personal and professional success since this skill is used for communication; however, sometimes teachers only focus on writing skills instead of speaking. That is why practicing oral activities in the classroom will help students to improve verbal communication. It has been noticed that when speaking activities are left out of the lessons, students do not feel confident to talk, participate or share experiences because of the lack of practice. Other consequences of this that have been observed are pronunciation mistakes, lack of confidence, and fluency difficulties. One of the strategies that help students improve their pronunciation and fluency is self-assessment. It helps them analyze their progress after each practice and helps identify their strengths and weaknesses.

In order to get the students involved in their own learning, there are a lot of new digital tools and technologies that teachers can use as a supplement to classroom teaching, to develop their speaking skills, and to motivate them to acquire the second language. Teachers can use different alternatives to involve students in the English learning process. For that reason, it is important for teacher to figure out a proper way to implement WhatsApp voice notes in their lessons so that students will assess themselves to improve their speaking skills.

Literature Review

In the present investigation, the objective is to improve students' pronunciation in speaking activities through self-assessment. Therefore, the definitions and strategies required to put this innovation into practice are described below.

Self-Assessment

This is the process whereby students provide feedback to themselves, which enhances their learning. Self-assessment allows students to reflect on their performances and to take control of their learning, according to Chan (2010). This is advantageous for students with lower levels of achievement since they feel confident working on their own, leaving out the pressure of a full classroom (Pitt et al., 2020).

Moreover, Yan (2020) stated that with the implementation of self-assessment, students are building their own knowledge, since they control their progress and are able to improve at their pace. DuBord (2016) wrote that students are able to achieve higher outcomes in certain areas, which means that they can do better when talking about their interests. Through self-assessment, they identify which areas need improvement and which need to be strengthened.

Rotsaert et al. (2018) stated that once students know what they are doing right, then they will realize what they have to improve. Self-assessment has become a widely applied tool that helps students comprehend the function of the assignment and the assessment criteria, according to Asdar (2017). Self-assessment gives students the power to decide in their own learning process.

Another advantage of self-assessment is making students think about the different language structures they need to communicate. Conroy and Batty (2020) also referred to methodologically speaking, which is described as the ability to express ideas consciously, in an organized way. So that students are not just talking about what comes to their minds, but they are building structures and complex ideas to make themselves understood. That is the reason why it is important to give meaningful feedback for them to apply self-assessment correctly, as Wang and Chang (2011) agreed.

Alternative ways to apply Self-assessment.

Before students carry out self-assessment activities, they have to be trained and given practice on how to assess and provide feedback. They have to be aware that self-evaluation is defined as students judging the value of their work, based on evidence and explicit criteria to do a better work in the future (Rolheiser & Ross, 2013). Students need to be taught strategies for self-monitoring and self-assessment to learn how it works and do it on their own.

The method to make students internalize the characteristics of quality work is by evaluating their own work and using reflection activities. This makes them think about their learning process, and the way it was applied by the authors in the classroom was questioning their achievement and performance through explanations of how they had to do the activities correctly (Gehring, 2017). As a result, any errors or mistakes in the usage of the oral language will be corrected by the students.

Benefits and challenges of using self-assessment.

A lot of difficulties involve the self-assessment process, but the benefits are uncountable once students know how to do it correctly. When self-assessing, students have more opportunities to engage in important cognitive activities such as critical thinking (i.e., deciding what contributes to a good piece of work), planning, monitoring, and regulation. A learner benefits in several ways from self-assessment, for example, receiving more frequent feedback than when the instructor is the only one providing it, getting feedback on drafts and being able to make improvements, and engaging in the critical analysis of their own reflection. Moreover, Murad and Starmer (2021) pointed out that self-assessment of individuals improves when they receive feedback from the teacher, which means that it is important to correct certain mistakes to self-assess properly.

On the other hand, one of the challenges for teachers appears when teaching students to use self-feedback to develop their capacity of judgment and make suggestions to improve

speech. This technique requires time to be acquired, but the results are impressive once it has been mastered.

Technology in the classroom

It is not a secret that the use of technology motivates students in the language learning process. Students know how to use a new technology or digital tool; nevertheless, they have to find the way to use it to benefit their learning. Thus, there are numerous tools that teachers can use in and out of the classroom to enhance students' learning, for example, WhatsApp.

WhatsApp is a widely used app for communication that almost every student is familiar with. However, the difficult part is not to teach the functions of the app, but to show them how it becomes an educational resource in the classroom. According to Ahmadi (2018), technology grows in importance as a tool to help teachers facilitate language learning for their learners, making the roles much easier to play. In education, technology facilitates students to acquire a second language and develop digital literacy skills. Therefore, "to effectively integrate technology in language classes", teachers should apply new platforms to engage students in the learning process (Gilakjani, 2017, p. 101). That is why the implementation of WhatsApp voice notes was fundamental to motivate students to work on oral activities.

WhatsApp and other similar apps have become part of our lives, so teachers need to start using it for learning purposes. Moreover, they need to give feedback after the implementation of this tool to make students think about their performance. Bregu (2020) described consequences to different ways to give feedback. He stated that the results depend on how the students process feedback. For example, meaningful feedback can make a student's performance improve significantly. That means that teacher should guide students to make them use technology to achieve their learning goals.

Innovation

The main goal of this innovation was to make A2 students of the first course in a Public High School improve their speaking skills through self-assessment facilitated by WhatsApp, a popular messaging service. This application allows people to send written text messages or voice notes to other users. To carry out this innovation, thirty students were asked to participate.

The implementation lasted four weeks, starting on November 22nd, 2021, and finishing on December 17th, 2021. As a pretest activity, students were asked to create a conversation using the simple past tense to describe what they did on their last vacation. Before working on the pretest, they made some practice with a mentor text that the teacher provided. Furthermore, there were class discussions about assessment and the presentation of a checklist to verify compliance. Students were familiarized with the checklist they would use to self-assess and the way they had to use it. Once this socialization was done, they started doing the pretest activity.

As soon as the task was completed, they had to upload the WhatsApp audios and a photograph of their self-assessment to the school platform, which was used as a repository. Students' self-assessment was an important tool for the teacher to come to the conclusion of how to improve the next activity. In addition, students developed more activities such as watching model videos with conversations to role-play and practice in the classroom.

The instruction for the posttest was to do the same activity that they developed in the pretest. The objective was to evidence the students' improvement by comparing the two dialogues. The teacher monitored the whole process and helped them during the activities. She was a facilitator who encouraged students to respond to the instructions in the speaking activities. The student's role was to participate actively and find the best way to express in

the second language that they had in mind. They self-assessed the first and the last recording audios to identify strengths and weaknesses in their use of English.

Research Methodology

Action research is a commonly used method in this kind of innovation. Action research allows teachers and students to learn through educational research to generate knowledge and improve educators' practice. According to Manfra (2019), researchers explore issues of everyday practice and work to bring about change. Teachers believe that through action research, their professional identities, and their levels of expertise will change for improvement (Warren et al., 2008).

Participants

The present study was carried out with 30 students, 11 males and 19 females, who were between the ages of 14 and 16. The sample selection did not include any pupils with special needs. These students belonged to high school of a public institution in Cuenca. The 100 % of the students belongs to the highland region, in Azuay province. The students had an A2 English level according to the CEFR (Common European Framework). This means that they are able to participate in short conversations on topics of interest (A2 CEFR conversation). The participants' level of English was verified after a diagnostic test, at the beginning of the school year.

Instruments

The data were collected through different instruments such as pre and posttests and an interview to answer the following research question: Does the implementation of the self-assessment help students improve their pronunciation in speaking activities among first-baccalaureate students in a public school in Cuenca, Ecuador?

WhatsApp audio conversations of the pre and post-test were graded using the rubric to get the results. The rubric was adapted from A2 Level Cambridge Assessment Scales

(<https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/key/results/>). It was based on four criteria: grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, content, and interactive communication. The highest criteria grade is 2.5, and the lowest is 1 with a total of ten points.

The highest band criteria of grammar and vocabulary described those students could use an excellent control of simple grammatical structures (Past Simple) with a good degree of control. On the other hand, the lowest band described that they had little control of grammatical structures with a low degree of control. The highest criteria on the pronunciation showed that students have some control of stress and intonation at both word and longer utterance levels, and the lowest band described that they have limited control of stress and intonation. In the third criteria, the highest band described students' content as clear, appropriate, presented in a logical order, and showing a thorough understanding of the topic, while the lowest described students' content as not clear, appropriate, presented in a logical order, and does not show understanding of the topic. In the highest band of the last criteria, students could respond promptly with only natural hesitation and pausing, and in the lower one, they rarely respond promptly with natural hesitation and pausing mid-utterance.

Quantitative data got from the pre and posttest were graded with a rubric created by the teacher using the content of the checklist. The checklist contains abilities that students should be able to do at the end of each activity. This rubric is set in the Appendix section.

Moreover, to collect qualitative data an open-ended questions interview was applied. The purpose of this interview was to carry out self-assessment to make students be aware of their improvement. This interview contained three questions that were asked to know how students feel before and after the application of the tests.

Data Analysis

The data were organized according to the research question that consist of the implementation of self-assessment to improve pronunciation through WhatsApp audios.

Students' grades in the pretest and posttest were compared in Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics of mean, maximum, minimum, and standard deviations were determined as well as the p value with the paired sample test. The interview also provided important information to find out what were the students' perspectives about the application of the innovation and what improvements they were able to notice in their oral performances.

Ethical Considerations

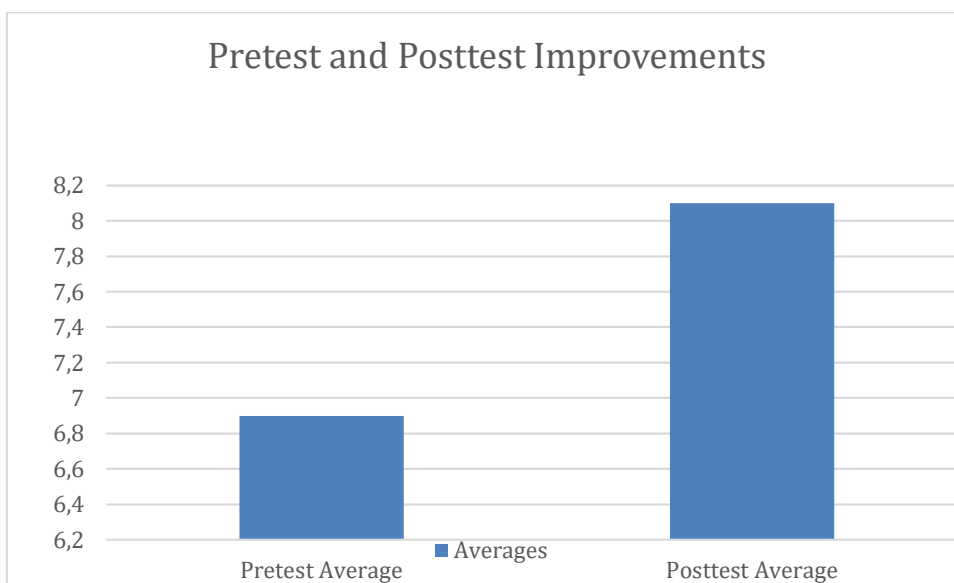
All participants were informed about the innovation, and 30 parents authorized their children participation in this innovation. The respective authorizations of the school principal and the students' parents were needed to implement the innovation. Moreover, the principal's authorization was primordial to start with this learning strategy. All these permissions were asked through a letter, so there was evidence in case someone tries to decline his or her participation after the program has started. Mohd (2018) stated that "participants need to be adequately informed about the research, comprehend the information, and have the power of freedom of choice to allow them to decide whether to participate or decline" (p. 30). Students, parents, and the school authorities need to be involved in all the educational practices applied to the students. Also, ethical issues promote the importance of values in collaborative work, such as trust, mutual respect, and fairness (Gajjar, 2013). It is also designed to protect students' intellectual interests and promote collaboration and respect for the group. Once this was clear for the people involved, the innovation did not present any difficulties.

Results

This study started by analyzing a diagnostic test (pretest) to identify students' level of knowledge. After some speaking activities, students recorded a last conversation (posttest) through WhatsApp voice notes. As we will see below, there are relevant differences between the first and the last tests.

Figure 1

Pretest and Posttest Improvements



The rubric used to evaluate the pre and posttests was relevant to get the results, and as it is shown in the chart, they were positive. Most of the students got a significant improvement after the posttest was applied. Twenty-nine students performed better in the posttest and only one student maintained the same score over ten.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Pretest and Posttest.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	30	4.50	9.00	6.90	.88
Posttest	30	6.50	10.00	8.20	.70
Valid N (list wise)	30				

In table 1, descriptive statistics for quantitative data were analyzed using formulas to calculate the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. This table clearly shows how well students did on each test, and the difference between them is considerable.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics of The Criteria in the Pre and Posttest.*

Criteria	PRE-TEST					POST-TEST					p value
	N	MI N	MA X	M	SD	N	MI N	MA X	M	SD	
Vocabulary and Grammar	30	1.00	2.50	1.75	0.47	30	2.00	2.50	2.07	0.17	0,00
Pronunciation	30	1.00	2,00	1.70	0.43	30	1.50	2.50	2.10	0.28	0,00
Context	30	1.00	2.00	1.68	0.43	30	1.00	2.50	1.97	0.29	0,00
Interactive Communication	30	1.00	2.50	1.77	0.45	30	1.00	2.50	2.00	0,42	0,00

Note: N= Sample MIN= Minimum MAX= Maximum M= Mean SD= Standard Deviation

Table 2 shows the improvement that the students had at the end of the intervention. In the post test, the first criterion of “Vocabulary and Grammar” has an increase in the mean of 0.32 points in comparison to the pretest. There is also an increase in the other three criteria: pronunciation, context, interactive communication; with an increase of 0.40, 0.29, and 0.23 points respectively. The standard deviation indicates that for each criterion, the scores tend to be very close to their mean.

For qualitative data, the students were asked three questions in order to know how they felt regarding both tests. To get the result, they were called for an interview with the teacher who asked three open-ended questions. These questions were related to their feelings and points of view before and after the pretest, and the improvements they noticed after the posttest. The last questions sought the students’ perspectives about using self-assessment after each oral practice. The three most representative answers are expressed after each question.

Question 1. How did you feel before and after the pre-test?

- “I felt a little nervous because I did not understand what I had to do.”

- “It was difficult because it was the first time, we did this kind of activity.”
- “It was not easy at the beginning, but after some practice, I think I improved my final activity.”

From these comments, it is possible to conclude that the students were not confident enough at the beginning, but after some practice they were able to do a better work.

Question 2. What improvement could you notice after the posttest?

- “I think I have improved my pronunciation,”
- “Now, I can speak more fluently,”
- “I want to do more practices like this to continue improving.”

The answers show a positive result in the students’ point of view about self-assessment. Because of their improvement, they are motivated to do more speaking activities.

Question 3. What is your perspective about using self-assessment after each oral practice?

- “It has been something new for us, but we have learned a lot,”
- “I think this strategy helped us to get more confidence in our oral performances,”
- “It is a useful strategy, and I try to self-assess all my speaking activities to improve.”

The comments from this question describe how the students feel about evaluating themselves. They had to check their own work and try to do better the next time.

Discussion

The results obtained from this research are very similar to what authors of articles and books have written. For example, Chan (2010) and Rotsaert et al. (2018) have stated that students improve noticeably after self-assessing themselves. It gives them an opportunity to

reflect on their performances to improve their pronunciation and fluency. The students are aware that they need an improvement in pronunciation, so they have to find a way to do a better job next time.

A similar idea was established by Yan (2020) who wrote that with the implementation of self-assessment, students are building their own knowledge. In the classroom, it was noted that when listening to their own audio, the students thought of ways to improve it in the following activity. This idea turned out to be very effective in motivating the students to continue improving their work.

The criteria given by Conroy and Batty (2020) turned out to be important to understand the process carried out to be able to guide the students in said process. They referred to methodologically speaking that is the ability to express ideas consciously, in an organized way. Students had to prepare in advance how to improve their first activity, according to the self-assessment results. The majority of theories turned out to be correct and the application of these yielded the expected results.

Furthermore, the result of the evaluations show that an improvement was gained with the application of the innovation. This improvement was also noticed in the students' points of view about self-assessment. Because of the implementation of self-assessment, students were able to build their own knowledge. They also could control their progress and improve at their pace, which supported DuBord's idea about self-assessment. Now they know what this means and what they can do to do great performances while speaking.

Conclusions

To sum up, the lack of practice of oral activities or not paying enough attention to communicative skills are causes that bring students' negative feelings towards speaking in EFL. For this reason, applying new strategies such as self-assessment is recommendable in each lesson to help students feel more confident after each oral practice. Self-assessment is

more than just a strategy to make students give their own feedback, but it also makes them be conscious of their learning. Significant improvement is evidenced through auto reflection in their own performance in English learning. Therefore, everyday practice must be a change for students to feel comfortable when developing speaking skills, it does not matter if there are some difficulties at the beginning.

Limitations

Despite most of the students wanted to be part of the innovation, not everyone could participate. Some of them felt sick and did not attend class. Others had internet problems and could not fulfill the task correctly, and some more did not present their respective parents' authorization. It would have been better if all students were able to participate in this activity since it was necessary to develop extra practices for those who did not participate in the innovation. Furthermore, time was also a problem since the 40-minutes class did not allow students to have more practice when applying self-assessment. All these difficulties can be solved if activities like this innovation are applied frequently in the classroom.

Recommendations

Teachers have to innovate in every lesson and develop their knowledge, strategies, and methods to engage students so that language learning is meaningful. One limitation found was the number of participants of the innovation. Some students could not participate for the reasons mentioned above. To avoid this problem, teachers should give a second chance for those students who skipped the class. Another problem was the lack of internet connection what caused that more students were not able to fulfil the task. Nowadays, there are an infinite number of digital tools that can be used to catch the students' attention and interest. Thus, teachers should motivate them to use similar apps that work in different devices. These recommendations may increase the number of participants of the innovation.

Regarding the lack of time in the classroom, the activities of the innovation can be done in different periods. For example, a small number of students presents their tasks one day and another group next day. This will give more time for students to present their job and do self-assessment activities. This is how different strategies can be adapted to overcome the inconveniences presented in the application of new activities. Everyone involved in education should understand that its purpose is to give students tools for everyday usage, so that they have to create the appropriate environment to make it possible.

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APPENDIX A

Lesson plan. Design Process Worksheet

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Pre and Posttest scores

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Self-assessment checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix E

Students' interview

Available upon request.

Appendix F

Principal's Authorization

Available upon request.

APPENDIX G

E-portfolio

Available upon request.