

## SELF-ASSESSMENT - SPEAKING SKILLS



### **Improving Speaking Skills Through the Use of Self-assessment in A2 Level Students**

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In these modern days, English is considered one of the most important languages around the world that allows people to communicate even if it is not their mother tongue. Indeed, in our education system, English is a mandatory subject; that means the necessity of improve students' knowledge on the four basic skills, especially the speaking skill. According to Brown and Yuke (1983, as cited by Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014), "speaking is the skill that students will be judged upon most in real-life situations" (p.9). As they mentioned before, when students develop their speaking skills, they can communicate in real contexts.

Nowadays, technological tools facilitate teachers' and students' life. Regarding Ecuadorian education, in the last years, tech tools have already been implemented during classes to call students' attention and encourage students to practice what they learn. In fact, it can be used as a way to improve different skills in a second language.

This research project is focused on speaking skills through the use of self-assessment in order to assist students in gaining confidence and reflecting on their progress by using WhatsApp voice messages. After analyzing some communicative problems that students have, the goal of this study was to apply the self-assessment technique to help learners with speaking practices and improve their communicative competencies. Sometimes, it is hard to persuade learners to practice speaking skills because of the lack of opportunities that we have in our country. It creates some students' pronunciation and fluency problems at the moment of using the language. Consequently, students experience difficulties when they have to make a short conversation, and finally, they feel frustrated.

### **Literature Review**

This research project focuses on the influence of self-assessment to improve speaking skills. In this section, it is necessary to explore concepts of speaking, self-assessment studies, and students' perceptions about the technique used during the innovation.

#### **Importance of Speaking**

According to some findings, speaking skill is considered the main source to be communicated. As Rao (2019) highlighted that in communication, speaking abilities are extremely important; people strive to acquire them so that they can connect effectively with society. Brown (1994) and Burns and Joyce (1997) mentioned that speaking is defined as an interactive process of making meaning that comprises information production, reception, and processing (as cited by Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Therefore, to help and motivate students to improve their communicative skills is necessary to be creative when planning spoken activities based on real situations where they are exposed to different contexts. Besides, it is relevant to be selective with topics and activities that would be interesting for students. As stated by De Saint (2009), "learners may also have different learning goals and expectations that may affect their willingness to participate in oral activities" (p. 158).

In addition, several studies mentioned that speaking could be easily developed through the use of self-assessment. Illustrated by Kirby et al. (2007), "speaking self-assessment, as a formative assessment tool, promotes learning, establishes a goal-oriented activity, alleviates the assessment burden on teachers, and finally continues as a long-lasting experience" (as cited in Babaii et al., 2016, p. 4).

Owing to, speaking is a crucial skill that must be honed, nonnative students find it challenging to acquire the language. As cited by Leong and Ahmadi (2017), speaking English is complicated because speakers must be proficient in many areas, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Butler (2018) stated that “there is some evidence that it is important that the criteria used to self-assess are concrete, task-specified, and graduated” (as cited in Andrade, 2019, p. 9). So that, teachers have to ignore traditional methods and encourage interaction every time in real-life situations.

Another relevant part of oral communication is about the elements of speaking. It is necessary to internalize in a deep understanding about the speaking skills and its elements in order to benefit in the overall students’ performance. According to Harries (1974) speaking has five components: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The author said that:

The first component is acceptable pronunciation. It means having a standard of English accent. The second component is grammatical system. It is indicated by making few (if any) noticeable errors of grammar or word order. The third is vocabulary mastery. The use of appropriate vocabularies related to the topic. The fourth component is fluent speech. It is described by having fluent speech without hesitation. The last component is comprehension. It means understanding everything or the topic without any difficulties. (as cited in Utami, 2021, p. 19-20).

### **Self-assessment (SA).**

Self-assessment is a technique that helps to increase students’ responsibility and autonomy in the classroom. Students can use a rubric to know what they can do according to the

rubrics' criteria and ask for the teachers' feedback. Brown and Harries (2013) mentioned that self-assessment is a “descriptive and evaluative act carried out by the students concerning his or her own work and academic abilities” (as cited in Andrade, 2019, p. 2). On the other hand, illustrated by Andrade (2019), the learning-oriented objective of self-assessment means that it needs to be formative: it is useless if there is no chance for adjustment and correlation. It means that self-assessment should be monitored and provided feedback when required. In his research, Bueno (2021) stated that “it promoted the English improvement because the rubric helped students understand the purpose of self-assessment and to reach the final aim led to learning” (p. 18).

According to Rolheiser and Ross (1998), by integrating students into the evaluation process, they recognize the required qualities to achieve the performance, how to evaluate their performance, how to create personal objectives, and how to boost their self-reflection (as cited in Hamed, 2017). Obviously, adequate practice is required to improve their communicative competencies.

In accordance with Andrade (1999), there are some factors that must be addressed when building self-assessment instruments to carry out it efficiently:

1. Awareness of the value of self-assessment,
2. Access to clear criteria on which to base the assessment,
3. A specific task or performance to assess,
4. Models of self-assessment,
5. Direct instruction in and assistance with self-assessment,
6. Practice,
7. Cues regarding with it is appropriate to self-assess, and

8. Opportunities to revise and improve the task or performance (as cited in Jamrus & Razali, 2019, p. 65).

According to students' perceptions, self-assessment is considered a useful technique that helps students meet their learning objectives. In addition, a study conducted by Masruria (2021) stated two reasons to apply SA; first, it motivates students' individual performance by doing their best, through the use of this technique students could find their mistakes, and in the future will be part of their strengths. Second, students are able to achieve the learning goal because they know their improvements (p. 395). Another study revealed that self-assessment was particularly useful for enhancing students' awareness of the learning process, according to the majority of students (Munoz et al. 2007).

Illustrated by Alek et al. (2020), self-assessment is a strategy that could be used as an instrument to help students to develop a positive manner their oral skills throughout their notion to evaluate their speaking progress (p. 3). Vasileiadou and Karadimitriou (2021) highlighted that "self-assessment makes them responsible for their learning by controlling their work, assessing themselves and making critical decisions about how they can improve their work" (p. 2). Furthermore, involving students to use self-assessment provokes personal reflection. Concerning self-assessment practice, Duque and Cuesta (2017) stated that:

Student's involvement is supremely important at all developmental stages, but most so in higher education where learners are expected to consciously manage their performance without direct interventions from instructors. However, such scenarios are not always present as many learners have not been trained and lack the necessary skills to undertake these practices (p. 399).

Thawabieh (2017) stated that self-assessment boosts students' enthusiasm and motivation for subjects. It results in improvements in learning and achievement for better academic performance. Other researchers argue that self-assessment can help students to know and correct their mistakes without feeling ashamed, for example, Yan and Brown (2017) mentioned that "from a pedagogical perspective, the benefits of self-assessment may come from active engagement in the learning process, rather than being "veridical" or coinciding with reality, because students' reflection and metacognitive monitoring lead to improve learning" (p. 1248).

In contrast, according to Brown (1998), when using the self-assessment technique, researchers should take into account the following possible problems during the implementation of self-assessment: subjective assessment and accuracy vary among learning exercises, and results may be not correct. Also, the environment where self-assessment is used could have significant challenges in results due to large classrooms, limited resources, and educational attitudes against self-assessment (Harries, 1997 as cited in Mistar, 2011). As a result, self-assessment should be used with some caution according to the setting.

### **WhatsApp**

Nowadays, students are part of a technological era, and they have the opportunity to use different apps to be communicated and find information. Hence, technology has an enormous impact on students and fosters them to be involved in the continuous use of various apps. According to Hashim (2018), "there are many online applications/games that could be utilized in teaching and learning. Among the simplest ways to engage students in gamified learning is to try web resources" (p.3). One of the accessible and easy apps that students can use to interact and practice their spoken skills is WhatsApp. In addition, WhatsApp could be useful for practicing speaking skills. Han and Keskin (2016) mentioned:

Using WhatsApp activities in EFL/ESL speaking classes has become popular on recent years, as it allows for unique and versatile learning opportunities. While using WhatsApp, students have the chance to individualize their learning, especially the language they have been working on. For example, they can monitor and check their language output for mistakes. Furthermore, students are able to practice their pronunciation (accent, intonation, speed of speech) while rehearsing for the recording, all while exposing themselves more to the language and building positive feelings towards speaking. (p. 32)

In this scenery, WhatsApp was one of the primary tools for students to develop their speaking skills. It facilitated students' practice due to they were not in face-to-face classes. Munir et al. (2021) supported that WhatsApp is used in teaching activities because it is simple to use, has low package data cost, and offers some benefits: groups, written messages, audio, and videos, among others (p.324). Another study conducted by Borja (2022) based on A2 level participants pointed out that students were able to feel at ease and grow interested in participating thanks to the use of WhatsApp. (p. 16)

### **Innovation**

During the innovation, students worked with four familiar topics related to the environment, social media, art or vandalism, and different ways of learning (See Appendix A), where they had to state their opinions in short dialogues through the use of WhatsApp audios. Students had two hours per week; sixty minutes of synchronous class and the same time for an asynchronous one.

First, the teacher explained what the innovation was about and what was expected. In the beginning, the teacher introduced the class with a mentor text and modeled a short conversation



to help students understand how to do the activity. Students were given examples, and they did some practice.

Second, students were inducted to work with the self-assessment technique and a checklist. The checklist (See Appendix B) had parameters based on grammar & vocabulary, interaction, and pronunciation. In addition, the checklist is structured in a logical order to help students evaluate their work in both formative and summative ways (Vasu et al., 2018).

Third, after explaining the vocabulary and grammar features, the teacher asked students to create a short dialogue talking with a partner about the environment. Students had to record a conversation using WhatsApp audios and upload it in a shared file by attaching a photograph of their self-assessment. This activity was considered the pretest to check what the pupils learned from the prior models.

Fourth, students received individual feedback to correct mistakes and improve for the following activities. Then students had to continue working with dialogues according to the planned topics using the self-assessment technique.

Fifth, students performed the last activity focused on ways of learning studies and followed the same process of recording their conversation using WhatsApp and uploading the dialogue in the shared file with the photograph to show their progress. Finally, the teacher graded activities from pre and posttest using a rubric (See Appendix C) based on the checklist's parameters to determine students' outcomes.

### **Research Methodology**

This study followed an action research process because the author is involved in this investigation. According to Burns (2009), "the main point of action research is to find out more about what is going on in your own local context in order to change or improve current practice

in that situation” (p. 115). This action research applied both qualitative and quantitative instruments to evidence how self-assessment and short conversations using WhatsApp audios (independent variable) improve speaking skills (dependent variable).

### **Participants**

The research setting where the innovation was implemented was a small group of sixteen students; from distance mode learning at a public university located in Quito. However, students were remote learners from all over Ecuador. Mainly, the students’ ages range from 20 to 35 years old. They were eight female and eight male students. Students’ proficiency level was A2.

### **Instruments**

The data from the innovation was focused on speaking self-assessment, and it was collected through the administration of both qualitative and quantitative instruments. Seeing that, the instruments used for the innovation were the pretest, posttest (using a rubric), and an interview. These first instrument answered the following question: What is the impact of self-assessment on students’ oral production? and the last one answer this question: What are students’ perspectives about the innovation through the use of self-assessment to improve speaking skills?

At the end of the innovation, the teacher used a rubric to regrade students’ performance based on descriptors according to their level: grammar & vocabulary, interaction, and pronunciation. The first lesson was considered the pretest, and the last one was the posttest. Brookhart (2013) mentioned that:

Rubrics, like any other assessment tool, are useful for certain purposes and impractical in others. The major purpose of assessment rubrics is to assess performance. Assessing students’ performance examiner can whether observe the process of doing something (for

example, oral communication or presentation) or observe the product that is the result of students' work (as cited in Ulker, 2017, p. 135).

Pre and posttest were taken as part of the innovation. The first one was to identify students' competencies, and the last one was to know how trained self-assessment improved their oral abilities. Thus, the pretest was a short conversation using vocabulary about the environment and phrases to state students' opinions through the use of WhatsApp audio messages. The posttest was focused on a conversation talking about the university facilities (face-to-face and distance mode of learning) stating opinions, vocabulary according to the topic, comparative adjectives, present perfect tense, ask and answer questions, and correct pronunciation.

To answer the second research question: What are the students' perspectives about the innovation through the use of self-assessment to improve speaking skills? an interview was applied at the end of the innovation. The teacher asked some questions (Appendix D) related to how did they feel during the innovation, and how self-assessment helped them to improve their speaking skills. Students' perspectives, challenges, and improvements would provide information to support this study. Qu and Dumay (2011) said that:

Interviews provide a useful way for researchers to learn about the world of others, although real understanding may sometimes be elusive. Even when the interviewer and the interviewee seem to be speaking the same language, their words may have completely different cultural meanings. Thus, communicating become more difficult when people have different worldviews (p. 2).

### **Data Analysis**

A pair-sample *t*-test was completed to verify what was the impact of self-assessment on students' communicative skills grades. Thenceforth, the paired-sample *t*-test helped to compare

both the pretest and posttest. This information was analyzed through the use of Microsoft Excel using the Analytics Tools Pack. Thus, grades from the pre and posttest were written in an excel document to determine the minimum and maximum value to verify if the innovation had improved students' progress in order to answer the first question: What is the impact of self-assessment in students' oral production?

To answer the second question: What are students' perspectives about the innovation through the use of self-assessment to improve speaking skills? The researcher interviewed students and wrote some extracts about their perceptions when using self-assessment for communicative skills. The results of the interview showed favorable opinions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To conduct this study, the researcher asked and obtain authorization from the English Language coordinator – distance learning mode (Appendix E). Participants were informed of the purpose of this project. The researcher's responsibility to keep confidentiality, anonymity, and guarantee the use of data only for this study. According to Govil (2013), the main goal of an ethical code is to force a researcher to respect the dignity and privacy of those who are part of the study (p. 18). Additionally, "good research then has at its core a commitment to ensuring that strategies for collecting data are responsible; that at all times research attends to a professional code of conduct that ensures that safety of all the participants involved," Cacciattolo (2015) added (p. 56).

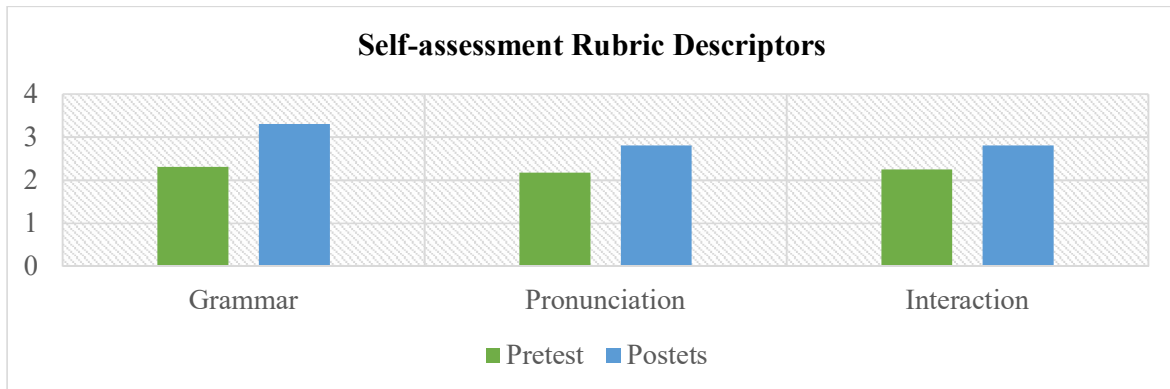
### **Results**

Regarding the first question, "What is the impact of self-assessment on students' oral production?" the results from students' pretest and posttest are shown in figure 1. It is based on the rubric descriptors related to grammar & vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction. Students

improved in the three different descriptors. The means reveal a variance between descriptors from pre and posttest. In truth, there is a considerable difference in the grammar descriptor.

**Table 1**

*Teacher’s grades – rubric descriptors (pretest and posttest)*



At the very beginning, students struggled with speaking skills and the self-assessment was not commonly used, for that reason, their average before the innovation was 6.75; after the innovation, the results were positive. Students’ improvements were shown on the average in figure 2, and students’ final grade (the mean) was 8.93.

**Table 2**

*Pretest and posttest – final averages*

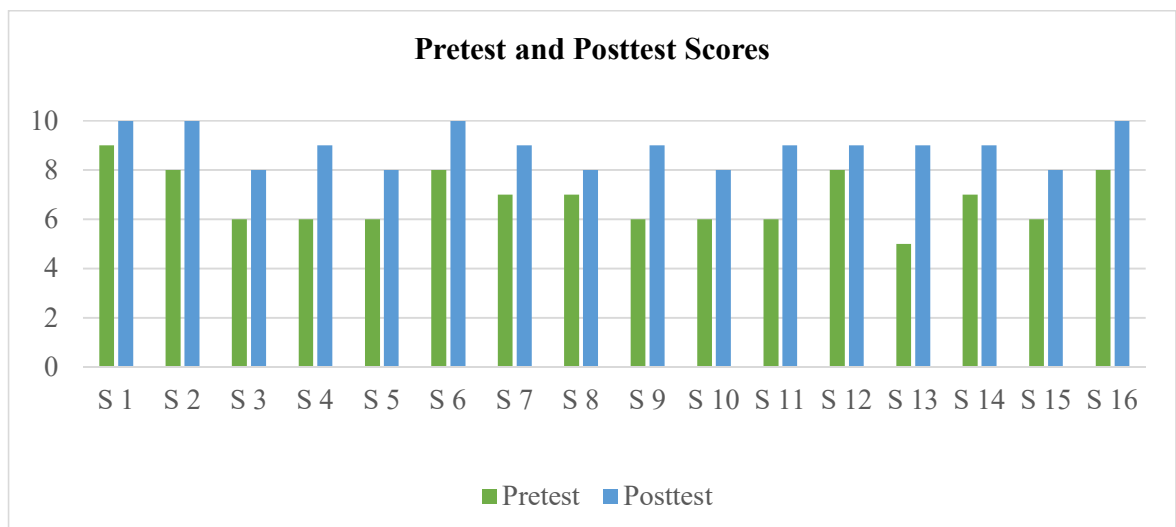


Figure 2 compares the outcomes of the pre and posttest; it indicates that all pupils' test scores have significantly improved between the pre and posttest. It shows that the innovation has positive acceptance and gained support. Although the results are positive, there are four highlighted cases; three students had a minimum difference in their improvements, and one significantly improved.

To continue with the results, a paired sample *t*-test was used to determine the impact of self-assessment on students' communicative skills. Figure 3 shows the findings of the pretest and posttest.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive statistics*

	<b>N</b>	<b>MIN</b>	<b>MAX</b>	<b>MEAN</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>PRETEST</b>	16	5	8	6.75	1
<b>POSTTEST</b>	16	8	10	8.93	0.77
<b>Valid N (listwise)</b>	16				

In response to the second question: "What are students' perspectives about the innovation through the use of self-assessment to improve speaking skills?" At the end of the innovation, the teacher collected information by interviewing students in order to know their perceptions of self-assessment. The qualitative data about students' perspectives were positive, and they accepted.

Most of the students interviewed said that self-assessment had a positive impact on their learning process, and it helped them to improve their speaking skills. For example, they mentioned the following:

"I realized what I know."

"I liked to record audios and grade myself using the self-assessment checklist due to it is easy to understand."

“Self-assessment helped me to check my mistakes and improve them.”

Others mentioned that using self-assessment helped them to identify their mistakes and consider some areas to be improved.

“In the beginning, self-assessment was difficult; I could not find my mistakes.”

“First, the self-assessment was difficult, but after the practice, it was easy and helpful.”

“With self-assessment, I can reflect on what aspects I need to improve.”

Another student mentioned that it was difficult to be neutral when using self-assessment because he thought that it was not a real grade.

“In the end, I felt confident because I focused on my task.”

“I did not feel confident using self-assessment for speaking because it was hard to be neutral with my own task.”

### **Discussion**

Results revealed that the self-assessment improved students' speaking skills. Students accepted self-assessment as a useful tool to understand their own oral capability and progress. It is also claimed by Masruria (2021), who applied self-assessment in the classroom and it allowed students to grade their work and the opportunity to understand what were their mistakes and how students perceived it during and after the speaking practices noticing their improvements.

Regarding the first question: “What is the impact of self-assessment on students' oral production?” learners had improvements at the end of the innovation. Students have shown significant progress in their oral results. Another study supported by Hamed (2017) revealed that it is highly advised that language teachers incorporate thorough self-assessment into their teaching strategies due to the promising results. Moreover, Vasileiadou and Karadimitriou

(2021) found in their study that utilizing rubrics as self-assessment evaluation tool helps students do better academically and learn more deeply.

To answer the second research question: “What are students’ perspectives about the innovation through the use of self-assessment to improve speaking skills?” The participants mentioned that self-assessment helped them to gain confidence during the practice. It was beneficial because they had the opportunity to recognize some mistakes and improve them for future speaking activities. Alek et al. (2020) concluded in their research that students’ perceptions are positive because they consider that self-assessment boosted improvements after the practice, they felt confident during the speaking activities, and there was more interaction between the teachers and students. So, this revealed similar students’ perceptions when they used self-assessment when they graded their speaking developments.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, using self-assessment helps students to improve on communicative skills. Under this technique, students can notice what are their mistakes, judge their progress, and finally, correct them. Therefore, during the implementation of the innovation, the impact of self-assessment had a difference between the grades shown on the pretest and the final grades on the posttest; however, students need more practice. An important aspect of this innovation was the checklist that helped students to feel confident at the moment of grading their progress. Lastly, the rubric was based on the same parameter to obtain the real and final results. It is essential to mention that results from students’ self-assessment and the rubric grades were not the same due to students using a checklist and grading their own activities.

### **Limitations**



This project was applied to a small group of students. During the innovation there were some difficulties, for example, there was not enough time to carry out the innovation, a small group of participants, and students' participation was not face-to-face. The virtual classes meant the biggest problem because this was the first time that students were trained in the implemented technique, self-assessment. However, this innovation could have been strengthened if students could have the opportunity to work in a face-to-face mode.

In the future, it would be convenient to focus on a study of students' perceptions after using self-assessment, how do they feel practicing self-assessment through the use of a different digital resource that would be more sophisticated in order to call students' attention.

### **Recommendations**

For future research, it would be recommended to train students implementing self-assessment during some sessions in order to prepare them when using this technique. It would be useful to help students to get a deep understanding of self-assessment and help to solve their doubts when required because at the beginning is difficult to judge his/her work. Long periods of practice are necessary to obtain great results. In addition, to motivate students more sophisticated technology such as skype, google talk, etc., could be part of this kind of practice due to students love to be involved in activities where technology is included.

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**Appendix A**

**Lesson Plan**

Available upon request.

**Appendix B**

**Self-assessment checklist**

Available upon request.

**Appendix C**

**Rubric for Speaking A2 Key Level**

Available upon request.

**Appendix D**

**Interview**

Available upon request.

**Appendix E**

**Consent letter**

Available upon request.

**Appendix F**

**E-portfolio link**

Available upon request.