Universidad Casa Grande

Influence of Peer-Assessment on EFL 2nd High School Students to Improve Their Speaking

Skills Performance

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Influence of Peer-Assessment on EFL 2nd High School Students to Improve Their Speaking Skills Performance

The teaching-learning process has suffered a remarkable turnabout. This pandemic has motivated teachers to apply methods, strategies, and techniques to get students interested in developing their competencies in a second language during synchronous and asynchronous classes. To reach this goal, several studies suggest implementing peer assessment to help students succeed and improve their skills and performance during the evaluation process.

Nevertheless, not all are focused on implementing this method to improve 2nd High school students speaking skills performance during the formative process. Undoubtedly, students do not like participating in their assessment process because they have not been taught the benefits of being in charge of their learning process.

However, if students are trained and motivated by their teachers and peers through the use of peer assessment, they can ameliorate their speaking skills performance.

Literature Review

This study emphasized the influence of peer-assessment in EFL 2nd High school students to improve their speaking skills performance. The approach employed was the communicative approach because it is directly intertwined with peer-assessment. It emphasizes that teachers should not just focus on accomplishing the goal but also promoting the interaction among students to make them become fluent and use the language (Richards & Charles, 2013, p. 74). Along with, it is necessary to go through these definitions about speaking skill and peer-assessment in order to understand better how this research was carried out.

Speaking Skills

Speaking is considered as a productive skill to get communication in any language (Boonkit, 2010). When people speak, they are immersed in communication.

This process occurs when there is speech. According to Qureshi (2007), "Without speech, a language is reduced to a mere script" (p. 3). Through it, the human beings can express ideas, feelings, requests but they have to organize each part of the message in order to convey it accurately to others.

There are a lot of learners who choose English speaking skills to learn because they think there are fewer possibilities of making mistakes. However, they do not have enough opportunities to use the language in real contexts in the classroom, nor this skill is included as important as reading or writing in the final evaluations (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Besides, students find speaking English a difficult task to do as a result of limited hours they are exposure to language per week (Al-Nawrasy, 2013). According to Gass and Selinker (2001) there are three primary sources of input (teacher, materials and other learners), where the teacher is the main actor during the instruction without providing students with real chances to practice the language (p. 311).

Peer-Assessment

Despite all these setbacks, the amount of EFL learners who are looking for mastering the second language is currently incrementing because English has evolved so far as a language for international communication (Nazara, 2011). Teachers therefore should implement methods that boost their students' speaking skills.

Musfirah (2019) indicated that "students need an assessment method that can potentially draw their attention to those aspects as they have to do a reflection on their own work or others in order to improve their linguistic performance" (p. 68). So that, peer-assessment (PA) is a method because students are part of the process of judging the quality of the final product.

Moreover, PA enhances students' responsibility and improves their focus on the development of the skills (White, 2009). On the contrary, in his research Topping (2017) highlighted that during peer-assessment process, the assessor and the assessee can feel strongly uncomfortable about measuring the quality of the work because it does not only involve critical thinking but also social skills.

Benefits of Peer-assessment

Peer-assessment can encourage students to exchange opinions and create discussion on relevant content (McGarrigle, 2013). Furthermore, it leads students to a co-construction of new knowledge created by each individual. This idea is linked to the social constructivism because through interaction, students reinforce their cognitive skills and support each other's to build up knowledge together (Vygotsky, as cited in Verenikina, 2003).

To teach how to peer assess, teachers should take into account how each practice is focused on implementing peer-assessment by planning it in classes. Teachers should organize coherently, so their students can do it within and outside the classroom; this is called transfer. This implies that teachers must take previous decisions that meet their students' perspectives. Thus, teachers plan in favor of what their students will learn, when they could apply this knowledge acquired, and how they will learn. Guilott et al. (2020) pointed out that transfer focuses on learning from the student's point of view. Therefore, teachers are conscious of what to include in plans to aim this transfer goal in the students' learning.

Students need to be conscious about their responsibility during the peer-assessment. Highlighting the importance of avoiding bias and that their suggestions and judging should guide others to what aspects improve in the next practice (Aljohani, 2017).

Setbacks of Peer-assessment

Some students are reluctant and worried about making mistakes. There is a feeling of anxiety and hesitation when speaking because they do not like their peers to laugh at them, criticize or judge their work (Fauzan, 2016). Likewise, Wulandari et al. (2021) determined other issues as the time constraint and unreliability of the data. Due to the workload and lack of time, teachers decide to leave peer-assessment apart from their work because they are not really convinced their students provide effective feedback that helps others to improve.

Similarly, Ahangari et al. (2013) mentioned the incompatibility between the students' grades and feedback towards their learning. The incompatibility deals with the fact that some students do not improve despite feedback they have received before, during and after their

practices. What is remarked on this research, students who domain the L2 and develop their skills can identify clearly what are their weaknesses and strengths. They know what are the exact guidelines to follow and during the peer-assessment process they know how to assess properly (Grez, 2010). However, students who do not manage it yet avoid giving scores that require explanation. Besides, Sridharan et al. (2019) remarked that students are not keen on peer-assessing honestly when they know their comments do not contribute their peers' improvement.

Also, as Cheng and Warren (2000) pointed out, teachers struggle with the dilemma of scoring group work assignments without considering each student's contribution during the peer-assessment method. Teachers do not sometimes trust entirely in their students' feedback toward others because they are not biased when assessing. Ratminingsih et al. (2017) determined that whether students do not feel part of the process, they will not get autonomy nor learn how to assess their peers objectively.

Innovation

To uphold the 2nd high school students' speaking skills performance, this innovation on peer-assessment was implemented for the Unit #4: In the news through the use of a checklist (Appendix 1) to quantify and provide feedback. Students were acquainted with and taught the advantages of the peer-assessment method before the final performance task.

This study lasted four weeks. Five hours per week divided into 2.5 hours for synchronous sessions and 2.5 hours for asynchronous ones. There were 4 weeks for the unit. In the first-week, students identified the features of an interview based on anecdotes or news from an interview found online, and learned to peer assess (Appendix 2).

In the second week, students employed different platforms as Padlet to practice peer-assessment (Appendix 3). During this task, they recorded a podcast and uploaded the audio in Padlet. Once all audios were on the online platform, each student selected another audio and peer-assessed it using the checklist and to give feedback.

In the third week, students worked on correcting and reinforcing the narrative grammatical structures, vocabulary related to the situation, and expressions. Next, students kept on practicing

through recordings and constant feedback to improve upon areas they identified in the peer assessment for the ultimate task.

The final performance implied readjusting the original script of the interview based on the teacher's feedback and peer-feedback and recording the interview again taking into consideration the suggestions. Then, they were assigned another audio to assess it with the checklist.

Research Methodology

The current study is an action research study because the researcher is being part of the investigation with the purpose of improving her practices and solving the problem stated (Corey, 1954). Throughout the study the qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed and tabulated in order to answer the research questions.

The method applied was peer-assessment involving also the interview strategy to promote students to enhance their speaking skills. In the beginning, it was applied a pretest and at the end, the posttest. In addition, the researcher had to design a rubric based on the checklist to grade the pretest and posttest, and answer the quantitative research question: What is the effect of peer-assessment on students' speaking skills performance? As well as an interview with open-ended questions was assigned to the students in order to answer the research question: What were students' perspectives regarding peer assessment?

Participants

The current study was developed in a private high school in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The high school was in an urban area near the city center. Participants were between fifteen and sixteen years old with a B1+ level according to the CEFR. Eight of them did not complete the pretest and posttest because they got Covid 19; thus, they were not taken into account for the analysis. The final sample was 9 pairs (18 students), who could accomplish both the pretest and posttest and took part in the peer- assessment innovation.

Instruments

For the first question: What is the effect of peer-assessment on students' speaking skills performance? The teacher developed and applied a rubric to score grades of the pretest and

posttest. A rubric is an instrument that helps to obtain evidence about the individual's knowledge in a specific area during his performance (Moskal & Leydens, 2000). This rubric contains three criteria and five bands of performance that are described below:

- Grammar and vocabulary grading rubric: In this criterion, to reach the highest band score of 10 points corresponding to "Excellent", students had to show a good degree of control using simple grammatical forms, and some complex grammatical forms using narrative tenses (simple past, past perfect, and past continuous) to describe experiences during the interview, and to use a wide range of appropriate vocabulary depending on the situation exposed in the interview. On the contrary, students who reached the lowest score 6 points corresponding to "Acceptable", their grammar errors during the interview impeded understanding and they used a limited range of appropriate vocabulary depending on the situation exposed in the interview.

- Pronunciation grading rubric: In this criterion, to reach the highest band score of 10 points corresponding to "Excellent", students used an appropriate intonation during the interview, and they were capable of pronouncing and modulating words correctly; contrarily, students who reached 6 points corresponding to "Acceptable", they did not use an appropriate intonation during the interview, nor showed a limited control of phonological features.

- Interaction grading rubric: In this criterion, to reach the highest band score of 10 points corresponding to "Excellent", students asked and answered with confidence during the interview with only natural hesitation and pausing; instead, students who reached the lowest score 6 points corresponding to "Acceptable", they asked and answered with no confidence during the interview, nor maintained simple exchanges, despite some difficulty.

For the second question: What were students' perspectives regarding peer assessment? An interview was applied with five open-ended questions. All participants were free to answer based

on their experience when they were peer-assessing. This interview is expected to define students' perspectives on peer-assessment.

Data Analysis

The data used for this study was from the pretest and posttest of the innovation. It was tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet in order to measure how peer-assessment impacted EFL 2nd high school students to improve their speaking skills performance. The pretest score and the posttest score were divided into different features as "Vocabulary and Grammar", "Pronunciation" and "Interaction", and different descriptive statistics were obtained minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation to identify the change in each criterion.

After this calculus, a paired-sample t-test was carried out using the Analytics Tools Pack in Excel. This analysis permits the comparison of pretest and posttest of each pair of students' scores. In total nine results were tested.

Finally, the researcher summed up all quantitative and qualitative data. Besides students' interest in taking part in the innovation, the scores were directly intertwined with the answers to the interview.

Ethical Considerations

During the development of this research, some ethical considerations were observed. Cacciattolo (2015) stated that "At all times the researcher should ensure that participants are safe from harm and are protected from unnecessary stress. This is the field of ethics" (p. 55). Therefore, the participants of the study were totally informed about how the research was being conducted, what role they were going to play, and what were expected of them.

Once the approval was obtained, (Appendix 4), it was necessary to demand the participants' parents' permission too because all participants involved in the investigations were minors. This was developed in a google form (Appendix 5) explaining the purpose of the study, and that all information gathered from it was going to be strictly treated as confidential and anonymous.

As Smith (2003) also emphasized, "when recruiting students from your course to participate in an experiment, be sure to make clear that participation is voluntary. If participation is

a course requirement, be sure to note that in the class syllabus, and ensure that participation has educative value." (p. 35) It is important to put in mind that researchers cannot violent minors' rights, and it is primordial to not force students to be part of the research if they do not want, so parents and students were absolutely informed and they decided to take part in the study.
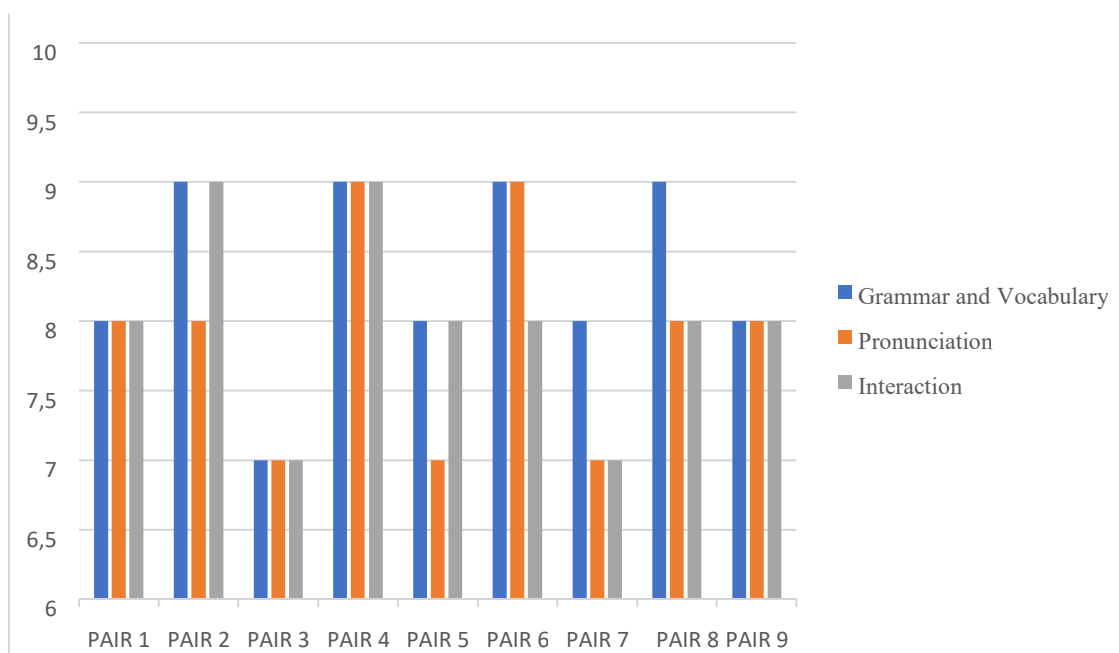
Results

Pretest Scores

Students' pretest scores on the speaking skills performance rubric resulted in a mean of 0.8 out of 1. This score is an average that represents students speaking performances were quite good in the pretest score. In Figure 1, it is seen the division among the three criteria; blue for grammar and vocabulary, orange for pronunciation, and gray for interaction. The range of each criterion is from the lowest band in the rubric 6 to the highest 10, and the maximum score was 9 from the scale. There were positive and negative outcomes that were remarkable in the students' oral production performance. Students who mentioned they did not enjoy the activities, got lower scores in the pretest and posttest than the rest. On the contrary, other students agreed with the efficacy of using peer-assessment.

Figure 1

*Teacher Scored Rubric Grade - Pretest Data*

Posttest Scores

Students' posttest scores on the speaking skills performance measured by the teacher resulted in a mean of 0.92 out of 1. This score is an average that represents students speaking performances significantly improved in the posttest score. In Figure 2, it is denoted that some of this data notably increased to 10 on a scale of 6 – 10.

Figure 2

Teacher Scored Rubric Grade - Posttest Data
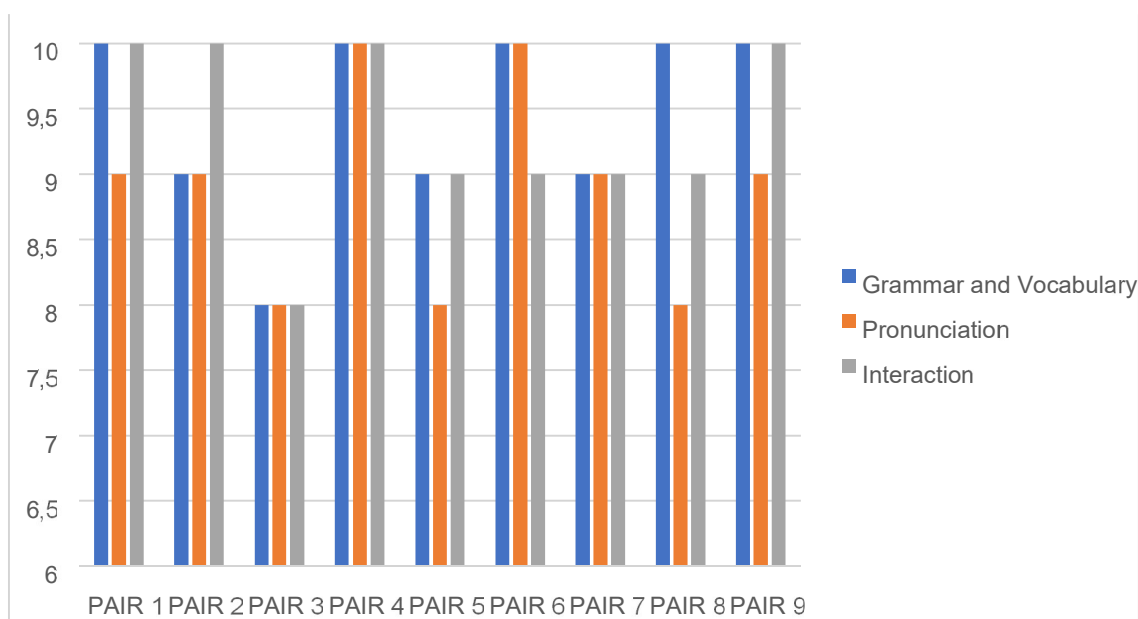
Outcomes of pretest and posttest based on the criteria in the rubric

The table 1 represents the results of the pretest and posttest for criterion of the rubric performance. The outcomes show that after the implementation the pairs improved in all aspects. In the posttest, the "Grammar and Vocabulary" criterion increased from (M=8.33) to (M=9.44) as well as the "Pronunciation" criterion went from (M=7.89) to (M=8.89), and "Interaction" from (M=8) to (M=9.33).

Table 1

Outcomes according to the criteria of performance Pretest and Posttest.

Pretest	Posttest

	Grammar and vocabulary	Pronunciation	Interaction			Grammar and vocabulary	Pronunciation	Interaction
Mean	8.33	7.89	8.00	**Mean**		9.44	8.89	9.33
Min	7.00	7.00	7.00	**Min**		8.00	8.00	8.00
Maximum	9.00	9.00	9.00	**Maximum**		10	10	10
STD. Deviation	0.71	0.78	0.71	**STD. Deviation**		0.73	0.78	0.71

Statistical comparison of pretest and posttest

Through the *t*-test, it was suggested a *p*-value less than 0.05 indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores.

Figure 3

T-test: Paired two sample for means.

		Pre-test		Post-test		
	N	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	*P(T<=t) two-tail*
Test results	9	0.8	0.07	0.92	0.06	p < .001

Note: N = Number of participants, M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

To analyze the *t*-test, we have to state our Null hypothesis (Ho) and Alternative hypothesis (H1).

Ho: It is not expected that the implementation of peer-assessment in EFL classes will impact the 2nd high school students' speaking skills performance comparing their pretest and posttest results by using a rubric.

H1: It is expected that the implementation of peer-assessment in EFL classes will impact the 2nd high school students' speaking skills performance comparing their pretest and posttest results by using a rubric.

Analyzing the *t*-test findings, we show that in a private school in Guayaquil, it is suggested that implementing peer-assessment will improve the students' speaking skills performance because the *p*-value for two tails is less than 0.05.

When sharing experiences during an interview, students showed they were struggling with using narrative tenses and expressions to hold on the conversation appropriately. Besides, they had some problems with pronunciation, as well as in interaction criterion in the pretest. In the posttest results contrarily, the outcomes showed that the implementation helped students to improve their speaking skills.

Discussion

The current research method implemented is somehow similar to Fauzan (2016) research because his study was divided into two cycles of three meetings where he started observing, and it was the first technique used to identify the problem. Then, students were taught about peer assessment. This encouraged them to experience giving and receiving feedback to improve their work. Furthermore, there were constant practices that promoted opportunities to explore the language for a real purpose (McGarrigle, 2013). In addition, it remarked the value of good feedback (Aljohani, 2017; Wulandari et al., 2021) in order to guide others to identify the areas to improve.   The implementation of peer-assessment benefited the participants (Musfirah, 2019; White, 2009) because it helped them to value the suggestions and to construct their own learning on that basis. This is aligned with the social constructivist approach Vygotsky (as cited in Verenikina, 2003) due to the interaction among peers. Students were constantly practicing on peer assessing, despite they did not trust in all their peers' suggestions they kept on providing feedback and improving their recordings.

Dealing with the second research question, some students felt the pressure, and fear (Fauzan, 2016; Topping, 2017; Wulandari et al., 2021) of being part of the process because they

constantly made mistakes but they had never been judged by another student. Besides students experienced different obstacles during the execution, such as time constraints, not enough meaningful activities, and so on (Al-Nawrasy, 2013; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Nonetheless, they were keen on continuing to practice to ameliorate their speaking skills.

Conclusions

To sum up, throughout the analysis and comparison of the pretest and posttest of the EFL 2nd high school students; there is evidence that peer-assessment considerably improved their speaking skills performance. The implementation of this method made students improve and realize how important is to take part of their learning.

Limitations

Even though the current study had significant positive outcomes, some limitations during its the application should be considered in future research. The first setback was the time because the implementation was in December and there were only two normal weeks and the rest, students were on vacation due to holidays and the classes became hybrid ones. The second setback was the lack of students' prior knowledge towards peer assessment. Although they were keen on participating in this innovation, some of them really struggled with understanding the appropriate application of the checklist, giving feedback, and peer-assessed their partners. Consequently, different activities to show and guide them to learn how to assess where carried out during the innovation (Appendix 7). Definitely, it was difficult to work with more than half students virtually and the rest of them at school in face-to-face classes.

Third one, the absences because some students got positive to Covid 19 and did not join the meetings or they sometimes suffered from technological damages.
Lastly, during the evaluation week, some students were more conscious about studying for other subjects than working on the innovation.

Nevertheless, it was tried to seize the opportunities to practice, and after the innovation, the students keep on asking for peer-feedback and peer-assessment to their partners because they said they were really interested in the comments that guide them to recognize the area to improve.

Recommendations

The implementation of peer-assessment in classes to improve students' oral performance has reaffirmed that applying during classes the appropriate assessment methods have a beneficial impact on the development of the students' skills. For future innovations, teacher should consider implementing it for a longer time because it will favor the outcomes. Furthermore, it is necessary to include more activities to make them practice peer assessment and show the influence and worth of a good and effective feedback for their partners.

Finally, one breakthrough during the innovation that should be taken into account is that some students feel the pressure and the shame of peer assessing others because they think their partners could revenge in other ways due to the feedback. Thus, the teacher should emphasize the real value of feedback in the instruction process and the respect among different opinions.

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Appendix 1

Checklist Peer assessment of interviewee Interviewer (assessor):

Available upon request.

Appendix 2:

Available upon request.

Appendix 3
Practice of peer assessment among students using Padlet.

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Authorization letter

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Parents' consent

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Practice of assessment and student's feedback

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

Lesson plan following the backward design process.

Available upon request.

Appendix 8

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 9

Students' marks

Available upon request.

Appendix 10

E-Portfolio

Available upon request.