Influence of Peer Assessment in Students' Pronunciation during Speaking Activities

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Modality: Research Report

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One of the major challenges that teachers have to face in a foreign language class is translation. As consequence, this problematic origin a slow development and sometimes the progress may be negative to students as well. There are many difficulties in learners related to translate each word, like lack of vocabulary and grammatical issues. One critical aspect is that pupils translate word per word creating a weak background on the content of the conversation and students do not speak fluently. As it is said by Al-Darawish (1983), general difficulties in doing translation in two languages are their differences in term of phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic features. They are divergent in arrangement of sentences or syntax. That is why students find it difficult in translating into the target language.

During my regular classes, the students of level one had problems related with the use of words in Spanish to refer to a specific place using grammar correctly. The learners confused the past tense with simple present while they were speaking, used subject and object pronouns instead of possessive pronouns. The scholars confused wh-questions of their partner because they did not know how to make the question, and they did not recognize when to use correctly the prepositions of place. The pupils confused cognates for example terrible with terrific. And they had difficulties to say sentences by the reason of the pronunciation of certain words.

The Common European Framework of Reference (CERF; Council of Europe, 2020) descriptors level A1 says students "Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places" (p.69). Besides that, this feature is related to the section of students in the Ecuadorian In-Service English Standards of speaking production in the

Level A1: "Produce slow, hesitant, planned dialogues (i.e. communication still depends on repetition, rephrasing and repair)." (Ministerio de Educación, 2012, p. 10).

Literature Review

This study explores the role of peer assessment through different linguistically structured activities, in the development of EFL students' speaking skills. Nowadays, with the use of the technology, teachers want to evidence the activity with the Whatsapp app and the sample involved are students of a public institution. As Ndoye (2017) mentioned, "peer and self-assessment can help engage them [students] in their own learning, make them take responsibility for it, and develop their collaborative learning skills by promoting a positive and supportive learning environment" (p.255).

The act of providing peer-assessment can be used across a wide variety of activities since students are required to consider an assessment criteria (Huisman et al, 2018). Peer-assessment has been widely applied in EFL teaching and learning (Zhao, 2018).

Moreover, peer assessment is a good strategy that help learners not only to evaluate their partners but also to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as understanding and respecting others. According to a study conducted by Miller and Morris (2016) "An individual may observe and try to model or imitate similar behaviors by others, such as peers and teachers". (p.7).

Peer assessment is important to establish "explicit grading criteria helps convey to students that rating is fair, consistent, and based on the quality of their work. Yépez (2019) explained that peer-assessment helped students not only to improve their scores in speaking but also to become better at giving feedback, which may translate to other aspects of their learning process.

Peer-assessment, proposed by Topping (1998), is such a strategy that engages students in assessing peer' performance by giving ratings and/or verbal feedback, which further enhances their higher order thinking. It helps students to notice, check and write the observations and the can feel confident with their partners.

According to Burns (2019), there are three components of second language speaking competence: language knowledge (includes knowing grammar); core skills in speaking (understanding, correcting and giving feedback), and strategies (i.e. planning, thinking and compensating).

Nevertheless, there are many challenges of peer-assessment: When students doing peer-assessment, they need to judge the performance of a peer. This needs a degree of knowledge in the field that is assessed (Topping, 2000). Additionally, students have to communicate the judgments to their peers and have to provide constructive feedback about their learning process and they need to evidence good communication skills (Black et al, 2003). Furthermore, the students who received this feedback need to critically review it and decide on the actions to be taken, because it might include flaws, they need to filter it and then choose if is necessary to adopt the peers' suggestions and to revise their work (Sluijsmans, 2002). In addition, to include peer-assessment requires time for organization, training and monitoring, particularly in the beginning, if it want to provide a good level of quality (Topping, 2010).

Peer assessment involves students evaluating each other's work against a set of criteria and offering suggestions for feedback. It happens best when students are used to and comfortable with an evaluation feedback action loop using learning intentions and success criteria receive and apply improvement feedback from your teacher.

Teachers must explicitly teach and model how to provide feedback before handing over this important aspect of student learning to students. It is important to

apply peer assessment by engaging students in descriptions of what the achievement of learning intentions looks like. Also work with the exemplars and examples making the criteria visible to the students. On the other hand, it is important to teach students how to apply criteria through explicit instruction and modeling, which help students understand what constitutes 'quality'. Additionally, guidance should be provided as students apply the criteria to anonymous samples to deepen their understanding of the criteria. And finally, include support for students in peer assessment and feedback including opening sentences and feedback forms which help students provide appropriate feedback.

Nejad and Mahfoodh (2019) paid particular attention to student knowledge of both rubrics and assessments aspects of oral skills, in order to avoid biased or ambiguous results. Similarly, Joo (2016) identified that self-assessment begins with progressive "training" of learners to provide supported feedback with teacher's notes or other instruments, such as interviews.

According to Derakhshan et al, (2015), precision is the precise grammatical construction with phrases, ideas or fragments that are relevant to what you wish to express. Using this language system the students must include the use of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Could be controlled and guided in the classroom.

Innovation

This innovation was focused on the development of speaking abilities by applying peer-assessment. The unit title was "My life" It was implemented in two synchronous sessions of forty-five minutes each, and two asynchronous hours per week, for five weeks. This innovation was planned to implement backward design (See Appendix A). The transfer goal of the unit was adapted from the A1 overall oral production from the Council of Europe (2020).

At the beginning of the innovation, students received an explanation exemplifying what it was expected of them after the five weeks. As a class, they used the speaking checklist (See Appendix B) to assess the content of the mentor text. In this checklist the following aspects were presented as "Do" statements: vocabulary, past tenses structures, possessives pronouns, wh-questions, prepositions of place, adjectives and intelligible pronunciation.

Each week focused on a specific aspect that was going to be evaluated in the final performance. The first week was focused on grammar related to past tense, the second one on vocabulary, the third one on adjectives, the fourth one on possessive pronouns. In the last week, students focus on prepositions of place and acquire the ability to produce sentences and keep fluent interaction.

The performance activity was a recording conversation between classmates describing two pictures of themselves about their last holiday using audio chats. Learners had to develop speaking tasks about different topics, which they received peer assessment for each task.

After the intervention, students learned to use vocabulary related to describing location, past tense properly in irregular verbs, possessive pronouns to specify ownership, wh-questions to seek information in a conversation and prepositions of place to indicate specific location and adjectives to define emotions. Students peer-assess once for each week during classes while teachers monitor the class and give the comments writing in the EVA platform in the assignation of this activity.

Research Methodology

This study was based on Action Research because the author was involved in the study. According to Clark et al. (2020) affirmed that action research promotes activities that enhance the roles of students in the education system. Also, Koshy (2010), action

research improves educational practices. It is a process of gathering evidence that

allows researchers to carry out changes in their practices.

The research design is mixed since it included quantitative and qualitative

instruments. According to Ferrance (2000), action research is a set of steps in which

participants examine their practice in detail using research techniques.

Participants

Learners were recruited from a single first semester class at a public institute

called "Vicente Rocafuerte" in northern Guayaquil, Ecuador. The Institute was in an

urban area near the city center. Students were between the ages of 18 and 30 years old.

The class had 12 students who were invited to participate in the study, they completed

both the pretest and the posttest and participated in the peer-assessment intervention.

Two students were male and ten students were female.

Instruments

The instruments were designed to collect information for the research question:

Does peer-assessment influence in the use of linguistically structured activities with

practicing and repeating oral phrases improving the students' pronunciation of first

level's students in a public institution in Guayaquil?

The instrument applied were a pre and posttest, they were graded using a rubric

and with four categories related to the A1 level of the students. It also ranges from 1 to

5 with specific characteristics that describe the criteria of each column; monitoring

students' work. Ibberson (2012) suggested that a well-devised analytic rubric has a

positive effect in generating peer-assessment ratings as comparable to the teachers.

This rubric included the following criteria: grammar & vocabulary, content,

pronunciation and fluency, which are interval dataset constructed with six bands of

performance, 0 being the lowest band and 2.5 the highest. The rubric was adapted from A1 Level Cambridge Assessment Scales.

a. In the grammar & vocabulary criterion, the highest band was described as students always use past tense of common verbs to express lived experiences; possessive pronouns and prepositions of place; and ask wh-questions properly to seek information in a conversation., while the lowest band was never use past tense of common verbs to express lived experiences; possessive pronouns and prepositions of place; and don't ask wh-questions properly to seek information in a conversation..

b. In the content criterion, the highest grade was described as students' content covering all the topic in-depth with details and examples. The lowest grade was described as students' content do not cover all the topics in-depth with details and examples.

c. In the pronunciation criterion, the highest band was the pronunciation most of the time intelligible to describe their favorite room, while the lowest band was the pronunciation is not intelligible to describe their favorite room.

d. In the criterion of fluency the highest grade was described as students most of the time speak fluently with little hesitation that does not interfere with communication. The lowest grade was described as students never speak fluently with a lot of hesitation that interferes with communication.

Each criteria was given a maximum 2.5 each, with a total of ten points. For scorer reliability, the English coordinator chose five random tasks from each pre and posttest submits. Then, she graded them with the same rubric. The final grades were compared the grades obtained on those tests and they showed a minor deviation of one point.

Data Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used to obtain the Analytics Tools Pack in this research study. Descriptive statistics were run to obtain information about the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation. In addition, inferential statistics were analyzed with the paired sample *t*-test, as well as the *p*-value.

Ethical Considerations

The ethicality of a research has been compared with the purpose of aiming at finding moral principles that prevent from harm and injustice and promote goodness, reliability, and honesty (Sieber, 1993). Ethicality as a concept includes among other things defined moral principles and guiding/dominant rules (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Fundamentally, students' research involves discipline, professionalism, and various ways of action and thinking (Mills, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to contemplate how to find suitable ethical working methods for the research. However, there is not just one exact answer to this question: all depends on the research context, target, and selected method (Alderson & Morrow, 2011).

In students' research, ethicality has been dissected among other things from the perspective of students' rights. Noticing it is a part of the ethicality of the research that can be justified with the interaction between the researcher and research participant, how the researcher threats the individuals that he or she interacts with (Mills, 2007). The role of ethicality is especially important when using research methods that involve intimate atmosphere (Young & Barrett, 2001). This is also the case in action research that is carried out in the classroom by the researcher who is simultaneously the pupils' teacher. Often, the relationship between the teacher and the student—in this case, the researcher and the research subject—is extremely close (Mills, 2007).

Thus, students' research involves considerably ethical tensions. Especially important is to notice the factors that relate to the selection of the research theme

(Farrell, 2005), how representative a sample the students in that particular study make

(Hill, 1997), the consequences that result from students' participation (Clark, 2005), the

autonomous space given to the student in the research (Moss & Petrie, 2002), and the

data collection methods and the framework used for analyzing the data (Grover, 2004).

In this article, we enhance research validity, maintain scientific integrity the ethical and

the considerations that were observed during this research.

Results

The results obtained after analyzing the quantitative data (See Appendix D) for

the first research question showed the following results:

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test total marks

	N	Minimun	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	12	2.50	5.00	3.667	0.8876
Posttest	12	7.00	9.00	8.00	0.6030
Valid N (listwise)	12				

In table 1, the posttest has an increase in the mean of 4.33 points. Moreover, the

minimum and maximum score has changed in both tests. The p-value is less than 0.05

which means the students increased their grades due to the intervention. The standard

deviation in the posttest is closer to the mean value than in the pretest. In conclusion,

the results support the alternative hypothesis that through linguistically structured

activities applying peer-assessment facilitated by checklists, students improve their

pronunciation scores.

Discussion

This research study demonstrated that applying peer-assessment enhance the

students' speaking skills related to regular situations. As Miller and Morris (2016)

concluded students may observe and try to imitate similar behaviors by others, such as classmates and tutors.

Students also received formative and summative feedback to evaluate their work and to calculate, estimate and identify the results obtained. As predicted by Derakhshan et al, (2016), interaction helped participants to gain confidence in speaking.

Additionally, it provided them with the opportunity to improve after the application of the pretest and their results can be seen in the grades obtained after the posttest. As explained by Yépez (2019), peer-assessment helped students to improve their scores in speaking and become better at giving feedback.

Another aspect that they can include was the checklist that students had during the peer-assessment activities. On this topic, Brown (2002) highlighted the importance of function in language learning to achieve a more "spontaneous" performance in communication using their own students in the communicative competence as one of the principles of Language Learning and Teaching.

Conclusions

This study analyzes students using peer-assessment checklists. The paired-sample t-test provided evidence that peer-assessment significantly improved pronunciation grades. This aligns with the theories of peer-assessment; it can help involve students in their own learning while assessing their peers o their classmates, make them take responsibility for it, and develop their collaborative learning skills by promoting a positive and supportive learning environment.

It is possible that students' understood the concept of peer-assessment and were accurately assessing their abilities. As a consequence, as students studied and practiced their pronunciation.

Limitations

During this research study, there were some limitations like the interaction between students, because they did not feel comfortable and at the beginning it was difficult to follow the activities.

Another limitation is time, because, although the lesson plan should continue, students were late in the previous activity. And finally, the last limitation was some students forgot to use the checklist during the speaking activities. It was necessary that the teacher monitored the class to remind learners to apply the assessment tool provided.

Recommendations

For future research studies, it is recommended to work with students in at least one or two classes to reinforce the friendship between them and meet each other. And consequently, do the activities without communication problems, another recommendation is that students have a stable internet.

The last recommendation is to give the correct training to apply peer-assessment rubrics appropriately and answer any question in order to be clear and understandable, explain the expectations and benefits of engaging in the process, explain how students can evaluate anonymous assignments for more objective feedback.

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Appendix A

Lesson plan with backward design.

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Self-assessment checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Self-assessment rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Pre-test and post-test marks

Available upon request.

Appendix D

E-portfolio

Available upon request.