Universidad Casa Grande

Peer Assessment for Developing Speaking Skills in EFL Students Facilitated by a Video

Discussion Website

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Modality: Research Report

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The development of productive skills, writing and speaking, have been the core when learning and teaching a foreign language since they demonstrate that a speaker can use a language in different contexts and situations. However, this is a hard task into the Ecuadorian classrooms and into the institute levels as well.

The students´ English proficiency continue being poor. Education First (2019) stated that Ecuador ranked the 81st position out of a total of 100 countries. This ranking was stablished after the application of the EF Standard English test (EF SET). The test was addressed to 2.3 million people from different countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Ecuador keeps the second lowest level in Latin America which is equivalent to the A1 level. In the same sense, Astudillo (2021) pointed out, "EFL students may have some trouble speaking accurately and fluently in English, preventing effective communication" (p.18).

So, the problem of this research lies in the limited skills that students have when speaking in a foreign language, in this case English; consequently, students have a lack of knowledge to communicate correctly and fluently with other English speakers, for which this study takes as reference peer assessment to improve oral communication. Before the intervention, students also identified that their pronunciation was not appropriate and of course they mentioned that the tasks they were exposed to years before were not beneficial at all. Once the difficulties were observed, it was proceeded with the intervention through experimentation. Peer assessment was implemented to improve the development of speaking skills.

Peer assessment is a process that has generally been overlooked while learning and teaching. There are some studies related to this type of assessment. 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). But, why not immersing students into others´ learning? Why not inviting students to provide feedback to their peers? Therefore, peer assessment could be a good source.

On the other hand, the application of authentic tasks is a real challenge. Sometimes, students consider that learning another language is boring or tedious making it more difficult to produce it. Currently, technology-mediated education allows students to access various resources focused on their reality and the improvement of various skills, especially to master another language. The research makes relevance on the use of authentic tasks to improve oral skills. Thus, students can be exposed to real language such as taking a taxi, going abroad, ordering food and various everyday situations. So, the use of authentic resources inside and outside the classroom are important to fullfill with these aims that are not only based on filling a book with pre-established activities, or just memorizing vocabulary.

Literature Review

The following studies supported the present research report which was focused on peer assessment and speaking. They analyzed different concepts from different resources that contributed to the two variables. The dependent variable is speaking while the independent variable is peer assessment.

Peer-Asessment

Prastika (2020) explained that peer assessment is a reciprocal action in which learners provide feedback to others to improve their learning. According to Efrilia (2019), "Self and peer assessment contributed to the development of a more supportive learning environment", (p.32). In this sense, peer assessment becomes a collaborative strategy and it allows students to enhance their skills based on observation of errors and thus exceed an objective.

Wenny and Fajar (2019) stressed that peer assessment is a strategy to assess abilities in any skill. In this way, students would be more careful so in the future they would consider every aspect to avoid making mistakes. By training students correctly for peer assessment, they would be able to write comments and give a suitable score. It is worth mentioning that when students are trained on peer evaluation, they carry out collaborative work, which is vital to have an adequate criterion on the performance of a qualitative or quantitative qualification. It allows them to make a significant improvement in their peer evaluation.

Peer assessment and speaking can be connected. Students can provide feedback and their peers would get better at the same time. In accordance with Furyanto (2016):

Peer assessment led to positive students' perception in learning speaking because it improved their skill in verbal communication, helped them to understand what other peers think, provided students with useful feedback about their performance, and motivated students to learn to speak English. (p.5)

According to the author, participants would speak easily due to the motivation they have and when a teacher or peer provides feedback. As a result, at the moment of having a conversation, they will be more confident when speaking and will be able to generate ideas fluently.

Peer assessment engages students in assessing peer' performance by giving ratings and/or verbal feedback, which further enhances their higher-order thinking skills. It helps students to notice, check and write the observations and they can feel confident with their partners.

Nevertheless, there are many challenges, as when students are 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). Furthermore, students have to communicate the judgments

to their peers, they need to evidence good communication skills and have to provide constructive feedback about their learning process (Black et al, 2003).

Students who received 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 it is necessary to adopt the peers' suggestions and to revise their work (Sluijsmans and Van Merrlenboer, 2000). In addition, to include peer assessment, it requires time for organization, training and monitoring, particularly at the beginning, if good level of quality is going to be provided (Topping, 2010).

Peer assessment involves students evaluating each other´s work against a set of criteria and suggestions for feedback. It happens in a better way when students are used to the process and are comfortable with feedback. Nejad and Mahfoodh (2019) paid particular attention to student knowledge of both rubrics and assessment aspects of oral skills, in order to avoid biased or ambiguous results. Feedback is used for learning intentions and improvement. Teachers must explicitly teach and model how to provide feedback before handing over this important aspect. It is important to apply peer assessment by engaging students in descriptions of how the achievement of learning looks like.

Joo (2016) identified that peer assessment begins with progressive "training" of learners to provide supported feedback with teacher's notes or other instruments, such as interviews. It is good to work with examples making the criteria visible to the students. Additionally, guidance should be provided as students apply the criteria to anonymous samples to deepen their understanding. Finally, provide support for students in peer assessment including opening sentences and feedback forms which help students work on the process properly. 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. It could be

controlled and guided in the classroom (Derakhshan et al., 2016).

Speaking

Speaking is one of the productive skills in English learning and teaching. As claimed

by Chameron (2001, as cited in Wenny & Fajar, 2019), "Speaking is the use of language to

express meaning so that others are able to understand it" (p.2). Speaking is a productive skill.

It clearly demonstrates that learners can use the language to communicate and interact with

others.

Speaking is connected to receptive skills as well. Speaking is just another step

(Benetollo, 2020). It means that to produce or interact, it is necessary to have other skills like

listening. Skills are not isolated. Speakers should have many inputs from other abilities such

as listening, writing and reading so that they can create a good conversation and therefore, the

communication is more fluid and above all understood without any difficulty. With all the

input students get, they would be able to put into practice all they learn by speaking.

There are speaking components which are necessary to be communicatively

competent. Kurniati et al (2015, as cited in Astudillo, 2021) described interaction, grammar,

vocabulary, fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation as the main items. Interaction is the

involvement with someone else. Grammar is related to the rules and use of language.

Vocabulary are the words or lexicon used. Fluency is the ability to speak without stopping,

speaking just flows and words and phrases "move" smoothly. Accuracy refers to how

correctly a person uses the language. Last, pronunciation is explained as how the sounds are

produced orally. With all of these components, any speaking task would be understood to

maintain dialogues, monologues, oral presentations, or debates.

However, producing language by speaking is not as easy as it sounds. It requires time

and patience. Syafrizal and Rohmawati (2017) asserted that students do not speak because

they are afraid of making mistakes and do not feel self-confident. In the same sense, Moreira

(2020) stated, "Some particular classroom activities that may help achieving this are opinion

sharing and scavenger hunt. These activities allow students to talk about topics they care

about as they mingle with their classmates, which may eventually promote interaction" (p.6).

It is normal that students are frightened of pronouncing, or having an inappropriate accent.

Therefore, as teachers, we have to be sources of solutions. It means that teachers might look

for activities that students would feel secure to share with others in and out of the class. The

tasks would be about topics that they know, or feel really interested in sharing their thoughts.

Innovation

The main objective of the innovation was based on the application of a lesson plan

with a focus on speaking. The transfer goal was to teach students to be able to give a simple

description of an object or picture while showing it to others using basic words, phrases and

formulaic expressions provided they can prepare in advance.

The book used was Personal Best A2 Elementary. The unit worked on during the

innovation was unit 6 titled "*Homes and cities",* which was part of the learning process of the

students´ semester following the syllabus belonging to the English programme at the institute.

The unit included activities to train the four skills and had some adaptations due to the lesson

plan.

The innovation was developed in four weeks. There were two days of classes each

week. The classes were face-to-face with a duration of two hours each. In total, all the

innovation lasted sixteen hours. The study was held at a two-year technical school located at

Pelileo in Tungurahua.

Before all the innovation, there was a socialization process to keep instructions well-

established to handle an organized innovation unit. So then, students were previously

instructed on four aspects: how to use the checklist, how to peer assess, how to use Filgrid,

and YouTube. Students were trained to use the checklist properly (See Appendix 1) for a whole week to understand the criteria. The checklist was easier to use and comprehend due to the fact that it was detailed in Spanish. It was written in that way since students were beginners. Then, the teacher taught how to peer assess highlighting that peer assessment is a type of feedback to help others improve. For it, they chose a partner called a study buddy whose main role was to peer assess during all the process.

To fullfill the task, the teacher instructed that the peer assessment tasks had to be completed on the video discussion website called Filgrid keeping the same aspects of the checklist: creativity, quality of video, vocabulary & grammar, fluency and pronunciation, all with three aspects: yes, sometimes, and not yet. The peer assessment was done in written form as a comment and in oral form as a video. It was done over there because the feedback could be read or watched whenever participants desired. For video recordings, there was also some time to use YouTube. Some students were not immersed at all at the beginning so it was key to show them how to publish a video on the page.

The tasks of the unit plan for the innovation were prepared previously and were detailed in the design process worksheet (See Appendix 2). The activities were identified as transfer (T), meaning making (M) and A (acquisition). During the first week, the teacher presented a mentor text. It was an example to guide students on the final product. This week, the teacher assigned the first video in which students described their room similar a ROOM TOUR. This was part of the pretest. The study buddies analyzed the videos using the checklist and provided the feedback on Filgrid.

During the next two weeks, students were taught grammar content related to demonstrative pronouns, there is / there are, indefinite pronouns, useful adjectives, possessive adjectives, and prepositions of place. Talking about the new glossary, it was about furniture, parts of the house, and plural of nouns. The big change was that the activities in and out of the

class were with a real-life focus known as "authentic tasks". The challenge was to help

students use English in real contexts.

Apart of the first video, some activities included peer assessment as well to have as

much practice as they could with the checklist. In the last week, a posttest was given to

produce the final product or summative assessment. It consisted of recording a 1-minute video

(sustained monologue) describing their rooms similar to a room tour. Students' roles were as

Youtubers to keep the assignment catching. The videos were uploaded to YouTube and the

links were pasted on excel. Only the study- buddies and teacher had access to the videos.

After the assessment process, and the usage of the content taught in all the unit, the videos

were produced with a better result comparing to the first video. All the innovation was

supported by the teacher and coordinator to guide learners correctly.

Research Methodology

According to Ultan (2009), "Action research is a methodology that is considered to be

a valuable problem-solving tool" (p.13). Action Research is useful to come up with new ways

to teach in our classrooms with the main objective of improving. In this case, to become better

at using the English language in real life. It is important to have a fluent vocabulary and,

above all, the development of skills that allow you to improve your communication skills.

Action research is of great advantage for teachers and students. Learners could be

benefited by its application as well. So, Ultan (2009) mentioned, "Action research is also

seen as a personal transformational tool for a teachers' professional practice" (p.13). Action

research allows teachers to seek or generate a personal transformation within their

professional practice. Action research can change the perspective to have creative and

interactive classes and to look for new methods or teaching strategies in benefit of learners.

In order to conduct the current action research and look for a solution for the stated problem, the collected data was analyzed with a qualitative and quantitative method to answer two main questions:

- To what extent does the application of peer assessment develop speaking skills in EFL Students?

- What were the participants´ limitations while applying peer assessment into the whole innovation unit?

The quantitative data was examined with a speaking rubric (See appendix 3) which was used to grade the pre and posttest. The rubric was used by the teacher and had connection with the checklist categories that the students used for the peer assessment development.

Participants

The participants were students from a public institute located in a rural area from Tungurahua, Pelileo. The institute provides dual free education with an emphasis on third level technical and technological degrees in different careers controlled by Senescyt. They belonged to the English language center at level A1 in the period 2021 – 2. In here, students have to approve four levels to reach a B2 level and meet a requisite to graduate.

The population was a group of 36 students who were invited to participate in the whole innovation unit as part of their final project. The students were young adults from 18 to 40 years old who belong to an average socioeconomic group. Five students who represent the 13.8 % were male and thirty-one students who symbolize the 86.1 % were female.

Instruments

Rubrics are evaluation tools that are widely used in the education field. Churches (2015, as cited in Muhammad et.al., 2018) pointed out, "A rubric is an assessment tool that has a description of the expected performance for each criterion in order to achieve a grade or certain outcomes. Rubric is a systematic method to collect data regarding knowledge and

skills" (p.1). As a matter of fact, a rubric has different grading criteria for presentations, projects, writing tasks, and other formal assessment. In general, it will provide a score. The descriptors request students to achieve a specific level in the activity proposed.

Besides that, Chowdhury (2018) pointed out, "Rubrics are useful grading tools that add reliability, validity and transparency to assessments" (p.1). So, a rubric could show results giving an idea of confidence and consistency of the task. It would show students their strengths and weaknesses they have on an assignment.

After the application of the instruments, pre and posttest, it was time to advance with the evaluation by means of a rating rubric. It provided a response to the stated quantitative research question, "To what extent does the application of peer assessment develop speaking skills in EFL students?" The rubric assessed the following criteria: vocabulary and grammar, content, pronunciation and fluency. Each criteria had a specific descriptor to be achieved in the innovation. The scores ranged from 2.5 representing the highest grade until 0.5 showing the lowest. The rubric followed the details from the Cambridge Assessment scale and the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) descriptors belonging to A1 level of proficiency.

For scorer reliability, the English coordinator chose five random tasks from each pre and posttest submissions. 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.

At the end of the innovation in order to answer the second question, "What were the participants´ limitations while applying peer assessment into the whole innovation unit?", students completed a survey to gather their experiences and difficulties they had through the study. Besides that, the professor used an anecdotal record tracker (See appendix 4) to take some notes on the participant's behavior towards the innovation and improvement in all the month.

Data Analysis

To prove the impact of peer assessment into the speaking skills development in EFL students, descriptive statistics was managed. It allowed us to compare the quantitative results obtained in the pre and posttest, the calculation of the maximum, medium, standard deviation, and *p-value*. All of that data was calculated in Excel with the analytics tool pack. It was useful to answer the question, "To what extent does the application of peer assessment develop speaking skills in EFL students?".

To describe the findings of the other question, "What were the participants´ limitations while applying peer assessment into the whole innovation unit?", students answered a 10-questions survey sent by the professor at the end of the study. The survey was done on the web page Typeform. To analyze the result, the data was transcribed according to the participants´ responses. In addition, the notes taken on the anecdotal tracker were considered part of this section to see how students started and how they finished all the process from the teacher´s perspective.

Ethical Considerations

When working with action research, there are ethical considerations to be considered. Fleming and Zegwaard (2018) stated:

> Most WIL research involves human participants; therefore, it is fundamentally important that human research ethics approval has been obtained. It is important that approval has been gained before the commencement of data gathering from human participants because human research ethics committees cannot grant approval for research after the data collection has begun (with three expectations; data was collected for non-research purposes is now proposed to be used for research, data was gathered through a 'chance encounter', and if the data was already publically available, e.g., already published. (p.6)

Due to participants are the core on a study, it is mandatory to look for permission. Therefore, it is of vital importance that the information that will be issued is always with the consent of the students, so that a summative evaluation can be developed in case of errors in the activities that may arise. The current study was not the exception. Since the participants were young adults and adults, it was not necessary parents´ permission. But it was necessary the students´ acceptance. So, it was done based on an approval document where students could agree and sign. Additionally, the coordinator of the English language center knew about the whole process and was part of it as well.

Another author Bhandari (2021), mentioned that ethical considerations are principles and values that researchers follow. It is like a series of codes to protect participants and their active involvement. Apart of consent, the author pinpointed five ethical: voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, potential for harm, and results communication. By following all these bases, the research would be ethically acceptable in any institution.

For the innovation, students were informed previously explaining the role they would have in those 4 weeks. So, they decided to participate voluntarily. Their names were also anonymous. At the end of the application, students could check their results (scores) with their rubrics and read the comments that the teacher provided in the anecdotal tracks. The Filgrid page was also available if they wanted to listen or read to their peers´ feedback any time they preferred. So, all students were secure before, during and after the data collection. The videos were also only property of the authors coordinator, professor and the study - buddies who provided the feedback to fullfill the peer assessment.

Results

The results obtained in the research for the question, "To what extent does the application of peer assessment develop speaking skills in EFL students?" allowed the analysis

of the students ´progress who participated in the experimentation. The results are described in

the table below:

Descriptive statistics of each pretest and posttest
Table 1

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	*p. value*
Pretest	36	3.50	8.00	4.95	1.16	0.00
Posttest	36	5.00	8.50	6.81	1.03	0.00

Note: N = sample   Std. Deviation = Standard Deviation.

Table 1 shows the calculation of the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation

gotten in the pretest and posttest where a representative difference can be identified in each of the

criteria within the research. In the case of the pretest, a general mean of 4.95 was identified while

for the posttest a general mean of 6.81 was calculated; therefore, a difference of 1.86 was

determined in the posttest. The minimum of the posttest had an increased value of 1.50 compared

to the pretest. The maximum of the posttest has a difference of 0.50 in contrast to the pretest. In the

pretest, the standard deviation was of 1.16 and of 1.03 in the posttest, so it decreased around 0.13.

In conclusion, since the *p-value* was 0, it means that the results helped to prove the

hypothesis. It means that the experimentation was successful and that peer assessment has a

positive impact into the development of students´ speaking skills.

Regarding second question, "What were the participants´ limitations while applying

Peer Assessment into the whole innovation unit?", the surveys generated the following

responses from thirty-six students who participated in the whole study. The survey was

applied after the posttest. Most students had a positive attitude towards the research. Student

#1 mentioned "I really loved the experience. It took a week to deal with the checklist, but at

the end it was rewarding that I could help someone else". Student #25 said "I really loved the

idea of working with webpages. It was easier to help someone with technology even I was not

so good at all. It took some time to master them". However, not everything was good, there

were some disadvantages". Student #12 explained "It was difficult for me to give a comment to my study buddy since I do not speak English very well. My level is good but I could have done it better". Not all the processes are taken in good way, for that reason student #30 pointed out "I liked the idea of providing feedback. But, when I received mine, some partners did not take it seriously so, I only received an OK". Student #36 said "I could work easily at the institute since I had free internet there. But there were some tasks to do at home. I do not access to the internet easily there so there was some delay in the activities assigned to me and my study-buddy. It was a huge problem to me".

The notes in the anecdotal tracker were considered. The professor wrote weekly comments. The teacher could realize how students started and how they concluded their innovation unit after applying the peer assessment. For example, "student #1 was struggling with using narrative tenses and expressions to hold on the description appropriately", "students #4 and #5 had some problems with pronunciation, as well as in fluency criterion in the pretest". They did not feel secure. In the posttest results contrarily, the outcomes showed that the implementation helped students to improve their speaking skills", "student #25 included lots of structures with there is and there are easily during the performance", "student #35 improved the speaking skills performance in relation to the pretest.", and so on.

The idea of the survey and the anecdotal tracker was to keep in touch with the students´ perspectives no matter if they were positive or negative and to analyze the advances, they had little by little. It is good to identify good and bad experiences of participants with the purpose to improve in future research. Most of the participants reported that the process was hard at the beginning since it was the first time, they worked with someone else for a whole month giving feedback. In general, it was an absolutely new experience. At the beginning they did not know what to do with a checklist and they were so nervous using the language. In addition, they mentioned that besides the difficulties, they could reach good results; mainly

they could deal with the insecurity they had for speaking English. In general, after a month of hard work, they realized that with practice and patience, they could apply English and the knowledge they had in real life.

Discussion

For the first question "To what extent does the application of peer asessment develop speaking skills in EFL students?" It can be clearly seen that peer assessment influenced positively in the speaking skills development. As Prastika (2020) mentioned in his study, peer assessment is a reciprocal action in which learners provide feedback to others to improve their learning. In fact, by analyzing the changes in the scores (See appendix 5) from the pre and posttest, it was possible to see how students improved. At the beginning students were shy and afraid of not helping their peers correctly. But, at the end, with the great result, they were content with all the successful development.

Now, that students are more confident, the study clearly agreed with Petty (2009, as cited in Efrilia, 2019), "The most important advantage of self and peer assessment is that it makes students realize that success or failure depends not on talent, luck or ability, but on practice, effort and using the right strategies. This is motivating and empowering" (p.33). Peer assessment was advantageous in class for the innovation. Students understand by now that everything depends on their effort and that if everybody collaborates, they would get positive goals.

For the other question, "What were the participants´ limitations while applying peer-assessment into the whole innovation unit? It is key to mention that students were not ready at all. Since they were beginners, they were even more nervous. By applying peer assessment activities, students became more active and got involved in learning speaking process by grammar, giving feedback, evaluating, and suggesting changes for the others' performance. Furthermore, the students obtained critical thinking for their own speaking and their peers.

As Thomas et al. (2011) stated that peer assessment in the education field has been achieved at an increasing rate in recent decades, using it as an assessment tool. It represents a system for learning that directed around the learner with the peers based on effective learning, which focuses on the full integration of the student in the process of collaborative learning with peers under the supervision of the teacher.

Conclusions

Peer assessment and speaking skills development matched completely. The idea was that only teachers could assess students in any task they had. But, after the study, it was proved that students can peer assess too.

Speaking is a productive skill that is one of the main goals. If a learner can speak fluently with good pronunciation, appropriate vocabulary, grammar, or body language according to the speaking situation, it means that they are ready to communicate. It was interesting to see that the development of speaking skills can start with beginners.

In addition, students loved the idea of working with their peers. Since they were separated for almost two years due to the pandemic, they linked their ideas easily. It was so pleasant that they could provide positive comments to their friends. In the products obtained in the pretest, it is evident that the students have several errors that limited their communication and English comprehension, but those mistakes did not stop anyone on their process of improvement. Another successful point was to observe student feeling owners of their learning with summative assessments showing their creativity recording their videos. The innovation was important to students to be in touch with a new process demonstrating to themselves that they could be a good resource for the rest of the class. By now, they are able to provide positive feedback, give opportunities to become better on assessment and also to share time with others. It means to be a complete support.

Limitations

Future action research needs to create activities that are aligned to real life. English would be used in the real world. That is why it is important to look for tasks that are interesting and applicable for life purposes.

A major limitation during the current action research project was the students´ English level and time of application. Since they were not accustomed applying activities of that type, it was kind of hard. Most of the time, the professor spoke in Spanish. If not, the class would not continue. However, little by little, students kept in mind that the more English they were exposed to, the better they would do.

Time played an important role. The innovation unit was kind of short. So, all participants were in a hurry recording videos, providing feedback, and improving their tasks. The English program had to continue, so time was even shorter. However, the results were good enough comparing how learners started and finished the unit innovation.

Recommendations

It is recommended to apply peer assessment continuously in most of the units. When the process is applied longer students would be more prepared to peer assess. It could be suggested to develop activities with students as final products or summative projects in which peer evaluation is included from the initial stage.

It is also suggested that activities applied in and out of the class would be related to real life. It is not good to fill pages of grammar all the time. Give a challenge to students so they will realize the high goals they need to achieve to pass a course or level.

Finally, it would be more beneficial and easier to apply peer assessment for any skills being receptive or productive and to apply this type of assessment in face-to-face lessons since learners and teachers are together and they could talk to each other most of the time.

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Appendix 1

Instrument (checklist)

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Lesson plan with backward design.

Available upon request.

PEER ASSESSMENT FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS

Appendix 3

Rubric

Available upon request.

PEER ASSESSMENT FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS

Appendix 4

Anecdotal tracker

Available upon request.

PEER ASSESSMENT FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS

Appendix 5
Grades

Available upon request.

PEER ASSESSMENT FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS

Appendix 6

E-portfolio

Available upon request.

PEER ASSESSMENT FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS