Peer Assessment of Students' Role-plays to Improve their Speaking Skills

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Modality: Research Report

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English is a language that offers many opportunities because it is a universal language that is spoken in many countries of the world. Kishen (2021) stated that the English language plays a main role in our lives, and it helps in communication because it is the primary language for studying any subject all over the world which is vital for students as it broadens their minds, develops emotional skills, improves the quality of life by providing job opportunities.

Due to this fact, the new Ecuadorian English curriculum has Communicative Language Teaching as its basic principle because it is important that students focus not only on grammatical content but also develop communicative skills by simulating real contexts during the learning process. Sepahvand (2014) affirmed that students who do not have space to practice the language, do not learn to speak. The lack of opportunity to interact using the language, makes students feel self-conscious for fear of making mistakes and being harassed by their classmates in class.

Richards (2006) pointed out that teachers must make decisions based on their class needs, adapting the book's lesson in different ways to achieve the students' improvement. Besides, creating a friendly environment promotes real interaction and spontaneous communication in class to exchange the students' ideas and opinions. In fact, planning and adapting learning activities are essential for a successful class because teachers create ideas focused on learners' understanding, needs, interests, and content of the lesson itself.

This research study pretends to measure the effectiveness of peer assessment through role-plays to improve the speaking skills of English A2 students who showed

problems communicating what they want to say fluently because of their hesitation to participate and interact with each other in the speaking activities in class.

Literature Review

The present research focuses on improving speaking skills using peer assessment through role-plays in a real-life context.

Speaking Skills

Developing speaking skills is one of the main goals of teaching English as a foreign language. For effective communication, students should be able to speak English fluently. Alamri (2018) commented, "the speaking skill is a complex oral ability that needs to be practiced much time to develop communicative proficiency" (p.21).

Speaking is essential for interaction and communication with native and non-native speakers, which means that teachers should provide students full opportunities to use the language for communicative purposes inside and outside the class as well. Rokhman (2020) said speaking skills are very important to master because they can help students to communicate with others well. In English class, students must be able to communicate and share their ideas, opinions, and explanations using the language.

The capacity to communicate effectively with others is the most common problem amongst students. This takes into account factors like fluency, pronunciation, and intonation (Savvidou, 2004, cited in Pardede, 2011). Even so, the improvement of students' speaking skills opens them to educational and social opportunities in a globalized society where English is one of the means of communication.

Role-play

Role-play is an effective technique to improve students' speaking skills because it gives students an opportunity to practice communication by assuming roles in diverse social contexts (Liu and Ding, 2009, cited in Neupane, 2019). Role-play is an interactive speaking activity that allows students to place themselves in the shoes of someone else or stay in their shoes for playing a role in an imaginary situation.

Role-plays are a successful strategy that has a significant impact on learners' performance in speaking (DeNeve and Heppner, 1997, cited in Piedrahita, 2017). Role-play helps students to apply what they have already learned by creating their own scenarios. When students communicate and negotiate the meaning to prevent communication breakdown, cooperative grouping is so important to overcome their speaking limitations. As communication is not restricted to one situation, the use of role-plays allows students to play a sequence of different interactions in a real-life situation (Nunan, 2015, as cited in Criollo, 2018).

It is known that effective learning takes place when activities are engaging and memorable. Harmer (2007) recommended the use of role plays due to the fact that they are fun and motivating because quieter or introverted students have the opportunity to express themselves in a more direct way. Furthermore, the classroom environment was expanded to include the outside world, thus offering a much wider range of language opportunities.

According to Harmer's perspective, students need to speak with fluency, good pronunciation, and intonation to be understood. Thus, all those aspects could be covered

with role-plays in students' speaking practice. In fact, role-plays improve students' fluency in the target language, encourage students to speak or interact with others and make the teaching and learning process more enjoyable. Finally, role-play as a speaking technique can improve students' understanding, accuracy, pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary (Gusmuliana et al., 2021).

Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is a broad term for a range of activities that include students in the act of evaluating and providing feedback on the work of their peers. It can be formative, where students give feedback on each other's drafts before a final product is submitted, or summative, where students use a rubric to grade final submissions. Peer assessment is most commonly used with written work, but can also be used with presentations, performances, posters, videos, and other types of assignments (Nicol et al., 2014).

Schuldt (2019) said that peer assessment is also regularly used as a strategy for students to assess the contributions of their fellow students to group work and assignments. Students benefit from peer assessment in a number of ways: receiving more frequent and timely feedback than when the instructor is the only one providing it, getting feedback on drafts and being able to make improvements, and engaging in the critical analysis and reflection associated with assessing the work of their peers. Faruk and Eda (2021) suggested that peer assessment consolidates and reinforces the students' personal and teamwork abilities by engaging students in cognitively demanding tasks such as reviewing, summarizing, clarifying, and giving feedback.

Hasnani and Mubarak (2020) stated that peer assessment encourages students to reflect on their own learning progress and performance critically. Therefore, peer assessment helps students to become autonomous learners because they are responsible for assessing their peers based on their knowledge. It also provides a structured learning process for students to critique and allow feedback to each other on their work. It helps students develop lifelong skills in assessing and providing feedback to others, and also equips them with skills to self-assess and improve their own work.

Spiller (2012) commented that peer Assessment can positively affect student learning by helping them develop their reflective and critical thinking skills, as well as their self-confidence as learners. Also, it can be essential to encourage students to learn from each other. The implementation of peer assessment implies informing students about the use and achievements of peer assessment. Moreover, teachers must motivate students to be responsible in assessing their peers and avoid being subjective to provide high confidence (Kayak et al., 2020).

Zoom Tool

As an educational tool, it allows students to have teachers around the world interact in real-time, and collaborate and meet in a way that is similar to in-person meetings (Earon, 2017). Nowadays, education is breaking down the physical barriers to access learning in ways not possible before. Also, the zoom app promotes a new way of learning based on technology.

Innovation

This study portrayed the effects of peer assessment on improving speaking skills. The innovation was applied for about two weeks with 12 periods of class in total, which meant 6 hours per week. Participants were 30 students of the second cycle who managed the English level A2. For the implementation of the innovative teaching plan, the essential materials were an internet connection, computers, and zoom for the synchronous sessions. During the first class of the innovation teaching plan, students were explained about peer assessment and guided on how to use a checklist to assess their pair performance and provide effective peer assessment. The lesson plan included activities that gave them opportunities to improve their speaking skills while they practiced the peer assessment process.

In addition, students worked on vocabulary related to seasons, weather, means of transportation, and simple past tense. To improve the student's knowledge of vocabulary and grammar learned in class, they interacted by talking about their travels and holiday experiences. Also, students practiced, performed, and recorded role-play activities based on their real context experiences. The role-play activities applied in this study were fully scripted, semi-scripted, and non-scripted role-plays that were used according to the lesson plan.

First of all, in the lesson, a fully scripted role-play was shared with the students, which included the new vocabulary and expressions related to the topic. So, the students could interact with others and practice their pronunciation in pairs. Then, they received a semi-scripted role-play to complete and create a new conversation with the new vocabulary and expressions learned in pairs.

Finally, students applied the non-scripted role-play activity that was worked in pairs using the content previously practiced. Once students finished the final task, they provided feedback and exchanged the checklist used to assess their classmates' performance (see Appendix 1), and uploaded it to the Eva platform to be graded by the teacher, who used a rubric that focused on grammar, vocabulary, intelligible pronunciation, and proper intonation.

Research Methodology

This study was based on action research because the researcher collected data and reflected on it to implement actions for solving the problem. Rademaker (2013) mentioned that action research is an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students' learning.

This action research applied qualitative and quantitative instruments to explore how much peer assessment of role-plays (independent variable) improves speaking skills (dependent variable).

Participants

This study was carried out with 30 students (8 males and 22 females) in a public university. Students ages were between 18 - 24 years old and were attending the second cycle of English Level A2. All of them were attending classes in a virtual modality. Due to this fact, the researcher used the zoom platform to encourage students' peer interaction and foster active participation in this study.

To diagnose the students' speaking skills, a speaking test was applied before the innovation. Students did a speaking test that was aligned with the Analytical scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) for English Level A2.

Instruments

The instruments applied to obtain the information were a pre and post-test and a survey. Pre-speaking tests were taken before the innovation to know students' speaking skills performance. This test was a semi-scripted role-play in which students filled in the gaps to create a dialogue in pairs. Also, the teacher used a rubric to evaluate aspects that involve speaking skills in role-plays like, grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation.

To measure students' speaking skills, participants were asked to create and perform a role-play in pairs through a zoom tool. The rubric was also used for the peer-assessment strategy, observing the rating scale between 0 and 5. Learners used the rubric for each task in which role-play performance was involved.

Furthermore, a post-test was applied based on the topics planned for this innovation. Students interacted in pairs through the role-play using the vocabulary learned during the innovation. For this assessment, the teacher applied the same rubric as the pre-test to analyze and contrast students' speaking skills improvement. This instrument answered the first research question: How much does peer assessment of role-plays improve speaking skills?

Survey

Cohen et al., (2018) defined survey research as the collection of information from a sample of participants through their responses to questions. A survey was applied at the beginning and end to know students' perspectives on the innovation. It drew conclusions about implementing peer assessment during the innovation. The pre- and post-survey answered the second research question: What are students' perspectives on innovation?

Data Analysis

The data collected in the pre and post-tests were computed in a Microsoft Excel document to get the mean, minimum and maximum values. On the other hand, the data of the pre and post-surveys were organized and analyzed into categories. Students' answers were detailed according to the questions related to peer assessment, roleplays, and speaking skills.

Ethical Considerations

To carry out this study, authorization was requested from the academic director of the university, and students were asked and informed about the procedure of the study. Besides, they knew the information collected was for academic goals. Fleming (2018) mentioned ethical considerations in research are a set of principles that guide the research designs and practices. These principles include voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, the potential for harm, and the results of communication.

Results

In this study, the peer assessment to improve the students' speaking skills was applied. The results obtained from the application of the innovation are presented in the following section. To measure participants' progress throughout the innovation and answer the first research question: how much peer assessment of role-plays improves the students' speaking skills? The data collected was systematized to provide the results from the pretests and post-test applications.

Table 1.

Results of the pre and post-test

	N	%	Mean	MAX	MIN	Standard Deviation
Pre-test	30	100	2.06	4	1	0.94443318
Post-test	30	100	4.13	5	3	0.77607915

The pre-test and post-test results helped the researcher to apply the innovation and to validate the effectiveness of the peer assessment. The mean score of the pretest was 2.06 which means the average score. However, in the post-test, the mean was 4.13, and there was a significant change.

Likewise, results indicate that the maximum score in the pre-test was 4, but in the post-test was 5 which was the highest one. As well as in the pre-test, the minimum score was 1. However, this score showed a significant increase in the post-test, it was 3 which represents that innovation had a positive effect on participants. Furthermore,

there was an important variation between the standard deviation of pre and post-test scores.

The results from the pre and post-survey are summarized in the following table to answer research question 2: What are students' perspectives about innovation?

Table 2.

Results of the Pre and Post survey

Indicators Peer assessment	PRE-SURVEY				POST-SURVEY			
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
As an effective strategy	11	36.6	19	63.4	27	90	3	10
Improves the students' pronunciation	5	16.6	25	83.4	25	83.4	5	16.6
Facilitates interaction among students	7	23.4	23	76.6	29	96.6	1	3.34
Influences the students' English level improvement	4	13.4	26	86.6	28	93.4	2	6.6

The results show that student's perspectives were negative before the innovation. Most of them did not believe that peer assessment can be an effective strategy to improve their speaking skills. However, their opinion changed after the intervention because almost all of them affirmed that peer assessment was very useful to practice the pronunciation and increase the student's motivation because of the interaction among them in class which means the innovation impacted them positively.

Despite the results, students reported difficulties when they applied the peer assessment because some students were less communicative. Likewise, they faced problems with pronunciation and intonation when they practiced the language.

Discussion

Results obtained in this study to answer the first research question, how much peer assessment of role-plays improves the students' speaking skills? showed that peer assessment helped students to improve their speaking skills as a result of the students' interaction among them. After two weeks of the innovation, it was evident that the peer assessment of students' role-plays improved their speaking skills. Additionally, during the innovation, students could identify their strengths and weaknesses in relation to grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation due to the implementation of the peer assessment in class.

Ndoye (2017) found in his study; the peer assessment encouraged students to participate actively, besides developing their speaking skills significantly as a result of the interaction with others. About the second research question, what are the students' perspectives on innovation? The survey after the application of the innovation answered this question and revealed that peer assessment involved students in real communication contexts and made them improve their speaking skills. Musfirah (2019) manifested that the implementation of peer assessment in his study had a positive impact on their learning outcomes because it allowed students to discuss and assess their classmates' speaking performance in a friendly environment.

On the other side, role-plays facilitated communicative activities in class because role-plays allowed the students to express personal feelings, ideas, and

opinions. Boakye (2021) affirmed that role-play provides an opportunity for students to express appropriate language functions correctly in the given roles and situations. Role-plays are a successful technique that achieves communicative efficiency and involves the students in a more communicative environment (Krebt, 2017). Furthermore, the role-plays provide supportive and dynamic classrooms that make the students feel confident when they use the language (Akbar, 2014).

Conclusions

Literature and results have shown that peer assessment helped to improve the speaking skills of students who are in cycle 2, English level A2, in a public university. In the same way, the results evidenced that students changed their perspectives after the innovation. In the beginning, most of them felt unsure about the effectiveness of the peer assessment in improving their speaking skills. However, at the end of the innovation, the students' perspectives were positive in relation to peer assessment through role-plays to improve their speaking skills (Naksevee, 2013).

Additionally, this innovation helped students to change their attitudes about communicative activities in class and it also decreased their anxiety and hesitation, encouraging their interest in achieving their learning goals. Finally, this study shows that it is essential to implement different strategies of assessment to strengthen students' learning.

Limitations of this study

In this study, despite the students' improvement there were many limitations such as students are not experienced in assessing each other, students may have a

tendency to assign the same mark to everyone, most of them might agree to assign good grades, and the internet connection made it difficult to guide and support the students' role plays when they perform in class.

Recommendations

Based on the results, the application of the peer assessment to improve the students' speaking skills is absolutely recommended before its application it is necessary to familiarize students with the strategy for getting experience with it and facilitate the students' peer assessment. Also, make students aware of ethics when evaluating to assign real grades based on their classmates' performance. Finally, organize all the technological resources and the internet connection to guide and support the student's performance during the innovation process.

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Appendix 1

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Lesson plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Pre-test

Available upon request.

Post-test:

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Pre-survey

Available upon request.

Post survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Consent letters

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

E-portfolio

Available upon request.