



**Self-Assessment in the Improvement of Speaking Competence using Instant Messaging**

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Research Report

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### **Self-Assessment in the Improvement of Speaking Competence**

During class sessions, students' participation is fulfilled by factors such as motivation, stress, anxiety and joy that are linked to linguistic competence barriers. This action research focuses on enhancing oral skills with self-assessment using an instant messaging tool to improve speaking practice. Speaking is the most challenging skill learners struggle with to succeed in language learning.

Rao (2019) suggested that “teachers have to understand the problems of the ELLs (English language learners) and try to implement various teaching strategies in their classrooms in order to develop their learners' speaking skills in English classrooms” (p. 6). Displaying structured strategies and methodologies control the way students learn, therefore, teachers have to incorporate activities make students aware of the importance of learning based on their interests and personal's backgrounds.

The difficulties of obtaining successful learning outcomes are evidenced during interaction activities. An important number of students do not follow briefings of activities and they lose marks apart from missing the formative assessment practice. It was observed that lack of interest causes low or no results during spoken production activities and as a consequence, students do not meet the expectations of the class.

### **Literature Review**

This section focuses on self-assessment and how to apply it to a skill that needs to be improved. Benefits and problems and what make self-assessment effective was studied. It also involved digital tools on the EFL environment to study speaking competence.

### **Self-Assessment**

A substantial way to monitor students' progress is by self-assessment. This strategy is helpful in language learning and the accuracy of this depends on students' autonomy.

According to Blanche (as cited in Jamrus & Razali, 2019), teachers must understand to what extent students are able to evaluate their own work and performance.

That strategy makes students self-reflective, and as a result, they get aware of their individual needs. Practical learning, experience and self-awareness are focused to achieve objectives, so that, learners acquire knowledge following the learning objectives expected according to the educational system expectations (Blue, 1994).

Self-assessment is defined as judgment conclusions where external criteria such as standards and outcome profiles have an effect on students' personal judgement. Students learn to judge their work realistically to meet educational requirements (Harris & Brown, 2018). Besides, learners that implement self-assessment have a better impact on their learning (Mc Kevvict, 2016, as cited in Papanthymou & Darra, 2018).

### **Alternative ways to apply self-assessment**

Applying self-assessment permits students to recognize a starting point to guide them in the process of learning a foreign language. Moreover, learners have to receive feedback. Teachers' recommendations guarantee self-assessment has to be done properly. The main reason is to make students feel conscious about their personal purpose-setting and to cover standards of the curriculum and their personal standards in order to achieve progress (Alek et al., 2020).

In the set of strategies for self-assessment there are the observation and reflection activities. Through modeling, students are able to reflect on their learning with self-judgement and self-reaction to impact in the self-confidence, in other words, by following a structure or model they are able to comprehend what they know about a topic, what they will apply for their interests into their context, and what they want to investigate to strengthen their confidence. Some strategies, such as portfolios, pre and posttest, videotapes and learning logs are verifiable. Those allow to measure academic objectives. Thus, students need to be

aware of their personal performance, not only in terms of grades but also to communicate their progress and experiences (Ariafar & Fatemipour, 2013). Additionally, Borg and Edmett (2019) referred that different forms of self-assessment evaluate and monitor students' performance.

### **Benefits and problems of self-assessment**

#### **Benefits**

Self-assessment encourages students to have a better ownership sense when they need to take decisions. It is attention-grabbing since speaking is one of the objectives of learning English (Alek et al., 2020). Additionally, learning autonomy is acquired and enhanced through appropriate training. Thus, teachers must provide the correct guide during the explanation of self-assessment practice. Holec (as cited in Cevallos et al., 2017) stated that autonomy must be acquired by natural means or through formal learning. Moreover, self-assessment according to Başak (2019) indicated "self-assessment itself has been a core point making students more autonomous and contributing to learner-centered language learning" (p. 47). The result is that learners take in total responsibility and manage their learning. They become active learners. Consequently, they become lifelong learners (Ndoeye, 2017).

#### **Problems**

One problem when self-assessment is implemented relates to the lack of knowledge in preparing for this procedure. Students must get involved in the process. Moreover, the main issue appears by poor guidance in self-assessment supplied by teachers. Another problem is that students do not provide sufficient information during the process. As students do not feel engaged making self-assessment worksheets, data obtained is not going to be real. Saribeyli (2017) mentioned:

In many cases, students are not eager to learn more, unless they recognize the need themselves. Usually, students can be demotivated by poor grades given by a teacher

because students cannot see the rationale behind the grade. In such a case, they need to witness their real performance, which can occur through self-assessment. (p.189)

Another problem during self-assessment is the timing. Insufficient time affects learners' concentration and rise stress levels during this strategy. However, Hughes (2003, as cited in Sa'diyah, 2020) mentioned "that it is not easy to determine correct speaking jurisdiction. Efficient and consistent outcomes take long time and commitment, including preparation" (p. 814).

### **Making Self-Assessment Effective**

The effectiveness of employing self-assessment lies in how English language learners are motivated to learn and reflect on their own English learning (Adams & King as cited in Jamrus & Razali, 2019). It has to be observable and traceable to monitor and design potential interventions that improve the effects of academic performance.

One of the conditions in order to achieve effectiveness in self-assessment is the teachers' expertise. When they know how to feedback, especially in domains they are skilled self-assessment can be reached properly and in an effective way (authors cited in Chung et al., 2021).

Panadero et al. (2016, as cited in Andrade, 2019) pointed out that training students on how to self-assess requires to do particular tasks adding an evaluation, following criteria or standards. To make an effective self-assessment it is needed a purpose, the presence of criteria and a method.

### **Self-Assessment Checklist.**

The conception of a self-assessment checklist according to Bharuthram and Patel (2017), a tool that evidences learners' achievement according to a particular criterion where it is pointed out in an assignment and this permits further self-assessment.

### **Speaking competence**

Through small utterances to talks, learners enhance their speaking competences. This happens on a daily basis and it has to be deployed according to each level of competence. It is focused on fluency rather than on accuracy. According to the Ministerio de Educación (2016), cognitive and social skills in the A2 stage require students to engage in the development of speaking skills.

Furthermore, learners scaffold spoken production when practicing and reinforcing topics that are related to their interest and background. Learning to speak demands practice and concentration. The result of this is to communicate their ideas orally with eloquence and manners (Wahyuni & Alvi, 2021).

### **Use of digital tools on EFL environment**

Integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into EFL classroom empowers learning. Thus, students that are accustomed to use electronic devices, have abilities for participation during classroom activities in an ICT context. Yordming (2017) exposed “one of the factors that determine educational development and innovation in general is teachers, as they are the ones to use the ICT investments for educational development” (p. 45).

As COVID-19 pandemic meaningfully changed the educational system in the country, the implementation of virtual modality appeared in different institutions where synchronous and asynchronous activities were incorporated as assignments. In spite of this new modality, Nugroho and Mutiaraningrum (2020) stated the implementation of electronic devices and mobile phones in the EFL environment potentiates students' self-confidence and motivation. Electronic devices facilitate learning practices and give the opportunity of interaction in real-life contexts for students. Based on this, digital learning on EFL classroom generates learning' development.

### **Rubrics**

Using rubrics within formative or summative assessment permits to check productive and receptive skills. Rubrics can be used to score students' abilities. Moreover, they help to give effective feedback from teachers on their learning progress (Brown, 2017).

Sharma (2019) stated using rubrics in order to motivate students to develop autonomy, belonging and accountability during the progress of each practice. The mistakes they commit are supported through guidance, feedback, and self-reflection.

### **Innovation**

Students participated in speaking activities. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, most speaking practice interaction were not synchronous during classes. Instead, speaking practices were sent through videos and by monologues.

The innovation was applied to a group of students in a private secondary school in Samborondón. Speaking level of participants was A2 referring to Common European Framework of References assessment scales. Students in this course were able to meet the parameters in the A2 level assessment scale. Their age ranged from 11 to 13 years old. For this innovation the duration was 4 weeks, divided into three class periods (two synchronous periods and one asynchronous period) following a lesson plan (Appendix 1).

Students were assigned and taught about different uses of grammar rules in order to communicate, compare and contrast, and maintain a fluent conversation in English related to world's amazing landscapes. Each week, students received feedback from the teacher after filling their self-assessment checklist (Appendix 2).

In class sessions, students received printed material to learn vocabulary according to a final assignment and received digital worksheets in order to practice with video expressions to manage fluency and delivery in a conversation. Self-assessment guidelines were explained in the long run of the whole innovation, so that, students got aware of their weaknesses and the teacher worked with them.

In the first week, teacher modeled the assignment and activities with students and guided them how to self-assess by using a checklist while reviewing vocabulary and grammar according to description, comparison and contrast in different real situations.

The second week, students practice with their mentor text. The activity was addressed in pairs in order to practice fluency, after that, each student self-assessed using the checklist.

In the third week, students were practicing for the posttest following a speaking rubric (Appendix 3) and reviewing content following the unit course. Students sent their assignments voice notes and self-assessment checklist to be graded and got teacher's feedback. In the last week, students reviewed grammar points and practiced in order to make an interactive conversation following the mentor text. The posttest was assigned to them.

### **Research Methodology**

This project was implemented following the modality of action research. Al-Mahdi (2019) defined action research as a "...systematic work in the field to solve a problem or answer an important question about professional practice" (p. 39). The research questions that gather quantitative data in this innovation project are 1) "Does the implementation of self-assessment improve speaking skills among ninth-grade students in a particular high school?" and 2) "Do all speaking skills improved at the same level after intervention?"

In order to work in the innovation process there was one instrument applied to measure the data obtained for research questions. A pre and posttest graded with a rubric to assess students' previous knowledge and final results.

Robers and Ilard indicated (2003, as cited in Alessandri et al., 2017) the pre and posttest rubrics evaluated students' progress and measured the desired aspects to value speaking production. First, students were given a pretest to assess their competences in speaking skills and to quantify their grades. After pretest they were given a self-assessment rubric. This rubric helps to monitor students' progress according to the innovation expected.



It was elaborated in Spanish for providing comprehensible criteria to improve in oral production. This process covered four-week practice using the unit book, after the posttest that will be consider as formal assessment.

### **Participants**

Students of 9th grade from section “A” and “B” between 13 and 16 years old. Their English level varies from A2 to B2 according to the Common European Framework of References, however there is evidence of students lacking a proper English level according to their course. Of a total of 37 students invited to this intervention, there was parental consent for 13 students, 6 girls and 7 boys that finished the pretest and posttest.

### **Instruments**

The rubric gives students self-awareness about what descriptors they need to improve in the oral skill. The rubric is a gradual scale that brings an objective measure with a description about students’ performance during the intervention.

The rubric included the descriptors detailed: content: displays the content of the voice notes following the rubric according to the background and topic assigned, vocabulary and grammar: employs the use of vocabulary related to the unit and the grammar studied in the assignment, pronunciation: this descriptor assesses the comprehensibleness and pronunciation in the voice notes, and interaction: it focuses in the natural interaction and fluency in the dialogue. Those descriptors are based on many activities focused in the unit studied.

### **Pretest and Posttest**

The outcome expected is to compare and contrast, describe with adequate adjectives, and employ vocabulary related to amazing landscapes in the world. The first phase in the intervention was to take a pretest which students have to record a speaking interaction activity describing landscapes using correct grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary in a fluent way. For posttest students had to record a dialogue using voice notes through Whatsapp in

pairs mentioning an amazing landscape comparing and contrasting information with their peers. The same criteria for assessment as in pretest was implemented.

According to data collection, the data obtained respond to the following that are needed to correlate with the variables. The score is described by Content, Vocabulary & Grammar, Pronunciation, and Interaction). The minimum score is 1.5 that means not appropriated understand or acquisition, the average is 2.0 that meets the expected aspects with minor mistakes and the maximum score is 2.5 with an appropriate comprehension and use of the elements in the oral skills.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were measured through mean and standard deviation to compare the data in the pretest and posttest. Moreover, the calculation using  $p$  value to measure statistical relevance of the data was analyzed. The analysis was done in Microsoft Excel using the Analytics Tools Pack.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In this study, ethical consideration was based on the importance of explaining the reason of conducting the innovation project as a way students understand the goal and their perspective of being assessed for investigation purposes. Giving to learners a clear and worth explanation, the outcome and the orientation of the study is more concrete in terms of participation (Montreuil et al., 2021).

To carry out the intervention it was necessary to ask students if they were able to collaborate in the process. An important clarification to parents was to emphasize that the whole intervention does not affect students' grades if they do not participate. Before implementing the intervention, a parents' consent form was sent via Google forms to have authorization from their parents or tutors. This adheres to ethical standards of privacy and

confidentiality that Hassan et al. (2021) pointed out to determine validity in the research report.

## Results

To measure the data that correlates with Research Question 1: “Does the implementation of self-assessment improve speaking skills among ninth-grade students in a particular high school?” the researcher used a rubric to validate the data obtained between pretest and posttest on table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Descriptive statistics of Pretest and Posttest*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>p value &lt; 0.005</i>
<i>Pretest</i>	13	6.00	10.00	8.00	1.17	0.001
<i>Posttest</i>	13	7.00	10.00	8.73	0.88	

Table 1 details general data about pretest and posttest results. In the description of pretest values, the mean of N (sample) that is 8.00 and the Standard Deviation points out that students are 1.17 points far from the mean grade. When analyzing posttest results, the Mean of the sample is 8.73 which indicates a difference of 0.73 points in comparison with the mean of pretest results. The Standard Deviation in posttest details that by 0.88 points students are closer to reach the mean according to their scores. This data indicates an improvement on speaking skills related to Research Question 1 during the innovation. Additionally, *p* value which is  $0.001 < 0.005$  for comparing pretest and posttest results demonstrates statistical relevance and as consequence a meaningful success in the intervention.

According to research question 2: “Do all speaking skills improved at the same level after intervention?” A rubric was applied and the grades obtained in each descriptor between pretest and posttest were analyzed. Students’ results indicate that the component of Content there was a mean difference of 1.92 in pretest in comparison with 2.15 in posttest.

Vocabulary and Grammar had in pretest 2.15 to posttest 2.19. Pronunciation descriptor had 2 in the mean to 2.23 in posttest. Finally, Interaction had 1.92 in pretest results, while posttest results were 2.15 in the mean. Students improved their speaking skills during intervention. However, there was not equity in values by applying self-assessment.as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Comparison by descriptors of pretest and posttest results*

	Pretest				Posttest				
	Min	Max	Mean	St. Deviation	Min	Max	Mean	St. Deviation	
<b>Content</b>	1.5	2.5	1.92	0.45	<b>Content</b>	1.5	2.5	2.15	0.38
<b>Vocabulary and Grammar</b>	1.5	2.5	2.15	0.38	<b>Vocabulary and Grammar</b>	1.5	2.5	2.19	0.25
<b>Pronunciation</b>	1.5	2.5	2	0.35	<b>Pronunciation</b>	1.5	2.5	2.23	0.33
<b>Interaction</b>	1.5	2.5	1.92	0.34	<b>Interaction</b>	1.5	2.5	2.15	0.32

## Discussion

This research reported that implementing self-assessment improved students' speaking skill competence. Papanthymou and Darra (2018) studies agreed that implementing self-assessment with electronic devices works as a formative assessment source and it can improve academic learning.

Regarding to the first Research Question 1: "Does the implementation of self-assessment improve speaking skills among ninth-grade students in a particular high school?" Results demonstrated improvement comparing pretest and posttest grades. It is similar to the study carried out by Ariaifar and Fatemipour (2013) declared that students had an improvement in their speaking ability from their posttest scores through self-assessment procedure. Moreover, that study identified the specific areas where students need support on the speaking skill.

Positive results in this study caused impact in students' self-confidence. They felt motivated and engaged after applying self-assessment. This reinforces first research question according to the study where Alek et al. (2020) affirmed that self-assessment rise students' motivation and stimulate the desire to learn in order to reach the learning outcomes.

Regarding to Second Research Question 2: "Do all speaking skills improved at the same level after intervention?" data collected concluded that participants improved their speaking skills. This correlates with Başak (2019) that established significant results according to the grades scored in the components of speaking skills. Even tough, there is not an equity in these values.

### **Conclusions**

According to quantitative results, this intervention had positive results applying self-assessment strategy. Students felt engaged and their participation and self-confidence rose through activities that included guidance and feedback. Implementing a rubric gives detailed explanation about the requirements students needed to achieve in the learning-process, especially in oral skills.

Students' grades demonstrated great impact because of applying self-assessment in order to improve the oral skills. The components of the speaking skill in the study rose comparing the results between pretest and posttest.

Quantitative data supports that the sample had some issues in the oral aspects. However, final results indicated that learners enhance some linguistic aspects such as content, pronunciation and interaction within oral skills scored in the posttest.

### **Limitations**

A limitation in this study was the lack of participation of all students in the population. Many of them have difficulties in the target language and the reason they did not participate in the implementation was their parents did not accept/sign the consent form.

Students did not have a good timing due to pandemics. The schedule in the institution was reduced. Thus, English subject hours were limited. Furthermore, it would support the study if interviews were applied. These would help to analyze the impact of using self-assessment according to students' perspectives.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the challenge of training in self-assessment to students, it is suggested to practice periodically this strategy to reinforce self-awareness in students. Many difficulties could be overcome with teacher's feedback and to carry out this study in a face-to-face modality due to some problems in terms of connectivity delayed the normal course of the project. At last recommendation, it is suggested to divide descriptor Vocabulary and Grammar to grade these aspects individually, due to it was the descriptor with the lowest score of improvement at the end of intervention.

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**Appendix 1**

Lesson plan

Available upon request.

**Appendix 2**

Checklist

Available upon request.

**Appendix 3**

Rubric

Available upon request.

**Appendix 4**

My e-portfolio

Available upon request.