



Self-assessment for A1 Learners to Improve Speaking Skills Using Whatsapp and FlipGrid

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THE EFFECT OF SELF-ASSESSMENT IN SPEAKING

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English is an international language that is used as a worldwide communication channel, and for that reason, communities need to learn the language. Living in the Ecuadorian Amazon region, has allowed me to identify many limitations that influence young students' English learning process.

The first limitation is the lack of English teachers in the Amazon region, specifically in El Coca. In elementary schools, teachers from other areas, such as Mathematics, must teach English due to the lack of teachers. Thus, learners do not have enough opportunities to enhance their language skills. At the end of high school, teenagers who migrate to bigger cities in Ecuador to continue their university education have problems with English courses.

Another limitation in public and private institutions from El Coca is the authentic application of speaking skills. In Ecuador, most people speak Spanish; consequently, the only place students can practice and improve their language skills is in the classroom. Therefore, teachers must consider the importance of providing many chances for their students to practice their language skills by providing meaningful and authentic activities.

Considering these mentioned issues, this innovation, with the application of qualitative and quantitative approaches, focuses on applying a self-assessment strategy to increase students' English skills, mainly their speaking skills. This study was conducted in a private language academy, which students from different public and private schools attend to enhance their English skills. Hence, the main aim of this innovation was to help students from this region gain confidence when communicating orally and allowing them to share their culture and traditions to boost tourism in this area since the community mainly focuses on oil production.

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Literature Review

This section details information about self-assessment and how it can improve students' speaking skills. This theoretical foundation is based on books, scientific articles and a thesis focusing on this study's variables.

Self-assessment

According to Panadero et al. (2016), self-assessment (SA) is "...a wide variety of mechanisms and techniques through which students describe (i.e., assess) and possibly assign merit or worth to (i.e., evaluate) the qualities of their learning processes and products" (p.2). Therefore, self-assessment is a technique where learners reflect on their own performance and judge if they meet the set learning objectives.

Likewise, Babaii et al. (2016) explained that SA is a type of formative assessment that allows students to learn to evolve their skills by evaluating their own final activities in the classroom. Furthermore, the SA enhances pupils' learning process and engages them in their learning; Başak (2019) mentioned that "self-assessment does not only contribute to the development of learner autonomy, but it also assists students to get involved in the learning process and turn, increase their motivation" (p.2).

Related to self-assessment, there is a crucial aspect mentioned by Krashen (1980): "students play an active role in the whole process, thus making learning a student-centred process where the student takes charge of his/her own learning" (p. 66). Consequently, by self-assessing, learners can view their performance and compare it to a list of criteria; thus, they can reflect on strengths and weaknesses and set goals for further improvements (Christianson et al., 2009). Applying this assessment strategy has led students to gain significant control over their

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learning by establishing procedures to improve the areas they need (Cram, 1995, as cited in Al-Sinani & Region, 2008).

There are advantages and disadvantages of applying self-assessment in EFL classrooms. Ashraf and Mahdinezhad (2015) stated that SA encourages students to reflect on their activities or projects to improve them according to established criteria. On the other hand, Ysseldyke et al. (2010) indicated that the reliability of the assessment could be problematic because teachers and learners can assess differently, which could affect the results.

Self-assessment in EFL Speaking

Kim (2014) claimed that applying self-assessment process in the classroom helps EFL students improve their speaking skills. Similarly, Gardner (2000) stated that self-assessment is the best way to help students to monitor their progress and identify their language level skills. Furthermore, Gardner (1996) affirmed that SA allows students to be autonomous learners, monitor their success during each activity and motivate them to focus on the expected objectives.

Regarding learning autonomy, Vygotsky (1978) introduced the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), an area where a child can succeed and go beyond the help and guidance of a more knowledgeable one. In this case, SA helps students reach their language expected outcomes by obtaining advice and support from their teachers, who must provide the specific assessment criteria to self-assess correctly and enough training through several practice sessions (Joo, 2016).

Therefore, students need support to self-assess. To accomplish this, instructors need to explain the benefits of self-assessment, model the self-assessment process, train students to self-assess, and provide them with ongoing feedback and support (Joo, 2016). Furthermore, according to Panadero et al. (2016), creating a positive environment is essential, so learners feel

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their class is safe and that they will not be judged negatively. Nevertheless, according to Yates et al. (2022), applying self-assessment could have some limitations, such as the lack of students' ability to self-assess their activities, the lack of language knowledge, and the low confidence to self-assess their activities.

To increase students' speaking skills, different Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been applied. For instance, mobile phones and apps to self-record have been used to support the SA process. Rabbani (2018) mentioned that his research study displayed how students' oral skills were fostered after applying a self-audio recorded task because learners thought that the self-audio recorded task was helpful for their speaking practice, and they liked to use their mobile phones.

Likewise, Widyawan and Hartati (2016) demonstrated that using voice recording apps helped students enhance their speaking skills by allowing them to SA on their recordings and find mistakes. In addition, Ju et al. (2017) investigated the effectiveness of voice recording activities in improving oral fluency. Their results showed that this strategy allowed students to speak the target language fluently. It also showed that it was helpful to build their self-esteem and to focus the teaching and learning process on a more student-centered approach.

Based on the previous theoretical framework, this research project used mobile phones to record students' timed monologue-speaking tasks and used the SA technique to improve their oral fluency. Consequently, this research question proposed for this study is the following: Does self-assessment improve speaking skills among 8–10-year-old students from elementary schools in Coca, compared to students' speaking skills before implementing self-assessment?

Innovation

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This pedagogical innovation used self-assessment in a group of A1 learners who recorded their presentations to enhance their speaking skills. The designed lesson plan (Appendix A) for this innovation followed the Backward Design template created by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). According to Alvarez (2020), the Backward Design Model provides a structured and systematic unit plan, which aligns the students' learning outcomes with the teaching methodology and material applied to achieve those objectives. In the first stage of the innovation, students learned about the main topics related to the unit and were introduced to the performance tasks they had to accomplish at the end of the innovation. The second stage focused on the evidence students had to show to use their acquired knowledge to develop the final performance task. Finally, the third stage covered the teaching activities and materials to make stages 1 and 2 happen efficiently.

The innovation lasted three weeks, divided into 12 lessons, covering different topics related to gastronomy, vocabulary and adjectives of food, and recipes from Ecuador. The classes were conducted through Zoom. As part of the innovation project, students were tested routinely on their pronunciation, grammar use, new vocabulary, adjectives, and sequence adverbs in English.

Given that vocabulary and adjectives related to food were not too familiar for students, they tended to struggle with the appropriate pronunciation of these words. Consequently, the desired result of this innovation was to improve students' speaking skills by preparing a monologue about a recipe of a traditional food or beverage from the Amazon region using words, phrases and formulaic expressions related to food and recording it in the Flipgrid app.

By using WhatsApp as an audio recording tool, students practiced the pronunciation of the new grammar, vocabulary and adjectives related to food by recording their voices. They

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assessed their voice against a recording of the teacher's pronunciation. After each lesson, students used the self-assessment rubric to indicate how they did and felt with their pronunciation and if it matched their teacher's recordings. Students had the opportunity to practice self-assessment in every lesson, which allowed them to notice and improve the details they identified in the self-assessment daily.

This study focused on applying self-assessment in the classroom to improve students' speaking skills. Therefore, the students were introduced to a self-assessment technique by providing them with the benefits and primary purposes of self-assessment. Furthermore, they had many opportunities to practice by self-assessing their tasks. Students were instructed to self-assess their pronunciation, grammar and use of the new vocabulary before the formal assessment.

In this innovation, the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) Instructional Framework was applied to allow students to be autonomous learners and get independence in achieving their learning goals through the four stages. In the Focused Instruction stage, the teacher showed the learners how to do the task (I do it). In the Guided Instruction stage, the teacher and students work together on the task (We do it). In the Collaborative Learning stage, students work in pairs or groups (You do it together); in the Independent Practice stage, students do it by themselves (Fisher & Frey, 2008).

Research Methodology

This innovation is an action research study. Niemi (2019) stated that action research combines theory and practice to improve instruction. Thus, it focused on applying self-assessment to explore its effects on enhancing students' speaking skills. The main technological tools used in this research were Zoom, WhatsApp, and Flipgrid.

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The integration of this innovation took place in a private school in El Coca. The data was collected qualitatively and quantitatively. Consequently, a mixed-method approach was used to gather information. Shorten and Smith (2017) claimed that the mixed method approach is where the researchers collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data about the same research work.

This research answered the following research question: Does self-assessment influence speaking skills among students from an elementary school in Ecuador, compared to students' speaking skills before implementing self-assessment? Hence, this study collected information to answer the research question of this innovation. The independent variable was self-assessment, and the dependent variable was speaking skills.

To answer this question and measure students' improvement in speaking, the researcher used pre- and post-tests graded with a rubric. This rubric (Appendix B) contained the English standards based on the Pre-A1 Starters speaking from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and it was divided into three criteria: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Likewise, a self-assessment checklist (Appendix C) was applied as an evaluation tool for students' recordings. Before the final summative assessment of transfer, students answered some reflection questions that encouraged them to think over their progress and consider any possible improvement before their post-test. Finally, students completed a post-test in the formal graded assessment where they recorded their final presentation in the Flip grid app and shared it with their classmates using the same rubric in the pretest.

Participants

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This innovation was worked with a level 2 class from a private English academy in El Coca. This group had 12 students, four males and eight females, and their age range was between 8 and 11 years old. According to the CEFR, their English level is A1. These students come from different elementary schools in this Ecuadorian Amazon region. Ten students from this class have the appropriate knowledge for the assigned book. However, the other two students have a Pre-A1 level.

It was a very nice and participative group, but they felt frustrated when they could not express their ideas in L2. These learners are very sociable and have a great disposition to learn, but because they lack fluency, they tend to speak in L1 during class. Another aspect to consider is that students from this region have minimal options to practice the English language, and some lack internet access.

Instruments

To answer the research question and determine the range of students' speaking skills improving, a pretest and post-test were used by addressing grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation as the main criteria to be assessed. It was on a 0 to 5 scale, with zero being the lowest score and five being the highest. Therefore, 30-second audio was recorded for the pretest, while the final recording lasted a 1-minute video for the post-test.

Besides, a checklist was applied by students four times to self-assess their recordings. It consisted of a 3-column scale divided into Column 1 = YES, Column 2 = SOMETIMES, and Column 3= NOT YET. It has six criteria divided into vocabulary related to food, adjectives to describe food, correct use of countable and uncountable nouns, use of sequence verbs, correctly use of there is and there are, and correct pronunciation of words to describe a recipe. Students used the same pretest rubric the teacher implemented to self-assess.

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Data Analysis

A rubric was created to give students a clear understanding of what they were expected to perform in their final task. In this case, after collecting the quantitative data, the analysis was done using Microsoft Excel. Therefore, descriptive statistics were used to find the average of the pre and post-test results.

Additionally, to test the impact of self-assessment on speaking, a paired-sample *t*-test was completed. The paired-sample *t*-test compared the pretest and post-test between the student's final scores.

Ethical Considerations

This innovation followed some ethical considerations. First, after obtaining permission to conduct this study, a consent letter was sent to students and parents to get their agreement to be part of this study. Through this letter, parents were notified of the details of this innovation and their children's involvement in each activity.

Second, the students were explained how the strategy would be used and the benefits of being part of the 3-week research. They were also advised that the data collected in this study would be treated with absolute confidentiality because pseudonyms would be used instead of their real names.

Results

After applying the pre and post-test to the 12 participants of this innovation, it was found that students significantly improved in all the criteria established in the rubric (Appendix D). Table 1 displays the results of each criterion applied in the rubric. The main criterion enhanced

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by students was pronunciation; students pronounced vocabulary words and expressions correctly to describe a recipe.

Table 1

Pre and post-test results

Pretest and Post-test results		
Criteria	Pretest	Post-test
Vocabulary	1.42	4
Grammar Use	1.42	4
Pronunciation	1.33	3.83
Total	1.39	3.94

The results are highlighted according to the research question of this innovation, which was the following: RQ#1: Does self-assessment influence speaking skills among 8–10-year-old students from elementary schools in Coca compared to students' speaking skills before implementing self-assessment?

The pre and post-test results indicated that self-assessment helped students enhance their speaking skills. It was found that students enhanced all the rubrics criteria by improving their final scores from 1.39 to 3.94 marks in total.

Furthermore, all 12 participants completed their self-assessments. Although marks did not grade students' self-assessments, the checklist was given three categories. The first one is, "Yes, I am very good at using the checklist. The second column indicates, "Yes, I'm getting close but needs work", and the third column " , Not yet, I still need to improve". Table 2 shows the average percentages of students' self-assessments before and after the innovation.

Table 2

Pre and post-checklist results

Items	Pre checklist	Post checklist
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	Yes	Sometimes	Not Yet	Yes	Sometimes	Not Yet
I use vocabulary related to healthy food	10%	30%	60%	60%	30%	10%
I use adjectives that describe food	20%	30%	50%	50%	30%	20%
I use count and non-count nouns	40%	40%	20%	60%	40%	0%
I use there is, and there are in a recipe	40%	40%	20%	80%	10%	10%
I use sequence adverbs when talking about a recipe	20%	40%	40%	70%	20%	10%
I use intelligible pronunciation when considering the learned vocabulary and grammar structures	20%	20%	60%	60%	30%	10%

The results from the checklists indicated that the percentages obtained from students' self-assessments in the post-checklist were better than the results of the pre-checklist. In the post checklist, a higher number of students perceived that the use of food vocabulary, quantifiers and sequence adverbs, and pronunciation enhanced. Therefore, applying a self-assessment checklist is an excellent technique to increase students' speaking skills.

Discussion

The analysis of the data collected from the pre and post-test indicated that students improved their speaking skills by self-assessing their tasks based on a checklist. Panadero et al. (2016) supported these results, claiming that applying the self-assessment techniques allows learners to improve their language skills by reflecting on their own performance and judging if they meet the set learning objectives. Besides, as mentioned by Kim (2014), applying the self-assessment process in the classroom helps EFL students improve their speaking skills and autonomous learning to achieve the expected learning objectives.

Likewise, it is essential to highlight the benefits of applying self-assessment in EFL classrooms. First, by applying SA, the students improved their vocabulary, use of some

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grammatical aspects, and their pronunciation by reflecting on their own recordings. Gardner (2000) supported the results because he claimed that self-assessment is the best way to help students to monitor their progress and identify their language level skills.

Second, applying SA made students feel more comfortable and motivated to learn English. Panadero et al. (2016) corroborated the results by saying that SA allows students to monitor their success during each activity and motivates them to focus on the expected learning objectives. Besides, SA helps teachers create a positive environment where learners feel comfortable in class because they will not be judged negatively by others.

Finally, technology helped students be more engaged in their speaking tasks, consequently improving their speaking skills. In this innovation, using Flipgrid made students feel more involved when recording their videos. Rabbani (2018) supported these results by claiming that using ICTs, such as self-audio recorded applications, helps increase students' speaking skills and fluency.

Conclusions

This research was conducted to explore the students' speaking skills using the self-assessment technique. The findings showed that all the students enhanced their speaking skills after practicing and using SA to evaluate their recordings. By applying a rubric, the participants of this innovation improved their vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and pronunciation between the pre and post-test.

From the three criteria of the rubric, the students' pronunciation needed more emphasis than their grammar and vocabulary. This information provided a clear scope to adjust some activities in the lesson plan to impact the pronunciation part better.

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Therefore, more activities were applied to encourage and challenge students to use and pronounce the words and expressions of the topic of this innovation correctly.

Using a checklist to assess students' own recordings had a positive effect in the classroom. Applying self-assessment made students feel more motivated and encourage to achieve the requirements established in the checklist. Besides, having students do their self-assessments in almost every class gave them more opportunities to practice. Therefore, it provides a positive effect on their learning outcome.

Limitations

Even though this study showed positive results, future research must consider some limitations. It was conducted in a single class at a private English academy; thus, the generalizability of results cannot happen in this study. Another limitation was that students' classes were transitioning from online to face-to-face, so students missed some of the lessons, not allowing them to have the complete practice of SA. Finally, students had no experience providing SA, so they felt uncomfortable when assessing themselves.

Recommendations

For future studies, it is suggested to follow the procedures of this innovation with more participants to increase the study's reliability and generalize findings for more ELF contexts. Besides, more research instruments such as interviews could be used to have more insights into students' perceptions of this innovation. For students to feel comfortable using SA, they need to have more opportunities to practice how to provide self-assessing and specific technological applications.

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Appendix A

Lesson plan.

Available upon request.

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Appendix B

RUBRIC (DESCRIBING A RECIPE) – A1 LEVEL

Available upon request.

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Appendix C

Self-Assessment Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Grades

Pretest, Self-Assessment, and Posttest Data

Available upon request.

