



Boosting Students' Speaking Skills through Peer-Assessment

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Regarding learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is a skill that has to be developed in order to foster students' fluency and accuracy when acquiring English by applying the direct method inside and outside the classroom. Vélez et al. (2020) concluded that speaking is the biggest issue to be dealt with.

Most of the eight college students (the ones interviewed for this project), find the learning environment useless due to its emphasis only on filling in gaps or just repeating words in a diary or orally. Students are thought to use background knowledge and concepts to assist them in their acquisition of information. Notwithstanding, meaningful learning happens only in realistic contexts and direct application that allow student involvement.

All participants face many challenges when it comes to oral communication in real-life settings and it is the lack of some collaborative learning strategies, just like peer-assessment as well as formative assessment on a regular basis. This innovation focuses on exploring the effect of applying peer-assessment on students' English speaking skills. Thus, students will be involved in assessing their peers using checklists and rubrics.

Literature Review

This section is organized according to the main concepts of this research report which is peer assessment. First, it starts with the definition, then it continues with related studies and how to train students. Peer-assessment helps students develop speaking drills in the short run, e.g., Chen (2008), who maintained that students' abilities are built and rebuilt while they are reflecting on what they have gained, with the help of their peers.

Peer-Assessment

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Through peer assessment, the students will compare their work over time, discuss their strategies, analyze their mistakes, judge and improve their progress and more importantly, construct their own knowledge. It is recommended that teachers who value independent thinking and autonomous learning consider peer assessment as part of their classroom activities. Additionally, peer assessment seems to be advantageous in learner-centered classes in EFL everywhere. In fact, peer assessment seems to be a logical outcome of increased interest in language teaching and self-directed language learning. There is evidence to suggest that peer assessment can provide students with additional constructive feedback (Basheti et al., 2010; Dochy et al., 1999; Topping, 1998).

The authors, above mentioned, have recognized and given value to peer-assessment due to its efficacy in speaking terms of far better fluency, intonation, accuracy and pronunciation. Furthermore, through the use of peer-assessment, students increase their motivation, engage in a much better learning environment, gain credits for studying in a better institution or even abroad through scholarships. Some investigations have demonstrated good validity of peer assessments on average, especially for web-based peer assessment with clear rubrics and a structured assessment process (Cho et al., 2006; Pare & Joordens, 2008).

Hence, establishing the “for when” and “for whom” of peer assessment, it is important for understanding how and when to integrate peer assessment into formative and summative assessments. Combined with the obvious benefits of receiving immediate, frequent and large amounts of peer feedback, demonstrating it further strengthens the value of peer assessment as an important teaching and learning strategy, whether as a process of Assessment for Learning or Assessment as Learning. Further, various authors have spoken

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about the importance of empowering students by giving them more opportunities to assess as a peer and participate in the assessment process (Gunersel et al, 2008).

When using a highly structured peer-assessment rubric, reliability is high across levels and years, even in challenging EFL and non-EFL contexts. It refers to whether an assessment instrument gives the same results each time it is used in the same setting with the same type of subjects. For instance: It is not the same working with toddlers nor teenagers or adults.

Validity is another aspect that comes into consideration when it refers to assessment. A number of investigations have demonstrated good authenticity of peer assessments on average, especially for web-based peer assessment with clear rubrics and a structured assessment (Li et al, 2016).

Limitations for the use of this innovation

One of the main challenges of applying peer-assessment is that students' marking can easily be inaccurate, unreliable and deeply pervasive, building on the assumption that students are novices not only in the subject matter but also in academia in general. This is evident in the volume of literature that focuses on the correlation between student and academic staff grading.

Besides, making students assessors can disrupt the power relationship between academics and students. Academics might feel uneasy about handing over this power (McGarr & Clifford, 2013); similarly, students might not be willing to turn an already established hierarchy on its head (Tai et al., 2017). The relationships among students may also be predisposed – for example, in a teamwork situation where unequal power

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relationship exists in their private life, students could face the pressure of abusing the assessment in giving unfair judgements (i.e. bullying).

Speaking Skills

How useful would it be if a person recognizes letters, greetings and even phrases but cannot manage to have communication with others? According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), to design a curriculum that can meet the needs of both students and the industry, there is a high need to analyze the needs of students in light of the target situations where such required skills will be used. Thus, this study was conducted to understand the learners' perspectives on the importance and perceived use of speaking skills at college.

Additionally, this study takes a step further to compare the students' speaking abilities with the current Common European Framework of Reference scales for speaking.

They understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority provided people articulate clearly and slowly.

Innovation

Firstly, the participants were put to tell the class to describe their last holiday by answering the following questions: *Where did you go and where did you stay while you were on vacation?* Afterwards, they had to record their voices for about twenty seconds. Secondly, they had to use the simple past as well, but this time they had to answer to following questions: *How did you get there? And did you like it?*

Likewise, they had to record their voices for thirty seconds. Thirdly, they had to answer two more questions about their last holiday. Those questions were the following ones: *What did you do there? what did you eat and drink?* In this session, they also had to record their answers and talk for at least forty-five seconds. The main point here is that

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after each session students had to do peer-assessment, which took five periods to train them and consisted of making use of checklist and then a rubric, and the teacher had to keep his students' recordings to keep track of their improvement. The whole process took six weeks so that we could actually see the benefits of peer-assessment as well as *the ongoing, timely and formative teacher's feedback*.

Research Methodology

Action research simultaneously assists in practical problem-solving and expands scientific knowledge, as well as enhances the competencies of the respective actors, being performed collaboratively in an immediate situation using data feedback in a cyclical process aiming at an increased understanding of a given social situation, primarily applicable for the understanding of change processes in social systems and undertaken within a mutually acceptable ethical framework. (Lennung, 1980, p. 241)

The six-week action research was carried out alongside eight college students who were in their second year of a degree program in the academic year of 2021/2022. The main objective of this research was to take part in the very stages of action research that include problem development, data collection, developing findings, planning and conducting interventions. More importantly, designing this project for students' speaking improvements with the help of peer-assessment practices became among the main context and area of study on which the students and the teacher have been constructing learning experiences within our college students.

This action research posts this question: To what extent would peer-assessment be meaningful in the Speaking innovation and development for A2 level students? The aim of

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this action research is to investigate how the application of peer-assessment facilitated with the aid of rubrics improves the speaking production in university students. My motive was also to help students become more autonomous learners who are able to search for learning techniques, who are much more confident when speaking English and can make decisions and changes to reach their personal goals.

Participants

A small class of eight university students in their first year (freshmen) and their second level of English were asked to use a pre-test, a post-test, and use a rubric as an in-class activity. These students are aged between 17-38 years old and come from many different careers and all of them have discussed about these techniques and strategies, giving personal and original detailed statements. These eight university students took a test with fifteen questions.

Instruments

Regarding the instruments applied in this innovation, the teacher made the students reach their goals by using checklists and a rubric, so that they could improve their speaking proficiency in English. To grade the pre and posttest, a rubric was used as follows:

The first and the last voice recordings were the Pre-Test and Post-Test. After recording their voices, the participants graded it using a speaking rubric. The rubric was done with the university students and according to the Cambridge speaking rubric that covered three parameters of speaking ability; vocabulary and grammar, pronunciation and interaction.

With regards to the range for the pre-test, the student had to talk for 1-minute minimum and 2 minutes' maximum but, for the posttest it was 2 minutes' minimum and 3 minutes' maximum (see the rubric in appendix)

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Data Collection and Analysis

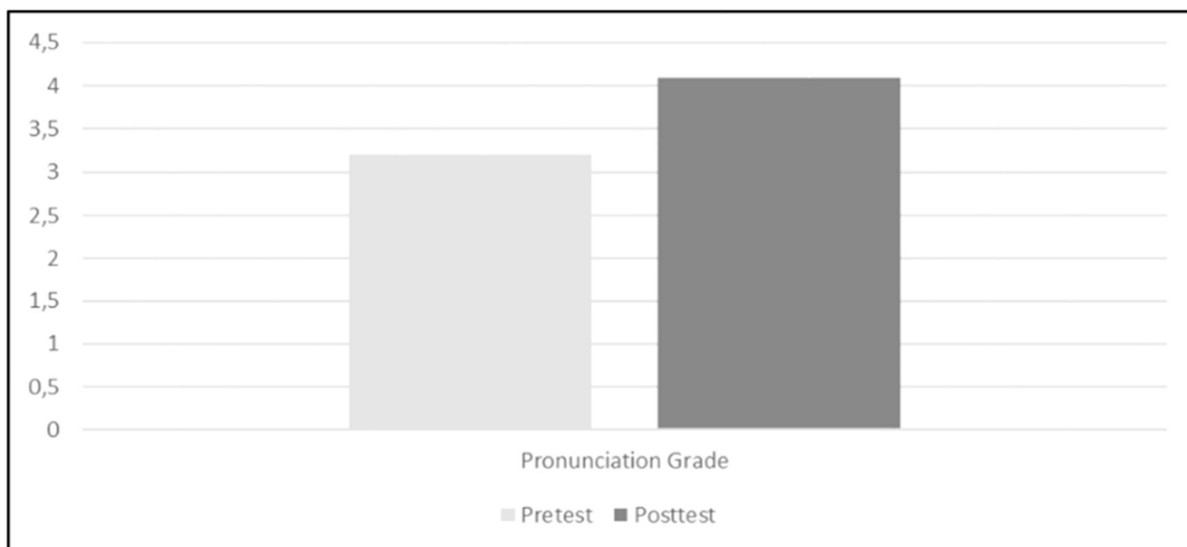
Research Question #1 – Speaking Rubric

Once the results were gotten, the records and grades were collected, then they were uploaded on excel format. In the end, the average was obtained. To answer research question: To what extent would peer-assessment be meaningful in the Speaking innovation and development for A2 level students? The analysis was done in word graphics. Data was collected on zoom sessions and with the aid of the teacher's journal. Data was collected during the six sessions we spent in the innovation.

Results

To answer the research question, the following results were found: This was a quantitative method in which the highest grade for each component was five and the lowest was one. To grade vocabulary and grammar, it was necessary to focus on range, control, extent and cohesion of the language used in the monologue while in pronunciation the focal point fell on individual sounds, stress, and intonation. Even though it was not a dialogue, but a monologue fluency was graded. It was supposed for the participants to get a low grade in the first recording and it happened so, and as they continued working on the innovation, they improved their performance, their grade and consequently their speaking skills and subskills.

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Regarding the media, it is easy to see that in the pre-test, the average is about 10.40 out of 15 while in the post-test students improved significantly, obtaining about 13.62 out of 15 giving improvement in speaking skills for A2 level students. For obtaining the data Excel was used as the most accurate tool. Taking a close look at the bar graph it is noticeable that students improved their speaking skills through the intervention by using different strategies inside the classroom such as the checklist. Peer-assessing their classmates gave them a sense of fulfillment and motivation to move on with learning languages due to the fluency they acquired with practice and speaking drills on a daily basis.

One of the most important advantages of peer-assessment for improving speaking skills is that students were much more aware of their capabilities when speaking a foreign language. What has been found as a disadvantage of peer-assessment is that some students would find it easier just to overlook their classmates' mistakes and not offer proper, ongoing feedback. In some other cases, they would just put the highest grade without being honest.

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Discussion

All eight participants improved their grades progressively according to what was previously stated by Basheti et al. (2010); Dochy et al., (1999); Topping (1998) regarding the additional constructive feedback. Research question number one wanted to know if the use of peer-assessment helped students improved their speaking skills and subskills. Students made five recordings in total and all of them were assessed with the rubric. The results from the pre-test and post-test displayed a mean difference of 1.8 which reveals a positive improvement. In addition, the speaking skills and peer-assessment rubric helped set goals contributing to their progress. However, when students are not correctly trained in how to self-assess they tend to be too general regarding to their assessment (Harris & Brown, 2018). It never happened though.

Conclusions

It is concluded that for the first question, the innovation works well for university students. As the research findings in this innovation prove the significance of peer-assessment in promoting learners' performance, it seems beneficial to incorporate it into EFL classes in general. At first, it was anticipated that this academic strategy would boost students' speaking skills and subskills for university students in their second level.

S2 also got 8 and in the end got 15 out of 15 itself giving full credit to the innovation being in this case applied for the Speaking improvement for A2 level students. Besides, this type of assessment would create stronger bonds with people with different cultural, religious backgrounds. All in all, it is concluded that the innovation project made a real change for the better.

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Recommendations

Many unexpected situations may take place, in our times the pandemic took over and it might well spoil researchers' plans since appalling circumstances may occur.

Notwithstanding, it is suggested that researchers, teachers and professors do consider options to reach the study goals, which implies follow-up research with more participants.

It is crucial to keep in touch with students to motivate their interest in participating in the study. Subsequently, discourage is overcome. Besides, it would be appropriate to know students' perspectives and thoughts on the innovation implemented for researchers and professors to take action immediately.

Limitations

Due to the number of participants (8), the results of this research should be interpreted with sensibleness and cautiousness. Various samples in different educational contexts and for far longer periods of time would be necessary to test the results. These kinds of studies would contribute to the understanding of the benefits and use of peer-assessment through rubrics for the students' speaking skills' improvement. Training students in giving quality feedback is essential for the effectiveness of peer-assessment. Further research in this area would be meaningful for training students before implementing peer-assessment.

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Appendix 1

Unit design based on the Backward Design Model

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric for the students' performance tasks

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Summative Task

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Link for Portfolio:

Available upon request.