



**Peer Assessment to Improve Speaking Interaction in A2 Students at a Private High
School in Quito**

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Communication is something vital for human beings in all areas. Conveying ideas and messages effectively in English is one of the longings for EFL learners. Bahrani and Soltani (2012) mentioned that one of the main concerns of language learners in both EFL and ESL contexts is how to improve their speaking skill. After developing speaking activities related to the diagnostic test, projects expositions, interaction speaking exercises and their own reflection, students from a private institution in Quito mentioned that the most difficult skill to achieve is speaking because they have to face different situations such as their fears to speak English and being teased by their classmates, the lack of knowledge, and the absence of speaking activities during their classes.

Richards (2008) mentioned that spoken interaction refers to a conversation, which develops a primary social function where people exchange greetings, engage in a small talk and share experiences. The absence of practice for speaking interaction activities was noticed when an exercise for A2 learners was proposed to them, during the interaction exercise they had to create a conversation to choose a present for a friend, which was developed with difficulty by the learners. This lack of practice of speaking interaction activities in the classes make students feel demotivated and lose interest in the development of activities to speak in English.

Bahrani and Soltani (2012) mentioned that it is necessary to create a stock of minimal responses in the learners to participate in these kinds of activities. These could be idiomatic phrases that students use to demonstrate understanding, agreement, doubt, and other responses to what another speaker is saying. Richards (2008) pointed out that

learners feel embarrassed during these exercises because they do not find the words to participate in the interaction activities and try to avoid these practices to keep a good image of themselves in front of their partners.

Success in language learning is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language (Nunan, 1991, as cited in Bahrani & Soltani, 2012). In order to develop this potential, it is necessary to create a wide range of familiar topics at learner's disposal in order to manage talk as interaction.

This project wants to improve the development of speaking skill through speaking interaction activities among the volunteer learners by creating their own scripted dialogues about their trip experiences applying peer-assessment strategy.

Literature Review

This innovation is focused on enhancing speaking interaction using peer-assessment. This section is to review information about this strategy such as the studies have been developed, its challenges and some recommendations for its implementation.

Peer-Assessment

Seba et al. (2008) mentioned that assessment in education requires deciding, collecting and making judgments to activities related to the objectives planned. William (2011) affirmed that assessment is the central process in effective instruction and that it is very important to understand its different forms, one of them is peer-assessment which can help learners to achieve goals and develop skills.

Spiller (2012) indicated that peer-assessment is one of the conceptions that is changing teaching and learning around the world. It consists of students providing feedback to other students on the quality of their work. Peer-assessment is an educational arrangement in which students value and qualify a product or performance

of someone with the same characteristics (Topping, 1998, as cited in Vanderhoven et al., 2012).

Ratminingsih et al. (2017) considered that peer assessment is an evaluation, teaching and learning strategy that brings benefits to students such as monitoring learning, making adjustments, changing their thinking and improving to achieve goals. Muñoz (2017) affirmed that peer-assessment helps learners to examine their own progress.

Mohammed (2017) mentioned that when teachers use this strategy the students become active learners and participants from the evaluation process instead of being mere receivers or working on memorization. This is focused on the full integration of the student in collaborative learning with the teacher's supervision (Tomas et al., 2011, as cited in Mohammed, 2017).

Related studies

A meta-analysis showed a correlation of 0.69 between teacher and peer assessment demonstrating that it can be reliable and that engages students in collaborative learning and assessment have positive outcomes (Falchikov & Godfinch, 2000, as cited in Muñoz, 2017).

The results of a research about peer-assessment in large classes demonstrated that the benefits of the strategy are more than its shortcomings. The learners that were part of this process affirmed that they were able to reflect on their own learning and gave them the opportunity to develop metacognitive skills that could be useful for their future (Ballantyne et al., 2002, as cited in Muñoz, 2017).

In Hong Kong classrooms, there were extensive interviews and observations to classes with repetitive learning. Peer-assessment was applied there and the learners' perceptions about the usefulness of the strategy varied due to the peer's quality

feedback and proficiency, they concluded that it has longer-term applications (Bryant & Carless, 2020, as cited in Topping, 2017).

Peer-assessment was performed by 523 students and their teachers because the researchers noted that teacher assessment did not develop self-reliant learners. After the application the investigators noticed that the students became more critical, creative thinkers, effective communicators and collaborative team workers, they also improved their self-awareness and self-reflection (Harrison et al., 2015, as cited in Topping, 2017).

Learning approaches linked to constructivism have increased the practice of peer-assessment. Research about this form of assessment has indicated that it leads to higher quality performances, as a consequence of better understanding the assessment criteria by playing the role of assessor (Topping, 2003 as cited in Vanderhoven et al., 2012).

Reinders and Lázaro (2007) mentioned in their research that peer-assessment helps learners to be more responsible for their learning, fosters collaborative skills and helps students to examine critically their learning in progress and through this to understand their own learning better.

Challenges or opposite points of view

Spiller (2012) affirmed that peer assessment is a process which is fraught with difficulties due to the feedback given by a peer to their partners on a product or performance. Students could feel stress due to the experience of evaluating their peers (Authors cited in Vanderhoven et al., 2012).

Topping (2017) pointed out some concerns about this form of assessment such as the validity and reliability of the process, the worry about the learners and how the students must be ready to accept or not a comment from a peer, how they should give

feedback properly, as well as the peer definition and role. Gibson et al. (2014)

commented that developing activities with a peer influence the adolescent behavior and cognitive process.

Wride (2017) highlighted some issues associated with peer-assessment such as the difficulty to implement this type of assessment in an environment where individual work is highly emphasized, the need to create a guide to developing peer-assessment activities to guide and train the learners, the time required by teachers to create material to apply it and how to balance self and peer-assessment during the classes.

Azarnoosh (2013) explained that the learners sometimes do not take the peer-assessment process seriously or that they might be influenced by friendship or gender. Additionally, it is suggested that its efficacy depends on factor such as language levels, student`s attitudes and familiarity with the criteria.

Muñoz (2017) mentioned a negative finding about this strategy which is related to the student`s beliefs. They considered that their peers did not have the skills to assess each other and that sometimes they could be lenient or strict.

How to train students to use the strategy

Wride (2017) pointed out that to get a successful implementation it is required the student reflection on the process and outcomes, training to provide the learners a guide to facing work in groups, managing learning task, dealing with group conflict, strategies for student reflection, monitoring and assessing their own progress.

Other authors recommended activities to be taken into account are: inform the learners what is supposed to do and expected from them, be familiar with the purpose of the evaluation, know the criteria to follow and practice. Also, it is emphasized that teachers need to train students on how to give a comment, how to behave during the process and train them to use the criteria clearly and appropriately (Muñoz, 2017).

Innovation

This project included speaking interaction by applying peer-assessment strategy to volunteer students from a private high school in Quito. It helped learners to be more communicative in English and improve their speaking skills development. This proposal wanted to create opportunities for the learners to share information about their trip experiences applying acquisition, meaning making and transfer activities to achieve the goal.

The planning was designed to be developed during three weeks with synchronous face-to-face classes (See appendix A). It included a pretest and posttest activities to identify the results from the innovation. The worksheets to develop the activities were designed using the book Golden Experience A2+ exercises from the unit Getting away and teacher's creativity.

Learners used a checklist (See appendix B) to develop peer-assessment activities and a learning log (See appendix C) to register their opinions and progress in each week while teacher used a rubric (See appendix D) for speaking interaction for A2 level.

During the three weeks, the learners worked on activities related to motivate speaking interaction about trip experiences that included Acquisition, Meaning Making and Transfer activities. In order to get the transfer goal, they performed 4 short conversations that were taught and written by themselves and guided with mentor texts designed by the teacher. Finally, the students were able to develop the performance activity which joined all the worked topics to demonstrate their progress in the unit, speaking interaction, and peer-assessment.

The teacher's role was to design the transfer goal, the corresponding planning to achieve the objective, and the instruments to assess it. Furthermore, the teacher trained

the learners to develop peer-assessment using a checklist and gave appropriate feedback to their classmates during all the process. On the other hand, the learners participated in the planned activities to achieve the goal and improved their speaking skill by interacting with each other while practicing how to develop peer-assessment.

Research Methodology

This project is Action Research, which is considered as an inquiry conducted by teachers or school members to solve a problem that affect the learners. It is developed in an educational field where practitioners want to modify, change and improve the teaching-learning process. It helps researchers to grow professionally, become self-evaluative, take responsibility for their own practices and be an active member of the school improvement. There are some characteristics for this kind of research, it is constructivist, situational, practical, systematic and cyclical (Efron & Ravid, 2020).

It has quantitative and qualitative instruments to collect data to answer the next research questions:

To what extent does the use of peer-assessment improve A2 students speaking interaction?

What are the difficulties applying peer-assessment in A2 level students while practicing speaking interaction?

Participants

The participants were students from a private institution in Quito. They were 15 to 16 years old. The group was formed by 10 girls. They are in their 1st year of high school. They are considered in an A2 English level by the high school innovation project. Their socio-economic background is medium class, their native language is Spanish and do not have opportunities to interact in English out of their classes. Due to

their ages their parents gave the respective authorizations to develop the project and record their participation.

Instruments

In order to collect data, there were developed pre and post-test activities which consisted on speaking interactions about trip experiences where they could apply new knowledge and vocabulary studied during the project progress. The pre-test consisted of creating a dialogue about their last trip experience applying present perfect and travel and transport vocabulary, after the creation they received feedback and had time to practice the interaction before their performance. During the post-test activity the learners needed to evidence the transfer objective through the creation of a dialogue about selecting a place for a field trip. They used present perfect, vocabulary and expressions practiced during the unit development. To collect data from the pre and post-test, a rubric was used, it was designed to enhance speaking interaction in A2 level English students (See appendix D). The rubric consists of four descriptors which are Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation and Interactive Communication. Each one of them has 5 bands to assess the learners, which demonstrate the lack of domains from the descriptor to the satisfactory and appropriate degree of control of the descriptors.

Additionally, in order to train and develop peer-assessment among the learners a checklist (See appendix B) was designed during the Instructional Design class. It consists of 3 criteria which are yes, sometimes, not yet. It consists of the next descriptors.

- Can the learner show a sufficient degree of control of the present perfect?
- Can the learner apply vocabulary about travel and transport, things you take in a trip in the conversation?

- Can the learner interact with reasonable ease in short scripted conversations to decide which would be the best destination for a field trip?
- Can the learner's pronunciation about learned vocabulary be mostly intelligible, despite limited control of phonological features?
- Can the learner apply expressions to reach agreement?

The instruments that were designed wants to test if the students' speaking interaction improved due to the intervention and what difficulties the learners see through the process. Previous the application the instruments were reviewed by the master's program teachers and the tutor of this project. They were piloted in order to test them, there were not appreciate difficulties.

A learning log (Appendix C) was used to collect information for the qualitative question. It consists of the next questions that were answered at the end of each week.

- The most important thing I learned was
- What was the difficulty applying peer-assessment while practicing speaking interaction?
- Next time I would like to
- Do you think that your speaking skill has improved? Why

Data Analysis

In order to show the results for the pre and post-test activities, the data collected was organized in an Excel spreadsheet and gathered in the Statistical Package of the program, which helped to get the minimum, maximum, mean, median, mode and a *t-Test two sample assuming equal variances* for the analysis and the interpretation of the results.

To know what difficulties the learners found during the peer-assessment process the learners completed weekly learning log. To analyze the information and interpret it the answers were coded in groups.

Ethical Considerations

Messikh (2020) affirmed that the increase to classroom problems have stimulated the application of Action Research in schools. It is used to suggest solutions to real problems that affect the educative community in order to ensure better education outcomes. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration to perform the research effectively. To develop this project the institution authorized its development. Moreover, the parents of the target group signed a consent letter (Appendix E) because all the learners were minors. During the process the students were informed and received training to perform peer-assessment and get reliable data.

Results

To answer the question, To what extent does the use of peer-assessment improve A2 students speaking interaction? Quantitative data was collected (Appendix F). This data is demonstrated in the Table 1. It shows that there was an improvement from the pre-test to the post-test activities in all the descriptors. It indicates that the innovation project helped the students to improve speaking skill while they interacted applying peer-assessment.

Table 1

Mean Results

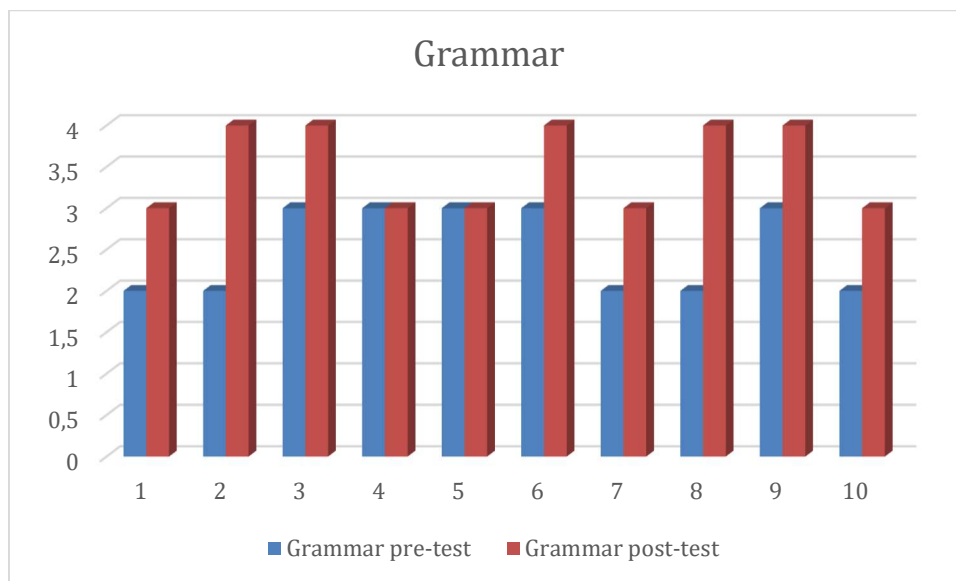
Descriptor	Pre-test			Post-test		
	Min	Max	Mean	Min	Max	Mean
Grammar	2	3	2.5	3	4	3.5
Vocabulary	1	3	1.6	3	4	3.6
Pronunciation	2	3	2.6	3	4	3.2

Interactive communication	2	2	2	3	4	3.5
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The Figure 1 points out the Grammar results, during the pre-test the students got a mean of 2.5 while in post-test they obtained a mean of 3.5. It demonstrates that learners showed a sufficient degree of control of the target grammatical structure that was present perfect. Learners used present perfect to make and answer questions in dialogues about trips, they used the mentor texts as a base where they visualized highlighted present perfect examples to remind them how to create questions, answers and sentences using the structure. The structure was used constantly in the peer assessment practices and different activities planned to get the transfer goal.

Figure 1

Grammar Results

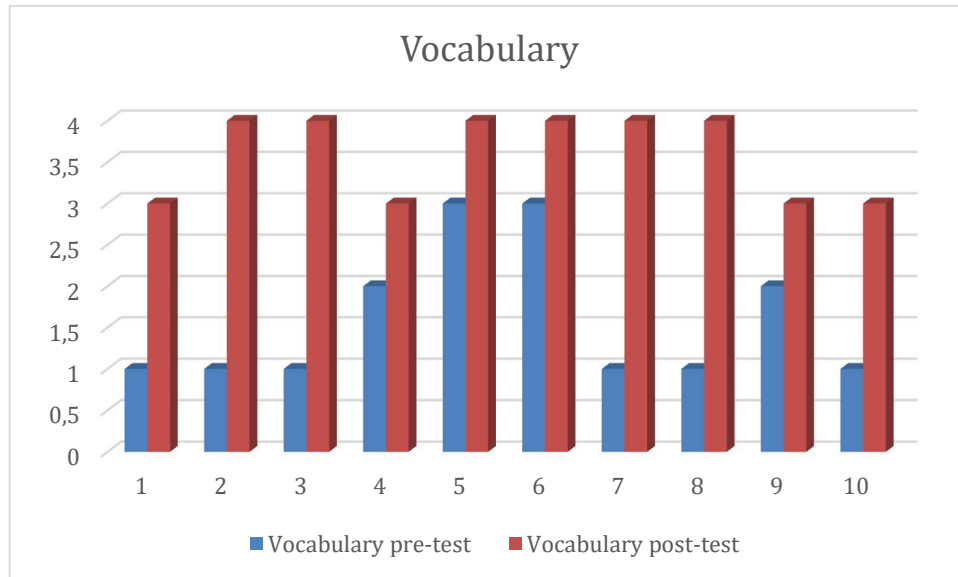


The Figure 2 is focused on vocabulary results. The students got 1.6 during the pre-test and 3.6 in the post-test. It pointed out that the learners improved their vocabulary during the intervention, using it appropriately to make questions and give answers according to the topic asked. There is a significant improvement due to the practices, where the teacher pointed out continuously what vocabulary was required for

each activity, showed them power point presentations with the words worked in the peer-assessment training sessions and practices.

Figure 2

Vocabulary Results

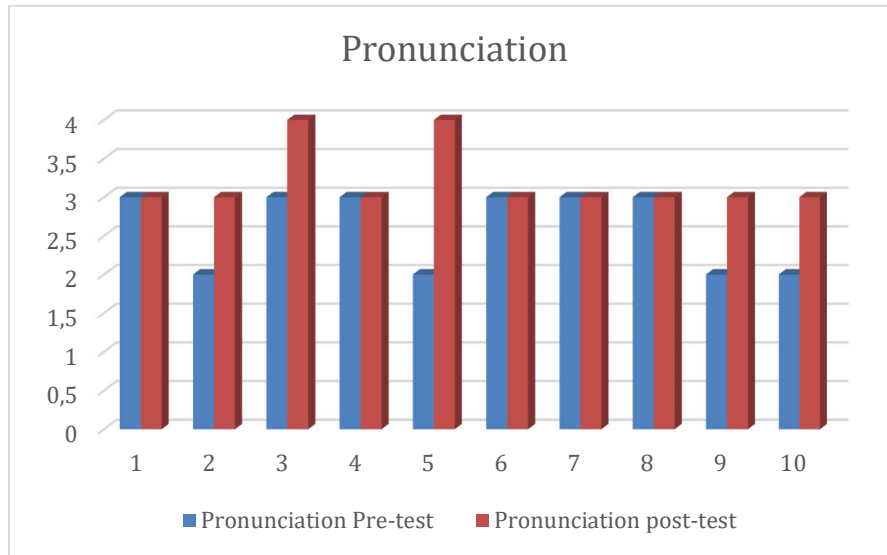


Moreover, figure 3 is about pronunciation results. The pronunciation descriptor showed that in the pre-test the students obtained a mean of 2.6 and in the post-test, they got 3.2. It exhibits that the learners improved their pronunciation in a minimal percentage even though the students performed all the planned activities for the project. There were 5 students that improved their pronunciation and 5 students that maintained the grade that was obtained in the pre-test. The students who maintained the grade had difficulties with pronunciation especially on verbs in past participle tense which are necessary to work the present perfect tense and cognates such as ideas or guidebook. It is interesting to notice that the dialogues which were written by the pairs have the pronunciation of the words that the learners considered difficult to pronounce, but at the moment of the assessment they did not use the correct pronunciation, they pronounced the words as were written. As reported by one of the students that did not improve her

pronunciation, she would like more reading activities to practice the learned vocabulary pronunciation.

Figure 3

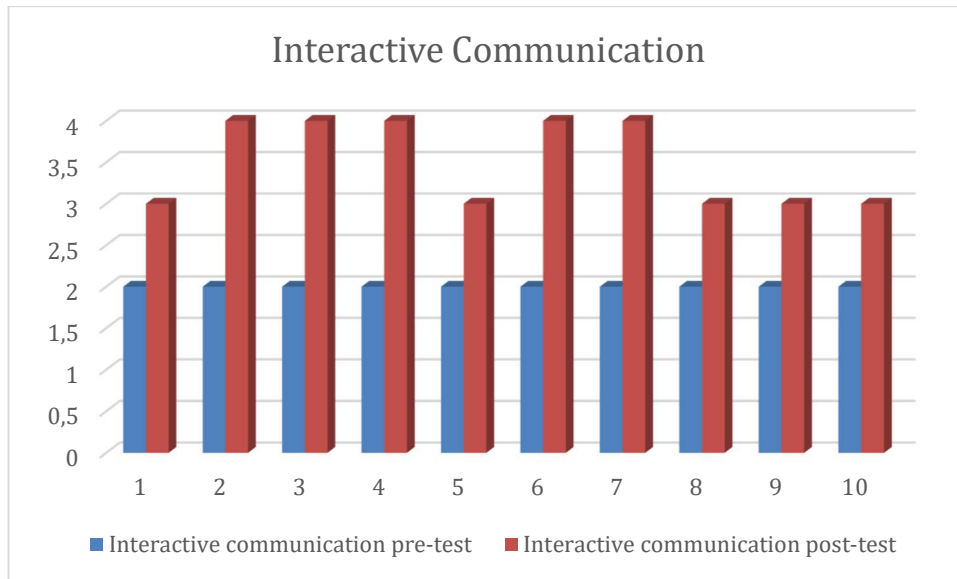
Pronunciation Results



Finally, the Figure 4 shows the interactive communication development the pre-test mean was 2 and during the post-test they obtained 3.5. It shows that after the process they had simple exchanges applying the required topic with little difficulties and minimal support. The mean demonstrates that the training and practices helped them to interact in dialogues about trips. The students learned to exchange greetings, share experiences and engage in small dialogues. Richards (2008) parameters were continuously remarked by the teacher during the practices, in the mentor text and before starting peer-assessment done by the learners.

Figure 4

Interactive Communication Results



Additionally, a *t*-test two sample assuming equal variances was made to demonstrate the results for the quantitative question. This shows that the project was significant, it is demonstrated by a *p* value of 0.000000087. It suggests that the difference between the mean of 0.435 from the pretest and the mean from the post test of 0.69 is meaningful. It means that the project was an effective tool to help learners to improve speaking interaction in A2 learners.

Table 2

Results for t-Test: Two Sample Assuming Equal Variances

	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	0.435	0.69
Variance	0.004472222	0.004333
Observations	10	10
Pooled Variance	0.004402778	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	18	
t Stat	-8.593336131	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.35904E-08	
t Critical one-tail	1.734063607	
P(T<=t) two-tail	8.71808E-08	
t Critical two-tail	2.10092204	

To answer the qualitative question What are the difficulties applying peer-assessment in A2 level students while practicing speaking interaction? A learning log helped to collect the answers which were grouped to facilitate the reading (Appendix F).

The table 3 represents the results for the first question which was What was the most important thing you learned? In the first and third weeks, most students considered the present perfect as the most important thing while in the second week they highlighted the pronunciation. These answers were permanent during the three weeks. Moreover, there were other answers during the process that the students considered relevant for the project such as the creation of dialogues or conversations and greetings. One of the students mentioned in week one that she did not know a lot of English, but due to the intervention she considers that she is able to create dialogues and sentences. Other learners in week three mentioned that they learned to create dialogues using the learned structure and vocabulary. They affirmed that they learned to listen to information to answer.

Table 3

Perspectives of Students' Learning from the Intervention

Week 1		Week 2		Week 3	
Answers	Students	Answers	students	Answers	students
Present perfect	8	Pronunciation	4	Present perfect	4
Pronunciation	1	Present perfect	3	Pronunciation	3
Creation of conversations	1	Creation of dialogues	2	Creation of conversations	3
		Greetings	1		

The second question was focused to the strategy, it was What was the difficulty applying peer assessment while practicing speaking interaction? The Table 4 reports the results of this question. During week one, five students mentioned that the

pronunciation was the difficulty more struggled by them while four learners thought that the voice of the peers was a difficulty. They complained about the volume of the peer's voice although the learners and teacher asked them to speak aloud to listen to them in order to assess them correctly. Finally, one student considered the creation of dialogues a difficulty to face.

At the end of the second week, the learners mentioned again these three difficulties, five learners affirmed that the voice quality was a problem during the implementation, three students wrote that the most struggled difficulty was the pronunciation and two considered the creation and organization of dialogues was a difficulty. Lastly during the third week, seven learners considered that they had difficulty with the pronunciation, two with the duration of the dialogues and one with the voice volume of their peers. The students affirmed that some words are difficult to pronounce. One of them during the week three mentioned that pronouncing words was difficult, but she achieved that goal. Even though the practices and feedback given they considered that have difficulties with the pronunciation of some words.

Table 4

Difficulty Applying Peer Assessment While Practicing Speaking Interaction.

<i>Week 1</i>		<i>Week 2</i>		<i>Week 3</i>	
Answers	Students	Answers	Students	Answers	Students
Pronunciation	5	The voice of the peers	5	Pronunciation	7
The voice of the peers	4	Pronunciation	3	Duration of dialogues	2
Create a dialogue	1	Creation and organization of dialogues	2	The voice of peers	1

The question three was focused on What would they like the next practices?

Table 5 reflects the results after grouping the answers. In the week one, most students

mentioned they would like to develop more speaking activities followed by learning more verbs and the pronunciation of the words. In the second week, they commented that they would like to have more exercises to interact each other and pronunciation exercises. Finally, during the third week they wanted more interaction exercises, but they emphasized they would like different topics. One of the students suggested to continue with interactions about movies.

Table 5*Preferences of Students for Future Lessons*

<i>Week 1</i>		<i>Week 2</i>		<i>Week 3</i>	
Answers	Students	Answers	Students	Answers	Students
More speaking activities	4	More exercises to interact	6	More interaction exercises	4
Learn more verbs and pronunciation	3	Pronunciation exercises	2	Get the objective for time duration	1
Others	3	More projects	1	More interaction exercises - different topics	5
		No answers	1		

Finally, the learners answered the question Do you think that your speaking skill has improved? During the three weeks the learning logs registered that their speaking skill has improved. Students mentioned in the week one as the Table 6 shows that seven learners considered that the dialogues and practices helped them to improve their speaking abilities. Also, it demonstrated that in week two, seven learners improved their speaking skill, one of the students affirmed that she improved her speaking abilities, learned to express herself, to interact and pronounce new words. Other students considered that the practices have helped them to improve. It is remarkable that one of

the students considered that she needs to work more to develop her speaking skills. Finally, at the end of the intervention eight students considered that improved their speaking abilities.

Table 6

Perspectives of Students' Improvement in Speaking

<i>Week 1</i>		<i>Week 2</i>		<i>Week 3</i>	
Answers	Students	Answers	Students	Answers	Students
Yes	7	Yes	7	yes	8
A little	3	A little	2	A little	2
		Answer no related	1		

Discussion

This intervention was created to answer one quantitative and one qualitative question. According to the results of this project to the quantitative question, To what extent does the use of peer-assessment improve A2 students speaking interaction? This project results reflects that as Muñoz (2017) mentioned the implementation of peer-assessment in a class generates positive outcomes, increase collaborative learning and engage learners with the objective. When the project started the students got a mean of 44% while at the end, they got 69% demonstrating that learners were engaged with the process. The positive results are connected with Wride's (2017) reflections. He affirmed that reflection, training, dealing with group conflicts, monitoring and assessing help to get effective results, activities that were implemented by the students and the teacher during all the intervention. Furthermore, Muñoz (2017) emphasized the importance of training during the peer-assessment implementation, the same that was developed as the planning organization. Moreover, during the intervention the students received additional training in the topics that required help. Topping (2017) pointed out the

application of this strategy can create effective communicators, team workers and improve self-reflection. It is reflected in the interactive communication improvement which mean was 2 during the pre-test to 3.5 in the post-test.

Regarding to the qualitative question which was What are the difficulties applying peer-assessment in A2 level students while practicing speaking interaction? The answers of the learners stated that the principal difficulties were the pronunciation, the voice volume of the assessed students, the creation and organization of dialogues. Azarnoosh (2013) pointed out that the learners sometimes do not take the assessment process seriously although the peers, teacher recommendations and feedback during the application of the strategy to avoid these problems some learners were not able to overcome them totally. For instance, one of the students commented that she was aware of the difficulty with her voice volume and her peer recommendations, but it was impossible for her to have a louder voice despite her attempts. Spiller (2012) affirmed that during peer assessment application students could feel stress due to the experience of evaluating their peers. The students felt stressed when they do not observe progress in their peers.

Conclusions

According to the students' perceptions the most difficult skill to achieve is speaking, and this project wanted to expose them to speaking interactions about trips to improve the skill development, implement a new strategy to motivate them and create valuable experiences.

The implementation of this project helped them to face their fears to participate in speaking activities in the class. The project helped to create a communicate environment in the class, where the students had activities to get the transfer goal proposed in the plan and to get the development of the skill according to the CEFR, for

speaking interaction in A2 level. Due to this intervention, the learners could interact with reasonable ease in structured situation and short conversations.

According to the results the students improved their speaking skill through the application of peer-assessment in speaking interaction exercises. The data collected showed that the learners increased their achievements in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and interactive communication.

The qualitative question wanted to recognize according to the student's perception the difficulties while they were working on the project development. The project helped to recognize three difficulties for A2 learners, these are not mentioned in previous readings, these were the pronunciation, the creation of dialogues, and the voice volume.

Moreover, as Richards (2008), Bahrani and Soltani (2012) mentioned that an interaction have some parameters such as greetings, farewells, share experiences and create a stock of minimal responses to participate. Due to this implementation, the students are able to create dialogues, this project helped the learners to boost their abilities to create dialogues applying the target structure, vocabulary and in an organized way.

Limitations

During the intervention there were some limitations and challenges such as the time. It was developed during September and October in Quito, these were weeks with a lot of activities for the beginning of the new year like the diagnostic evaluations, catch up classes, parents' meetings and different events. Another limitation related with the time was the annual planning, which had to start on time in order to get the objectives proposed for the school year. This planning did not count with time to develop this kind of projects, and the teacher had stress to develop the project and the annual planning

with the target students. So, there were days of the week that were used for the implementation and days for the annual program advances.

One of the challenges that is demonstrated in the results was the voice volume. After the first training the teacher recommend the learners to develop the speaking activities without wearing a mask that is used for social distancing in the classrooms, considering that its use nowadays is volunteer, but they prefer to wear mask to avoid the contact, it affects the students voice volume specially of those learners who had soft voice volume.

Recommendations

To get a more effective development an intervention like this must be planned for months in which there were not a lot of activities that could interrupt its performance. Additionally, the annual planning for the year must have time for this kind of activities that can benefit our learners to develop English skills and teachers to work on the student's weakness through an action research project.

Wearing a mask could change the learners voice, so they need to work harder in their dialogues to be assessed. It would be recommendable to apply this kind of intervention when there were not social distancing rules for the classroom.

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Appendix A.

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix B:

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix C.

Learning Log

Available upon request.

Appendix D.

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix E.

Consent Letters

Available upon request.

Appendix F.

Grades – Excel

Available upon request.

Appendix G.

E-Portfolio

Available upon request.

Appendix H.

Audios Interactions

Available upon request.