



## **Improving A2 Students Oral Interaction by Using Peer Assessment**

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### **Improving A2 Students Oral Interaction by Using Peer Assessment**

During an A2 private adult class, students have shown issues in speaking, which is the most challenging skill to manage, mainly at the beginning. The factors causing the speaking problems have been lack of speaking practice, which is common in this level, fear of errors, limited vocabulary, shyness, or fear of expressing themselves in a foreign language. All these aspects prevent their communication when they try to maintain a dialogue. To help students overcome their difficulties; an intervention was applied, and peer- assessment was used.

Teachers use peer assessment to test students' speaking performance (Kuo et al., 2017). It is a fun way to assess students, and they feel more relaxed during the process, considering that it is one of the hardest skills to develop when learning a new language. According to students' survey results, improving oral skills has become their primary objective to overcome for adults with an A2 level in English.

### **Literature Review**

The current section contains peer assessment definitions, related studies, and strategies implemented by other authors. Furthermore, it describes opposite points of view and how other studies have shown that peer assessment is an appropriate strategy for improving speaking skills.

Speaking is considered a more challenging skill than other language skills. And it is necessary because people can exchange information and be communicated with others (Zakaria et al., 2019). Likewise, students can state more ideas using and producing new words during the activities, showing how their vocabulary and

interaction have improved. Therefore, peer evaluation has the advantage of actively involving students during the process, benefiting their learning (Butler & Hodge, 2001).

Decades of research support that teachers can produce more significant learning by teaching less and providing more feedback (Bransford, 2005). The pace of learning is accelerated because feedback makes it easier to correct the mistakes that students are having. Using the peer assessment method improves student communication because it will significantly impact skill development (Tarighat & Khodabakhsh, 2016). Peer assessment involves students so that they are more active, have more responsibility during the process, and can apply deeper learning strategies for a better understanding (Divjak & Maretic, 2017).

There are several ways to do peer evaluation, in which students can take the same criteria as teachers (Bachman & Palmer, 1989). Peer assessment can be used in a more supportive way rather than simply enabling students to grade each other. Roberts (2006) pointed out that peer assessment allows critical thinking to be put into practice since students must criticize and review the work of their peers. Noonan and Duncan (2005) added that peer assessment is a form of collaboration.

There are some disadvantages to peer assessment. According to Divjak (2017, p. 24), "Reliability risk – is because students are assessing their peers. Some of their peers can be their friends, and others can be members of other class cliques. Therefore, teachers must be aware of it, and if necessary, anonymize assessment

tasks”. Peer assessment is “an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of learning of peers of similar status” (Topping, 1998, p. 250). So, it is an arrangement in which individuals consider students' strengths, quality, and weaknesses, as well as their learning outcome.

### **Innovation**

The process started at the end of a pandemic crisis. First, a four-week lesson plan was designed, three synchronous and five asynchronous classes, forty-five minutes each. The resources used were Cambridge digital books (CEFR A2), (zoom), and chatter pix (This is a simple digital app that allows us to put a voice to any image through the phone) and Flipgrid (this is a tool that belongs to Microsoft and where you can record videos of up to 10 minutes).

The students were then trained in the use of a peer-assessment technique. They were instructed on the purpose of peer assessment. Each task consisted of three students, one pair doing the dialogue and the other students assessing them. The role of the teacher was to be a facilitator in the class, and the students had to interact as much as possible with each other. The unit of the lesson was called Sports and Hoobies. Before forming the team, students were instructed to assess their peers' pronunciation and fluency before the pretest assessment. Then, a pretest was implemented, and the result referenced their weakness. It consisted of asking and answering questions about sports using flash cards. In the pre-test, learners were asked to speak about sports and hobbies using basic information and send it through

the Drive link by WhatsApp. In addition, this conversation was assessed by their peers, who used a checklist with previous training.

In each lesson, there were simple tasks, with the primary purpose of encouraging the students and making them acquire the knowledge to process it and apply it in the future in other areas through practices and dialogues, which allowed them to add new words and phrases related to the unit vocabulary, additionally, students used a checklist to collect the information needed about the improvement of the students at each point. Students then used the list to indicate how well they felt their accuracy matched their teacher's. After the peer assessment, students had two days to improve upon areas they identified in the peer assessment as needing improvement. While working on the project, it was pointed out how to use the checklist after every practice. The list consisted of four categories with three options (yes, sometimes, not yet). Every item was worth 5, 3, and 0, respectively. The assessors had to mark each box according to the performance of those evaluated, respecting the established options. By training the students to use the checklist, the students would be able to: Evaluate the process without fear and ask intelligent questions; analyze the issues critically and work together to find appropriate situations; and learn from hands-on experience.

The essential question, which was necessary to guide the lesson plan, was made according to the project's objective, and an answer was given after applying the post-test. Besides, it was used to engage students and lead to reflection on their learning process.

On the other hand, the teaching objectives were examined (based on oral skills improvement). So, the transfer goal was focused on improving their speaking ability. Then, the final oral performance task was planned as a strategy for transferring the skill acquired (Table 1). To succeed during the process, first, the students should develop the necessary knowledge and skills and then make meaning of big ideas (fundamental principles and strategies). Ultimately, the transfer will be achieved when they can use it in real-life situations.

### **Research Methodology**

Reason and Bradbun (2001; as cited in Burns, 2016, p. 2) described that “action research is about working towards practical outcomes and also about creating new forms of understanding, since action research without understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless.” Therefore, the problem led to the following question:

To what extent do A2 level adult students improve speaking by using peer assessment?

### **Participants**

The sample group consisted of ten students from twenty to forty years old attending private classes. Four of them were college students, one held a master's degree, and the rest were adult professionals interested in developing English as a foreign language to increase their job opportunities. Besides, they identified themselves as mixed race. They were Ecuadorian residents but came from different provinces; six students were from Guayaquil, two lived in Quito, one was from Babahoyo, and the other lived in Loja.

## **Instruments**

The instruments used to collect data to answer the research questions were: at the beginning, a pretest was applied, then at the end post-test was used to measure oral skills improvement. The pre, post assessment and the checklist were used to measure if there was an improvement in their oral production. The checklist, which had to be answered by the students after the pre and post-test, had four categories related to grammar, vocabulary, and interaction and it was assigned for each possible response: Yes, Sometimes, and Not yet.

After introducing the innovation, students were taught how the peer-assessment checklist works to guarantee accurate data from the pretest activity. Each one of those audio files was used as a tool to gather data about the learner's speaking development, but the only practices graded were the pre-test and the final dialogue. There was a four-week between the pretest and posttest.

## **Data Analysis**

A paired sample *t* test was used to compare the pre and post-test results and to explore the research question: To what extent do A2 level adult students improve speaking skills by peer assessment? In a paired sample *t*-test, the null hypothesis is that there was no difference between dependent groups, indicated by a *p*-value greater than or equal to .05. The analysis was done in Microsoft Excel using the Analytics Tools Pack, which takes raw data and turns it into meaningful insights that can be used for more accurate decisions.

Some measures such as Minimum, Maximum, Mean, and Standard Deviation were included for grades. The Minimum refers to the smallest value the data yields, contrary to the Maximum value. Likewise, the Mean gives us an idea of where a dataset's center value is located. And the standard deviation is a statistical measure of the spread of a dataset as it relates to the Mean.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In research, we as teachers must ensure participants' rights, welfare, and consent. All students' rights are protected, and it is necessary to inform all students in the research of the purpose of the study to avoid risky situations. We must be aware of the importance of being honest when researching to prevent discomfort to students and parents if they have to approve their children to participate in the research.

It would be essential to clarify that the current data analysis was applied to students who did not need permission because they all were adults, but they were informed of the innovation and its purpose.

### **Results**

In the Pre-test, no student had a minimum grammar, vocabulary, and interaction score of less than 2. A maximum score of 5 was achieved in the three criteria.

Students' pretest scores on the grammar rubric resulted in a mean of 3.8. This score corresponds to an average rubric categorization of "Generally, uses count and non-count nouns, but makes very few mistakes."



**Table 2*****Pretest results.***

Pretest			
	Grammar	Vocabulary	Interaction
MIN	2	2	2
MAX	5	4	3
MEAN	3.8	2.8	2.9
SD	0.91	0.78	0.31

Their performance was analyzed and expected a significant improvement in interaction, although with some mistakes made by the pupils in vocabulary above all. In the posttest, the scores increased notably at each evaluation point, so the overall prototyping stage was successful. The most interesting part of using the checklist was the interaction between themselves because they had to produce better sentences during the dialogue.

**Table 3*****Posttest results.***

Posttest			
	Grammar	Vocabulary	Interaction
MIN	2	2	2
MAX	5	5	5
MEAN	3.8	3.4	3
SD	0.91	0.84	1.24

**Table 4*****Total results***

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Pre	8	11	9.5	1.17
Post	8	13	10.2	1.98

### **Discussion**

As far as we can observe, accuracy increases with peer assessment between students, and students learn from their own mistakes. The results provided values that showed the improvement in the ability studied, thus supporting the theory of Butler and Hodge (2001), which stated that using peer assessment is an advantage to improving speaking in A2 adults.

Roberts (2006) pointed out that peer assessment allows learners to reflect critically upon the understanding of their peers. This was verified during the evaluation process, as the students improved their interaction as they reflected on the points made by their classmates, which used the same rating criteria as their teachers.

### **Conclusions**

Applying the innovation had positive results considering the results obtained by the students in the skill assessed, so we could realize that their knowledge had increased. Conversely, there was room for improvement in vocabulary, the most complex skill to improve for them. Nevertheless, peer assessment improved the speaking interaction of the students. So, the research question was answered, but work must continue to improve the statistical results that translate into the quality of student knowledge. This study did not seek to measure meta cognitive learning, but students

had a chance to reflect on the activity of being assessed by others in speaking after the experience.

Speaking is the most challenging ability to develop regarding language skills, considering English learning as a foreign language (EFL) since it usually raises learners' anxiety. According to the process and at the end of the post-test application, they improved their grammar, interaction, and vocabulary, which allowed them to interact with others on the same proficiency.

### **Limitations**

Some limitations were found due to time restraints. Taking into account the variety of jobs and ongoing obligations participants had, attendance was limited at the beginning of the research. Furthermore, it took some work for the students to separate their feelings of friendship themselves at the time of peer assessment. Still, the evaluated student felt comfortable when he was the one assessed by the peer. Likewise, their accuracy and interactions will flow better, similarly to the vocabulary, which is part of having good communication. In addition, they will feel more confident when talking because their knowledge is improving. The pupils feel pressure when their peers assess them due to their close relationship. Then, during their interactions in the middle of the activities, they learn from each other, and their feedback helps them to improve their oral skills.

On the other hand, the elaboration of tests took time to innovate; likewise, the training to teach them how to use the checklist took time accordingly. But happily, the teaching-learning process was successful in the end.

### **Recommendations**

It is strongly suggested that others professionals replicate the study. Starting the innovation, the students must be taught about using the checklist to measure results before and after. In addition, it is essential to identify their weaknesses to facilitate the strategies to use. From the teacher's perspective, the content of the tests tends to be easier to design.

Before starting the experiment, students must read and understand the checklist to assess their peers responsibly. So, this was a challenging task because it was their first time doing it, and the level of responsibility was high. Hence, the training was for four days to gain knowledge, understand it, and apply it later during the pre and post-test.

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**Appendix 1**

**Checklist**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 2**

**Lesson Plan**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 3**

**Link to the E-portfolio.**

Available upon request.