



Peer Assessment for the Improvement of Speaking

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Research Report

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In the curricular system of Ecuador, as in many countries, learning of English is mandatory. Speaking is one of the most difficult skills for students according to Nazara (2011) and the main causes for not producing output is a lack of vocabulary and grammar, the limited time to practice speaking in class, and the uninteresting topics and activities that do not motivate students to learn the language. After observing a class in a public high school, it has been evident that many students struggle when they have to express their opinions in a spoken form.

According to the Ministerio de Educacion (2019), students need to have an A2 when they finish the 10th grade of Basic General Education and a B1 level when they finish the 1st Unified General Baccalaureate based on the scale of the international standards of the Common European Framework for Language Reference. After doing some activities where students of 2nd Baccalaureate had to describe some pictures, it is evident that students were not able to give short sentences. Students dedicated much time to hesitating and organizing what they wanted to say in English.

Literature Review

This section of the theoretical review consists of the peer assessment definition, the related studies that applied this strategy, challenges or opposite points of view, and the way of training students to apply this peer assessment plan of action.

Peer-Assessment

Tangaraju et al. (2019) maintained that “Peer assessment encompasses peers using one another as resources by sharing ideas, by evaluating the work of others, and by providing feedback” (p.41). This is a good opportunity to develop students' speaking skills because all of them will have an active role in the class. Also, they will have more expectations to know about the comments of their peers. Alqassab and Panadero (2022)

also mentioned that peer assessment can work as a tool to judge students because peers can give positive or negative feedback about their task in order to have a better outcome in their assignments.

Many researchers have applied peer assessment strategies finding positive results. Ndoye (2017) concluded that a study of the University of Kentucky through an online survey stated good opinions from the students once they worked with this strategy. For example, students mentioned that using this helped them to fill the gap because in class they did not understand the teacher, but with the comment received from their peers, they had a better idea of how to do the activity.

Peer assessment awakens students' motivation and self-preparation. According to researchers Kleanthous and Cardoso (2016), when Cyprus University applied the peer assessment strategy, the teachers asked students to upload a video to a platform to receive peer assessment; students mentioned that recording it to receive feedback was very motivating because they wanted to make the minimum mistakes possible while appearing in the video in order to demonstrate a good performance to their peer assessor. Also, students said that they remember their classmates' feedback more than the teacher's feedback. In conclusion, through peer assessment with the application of video, students can work on their pronunciation as well as on their confidence to start speaking in English in class.

On the other hand, the peer assessment strategy has some limitations, for example, it does not help students to correct their mistakes because they think that their classmates are not knowledgeable enough to correct them (Smith, 2017, p. 183). Some people, especially teenagers, do not take things seriously, thus it is evident that when they make the peer assessment, they will not give the right assessment to their partners. Moreover, students tend to overestimate the performance of their peers; in a study carried out with

seven intermediate students in Korea, there was not enough consistency between the scores of teacher and students, especially in language use (Lee & Chang, 2005, as cited in Joo, 2016). This demonstrates that students need more training to provide a good score and comments that are in relation to the teacher's comments about language use.

Implementing peer assessment is a process because teachers need to start explaining students what peer assessment is, what the goal of peer assessment is, and how students can assess their partner's presentation through a rubric or guidelines (Ndoye, 2017, p. 3). For example, the teacher introduces everything about peer assessment in order to allow students to deeply understand the definition of this strategy. Then, the teacher gives students a checklist to explain what they need to assess when students perform their presentations. Also, the teacher has to create an example of him or her talking about a topic and making mistakes for students to start practicing the process of peer assessment. Richards and Renandya (2002) found that "Implementing peer assessment is not like waving a magic word: just say a few magic words, and whoosh! Everything is working well" (p.53). This process is engaging for students but it demands more time from teachers to have positive results.

Innovation

This action research gave students more practice for the improvement of their speaking skills through peer assessment for a class of A2 level students in a public high school. Peer assessment was introduced by the teacher's explanation. The class was planned with the use of the backwards design (Appendix 1), which lasted 10 teaching hours (2 weeks).

During this time, students practiced their speaking skills through peer assessment using the checklist, and the rubric was useful for the teacher to see what students were able to demonstrate and provide them feedback. For students to understand the process of

peer assessment, the teacher explained the definition, the goal, and the checklist. Students also had to complete different activities to practice the vocabulary of adjectives of descriptions as well as the simple present in affirmative and negative forms used in the monologue. It was necessary for the teacher to make a sample video for the students to start practicing the process of peer assessment with the checklist.

Research Methodology

Considering students' low speaking performance, this research project implemented the peer assessment strategy in order to improve students' speaking skills. Therefore, this study was designed to find answers to the main research questions: To what extent does peer assessment improve oral skills? And what are students' opinions about peer assessment?

The current study is considered action research because we as educators have a purpose for the problem found in the classroom, so this investigation was designed to give a solution for improving speaking skills. First, the author found a problem, then chose a method to collect data, and next analyzed the problem to find actions to the problem (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

The problem was noticed by daily observation of the students' performance which showed that they could not communicate with simple sentences in the English language. Thus, peer assessment was chosen as a strategy for improving speaking skills. The instrument to collect data to answer the first quantitative question was through the pre-test and post-test, and the survey was the instrument to respond to the qualitative question.

Participants

The action research took place in a public high school in Tosagua city. The participants were in their second baccalaureate level, 6 women and 9 men, their ages were between fifteen and sixteen years old, and 40% have A1 and 60% had A2 level according

to the Common European Framework for Language Reference. Most of these students had a poor economy that did not allow them to attend extra English classes as well as daily access to the internet to enhance their speaking skills.

Instruments

To answer the first research question “To what extent does peer assessment improve oral skills?” a pre-test and post-test were carried out. For the pre-test, students had to make a 2-minute video talking about a famous person. Also, a rubric was necessary for the researchers to grade the pre-test and post-test. The last part to answer this first research question was the post-test, the student created another 2-minute video talking about someone they admired with the topics learned during these 2 weeks.

To answer the second research question “What are the opinions of the students about peer assessment?” A survey was carried out. There were 5 open questions in the survey. The questions were in Spanish because it is more difficult for students to express their thinking in English. The students were asked if they considered that using peer assessment would improve their speaking skills. The survey asked the students is attached to this document as an appendix 2.

Data Analysis

To answer the quantitative question: To what extent does peer assessment facilitated by rubric improve oral skills? The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were uploaded in an Excel document. The descriptive statistics were run to analyze in detail the pre and post-test minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation. The *p*-value was also calculated.

To answer the second research question: What are students’ opinions about peer assessment? The data obtained from the survey were classified as the students’ responses on peer assessment as beneficial or disapproving.

Ethical considerations

First, it was necessary to request the institution's permission to do the study that according to Zeni (1998), "In action research, we document our own practice, we rarely work in isolation" (p.11). Then, a letter was sent to ensure that parents understood the purpose of the research, it also detailed what students had to do and the objective of getting the results. Additionally, the researcher compromised to show the data keeping the names of students anonymous (British Education Research Association, 2018).

Results

In this section, the researcher reports the results of the study. The results are analyzed according to the two research questions.

To answer the first research question: To what extent does peer assessment improve oral skills? the descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations demonstrated that applying the strategy of peer assessment made the students improve their speaking skills.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	PV
Pretest	15	2.5	10	7.30	2.53	0.00
Posttest	15	3.5	10	8.33	2.01	
Valid N (listwise)	15					

There was a difference between the pre and post-test. There was a difference in the mean, also there was a difference between the minimum of the pre-test as well as in the post-test. The standard deviation was lower in the post-test. The *p*-value is less than 0.05,

therefore the results were significant and do to the application of the strategy. There is a difference of 1.03 in the mean from the pre-test and post-test. Analyzing the results from the pre-test and post-test, students had an improvement in their speaking skills while using the peer assessment strategy.

When students were asked about peer assessment, it was difficult for them at the beginning because this strategy was new for them, they had not had the opportunity to assess their peers before. For example, student 1 said, “When I evaluated my peer, I had to ask the teacher about the checklist because I did not understand it”. Other students said that “peer assessment was a strategy that encouraged us to speak in English because it was not the common activity to memorize a dialogue, it was an engaging strategy for the reason that our partners gave us feedback about our grammar, vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, and organization in our presentation”.

Discussion

This study expected to improve the speaking skills of the participants through peer assessment. After two weeks of implementation, the results of this study corroborate the usefulness of using peer assessment for speaking development; these results responded to the two research questions:

Question 1: To what extent does peer assessment improve oral skills? The results of the pre and post-test scores display that peer assessment permitted an improvement in the oral skills of participants. There was a difference of 1.03 in the mean from the pre-test and post-test, which means that applying peer assessment allowed students to have a better performance in their speaking task. This result is similar to Alqassab and Panadero (2022) who affirmed that peer assessment through positive or negative feedback gives students the opportunity to improve their speaking skill performance.

Question 2: What are the opinions of the students about peer assessment? The results of the survey demonstrate that students consider that there are more benefits than drawbacks to applying this strategy. Students agreed that when their partner gave them positive or negative feedback about their speaking performance, they took into account their partner's advice to improve their speaking performance. The result matches with Ndoye (2017), who stated that students remember their peer's feedback more than the teacher's feedback.

In another question of the survey, students answered that it was difficult to assess their peers because they would not take their feedback seriously. They knew that the only person who was knowledgeable enough was the teacher. Peer assessment does not help students correct their mistakes because they do not trust in their peers as they trust in the teacher (Smith, 2017, p. 183).

Students responded that applying this strategy was helpful not only in the English subject but also, they considered that students could apply it in other subjects where they could support their peers through feedback; this statement coincides with Kleanthous and Cardoso (2016), who confirmed that after applying this strategy in Cyprus University, students improved the learning in different subjects.

Lastly, this strategy seemed to be easy in the two weeks of classes, but it was not as easy as the researcher expected. As Richards and Renandya (2002) said that "Implementing peer assessment is not like waving a magic word: just say a few magic words, and whoosh! Everything is working well" (p.53). If someone wants to have a better result with the implementation of the peer assessment strategy, it will need more time than two weeks because the lower the English level of the students is, the more difficult it will be to carry out the intervention.

Conclusions

The purpose of this innovation was to determine to what extent peer assessment improve oral skills. Based on the results, it can be concluded that the use of peer assessment allowed students to improve their speaking skills because when they showed their first presentation in the innovation, students had a lower score on the pre-test, therefore the post-test was higher because students worked on their peers' feedback for the improvement of their presentation.

The information from the survey that responded to the second research question which is about what are the opinions about peer assessment, students confirmed that the strategy supported their speaking skills because their partners made them notice the mistakes that they had in pronunciation, organization, and grammar that were the categories of the checklist to assess their peers, hence students had a better performance at the end of the intervention.

Limitations

It was difficult to apply this intervention in two weeks because students had a lot of problems making sentences with the simple present affirmative and negative, also they had some difficulties organizing what they were going to say about their famous person. To answer the first research question, in the pre-test, it was more difficult for them to assess their classmates because they asked the teacher for some information from the checklist. Also, some students could not record their videos either in their homes or in school because they said that they did not have cell phones.

Recommendations

If someone has plans to apply this intervention of peer assessment, it would be important to consider that two weeks are not enough when students have a low English level. It would be better to establish more weeks to train students through different worksheets on grammar and vocabulary to develop what they are going to say in their

intervention of the peer assessment strategy. If students have a low English level, the teacher should support the explanation of the checklist using Spanish in order to let them understand what the checklist says. Also, for students who do not have a cellphone, the teacher should have a different option, they should read their work rather than record it for their partners to assess the activity.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Speaking Rubric- A2 Level

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Survey

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

E-portfolio

Available upon request.