Improving Speaking Skills Through Self-Assessment in Students with Level A1

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Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Master in Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages with Mention in Teaching English. CES: RPC-SE-19-N˚.140-2020. Cohort 2021 - 2022. Author's email: maria.intriago@casagrande.edu.ec. Guayaquil, October 16th, 2023.

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Nowadays, English is one of the most spoken languages around the world. Consequently, many people in Ecuador want to learn to speak this new language in order to have better opportunities for traveling, studying, and working. However, beginner students find difficult to speak in the foreign language. Usually the content and activities for A1 level is related more with grammar and vocabulary, leaving behind exercises of oral communication. Based on my experience, the lack of speaking practice among beginner students lead to the idea they may not succeed in conversational and lose their motivation to keep learning.

For this reason, as teacher myself, finding different methods and strategies to help the students accomplish their goal is important. One method that can be applied to help improve speaking skill is to implement self-assessment. Self-assessment positively impacts the students, such as improving outcomes (Panadero et al., 2017). It has the potential to enhance students' understanding of the quality of their work and the criteria employed for its assessment (Khabbazbashi, 2017).

Literature Review

In this section, self-assessment will be the independent variable and the speaking skill that correspond to the dependent variable are explained. First, related studies that had been successful will be mentioned to demonstrate importance of its application. Next, the review of theoretical concepts and definitions that support the reliability of this innovation. Followed by the limitations of this strategy and finally focusing in describing how was the process of training the students to self-assess themselves.

Related Studies

Prior research has indicated that incorporating self-assessment mechanisms into speaking activities can lead to increased learner motivation and engagement. One of the studies reveal that self-assessment assisted students in increasing their speaking self-efficacy (confidence and belief in their ability), self-regulation (awareness of research, time management, independence), and engagement (Masruria & Anam, 2021). In addition, another study showed a significant improvement by implementing Self-regulation and Self-assessment in student of A1 level (Vera et al., 2023). Considering the favorable outcomes of these studies, it provides a broader perspective and enhances the expectations of my own results.

Speaking

According to Nunan (2003), speaking is a productive oral skill. It consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. Teaching it is sometimes considered a simple process. The main point of speaking is to communicate, so thinking and feeling convey effectively and the speaker must understand the meaning to be communicated in order to make other people understand what they are talking about (Tarigan, 1981). It means that people in the world have speaking abilities because it is an activity to communicate with other people and to make good relationships in society.

Speaking is a production skill that falls into two main categories: accuracy and fluency. Accuracy consists of the correct or appropriate use of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation through several activities, fluency takes into account "the ability to keep going when speaking spontaneously" (Derakhshan et al., 2016). According to Koşar and Bedir (2014), speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that consists of producing and receiving information.

Based on the provided statement, it can be inferred that speaking involves the ability to convey information accurately and fluently, encompassing the careful consideration of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation by the speaker.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is considered one of the various assessments that the students may execute in exploring, growing, and figuring out their functionality. Self-assessment is believed to be an efficient tool that could help students comprehend the function of the assignment and the assessment criteria (Asdar, 2017). It is a tool, technique, and procedure used to understand what students can or cannot do (Goral & Bailey, 2019). Self-assessment positively impacts the students, such as improving outcomes (Panadero et al., 2017).

According to Ma and Inke (2019), self-assessment requires students to assess themselves in the classroom. Self-assessment affects the students' individual understanding because it emphasizes their high-order thinking, self-reflective, and self-regulation, and they can manage themselves to achieve their goals (Khabbazbashi, 2017).

Challenges of Self-assessment

It is important to recognize that the implementation of self-assessment face some challenges. The researcher needs to be prepared beforehand to help students to overcome them. For instance, subjectivity and peer pressure are factors that can affect validity of self-assessment. Students may want to assess themselves as high as they can in order to look better in the classroom (Karakaya, 2017).

Meihami and Razmjoo (2016) revealed that self-assessment can be challenging due to practicality problems that involves limitation in resources and time. According to this, the

management of resources and time is vital in the classroom. The teacher must possess a well-structured lesson plan in order to reach its expectations.

Training Students to Self-assessment

The objective in this process of training students for Self-Assessment, is achieving improvement students' speaking Skill. First, they need to understand the process of Self-assessment. Consequently, the role of the teacher explaining this is very important to have success in the application. According to Blanche et al. (1989), teachers have to know to what extent students can appraise their own work and performance. For this reason, students must take a placement test and according to the results applying the adequate lessons.

There are three underlying principles or steps in self-assessment, as suggested by Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) namely; (1) articulating expectations, (2) self-assessing, (3) revising. In the first step, the teacher not only clearly defines expectations for a task, but also explains each criterion that would be used in the self-assessment. In the second step, students come up with initial drafts. In the third and final step, students use the feedback to aid in their revision. Thus, students come up with a final self-assessment, which can be compared with those of their peers and the teacher (Hafizuddin et al., 2019).

Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) suggested using a rubric, whereby they say that "a good rubric describes the kinds of mistakes students tend to make, as well as the ways in which good work shines" (p. 13). For this reason, for this innovation, a rubric was created according to the content and the possible mistakes. Self-assessment can help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses as it involves them in the evaluation and description of their learning process, product, and progress that requires them to judge their own work based on given criteria (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2013; Panadero & Botella, 2017; Wisnu & Pradana, 2020).

Innovation

In this innovation, the lesson plan (Appendix 1) was designed according to the transfer goal, that is related to the objective of the unit. In the first class, the teacher trained the student to self-asses through a previous prepared example. In the example activity they learned how to perform and self-assess with a checklist (Appendix 2).

Afterwards, the teacher instructs the class how to use the check-list. It has three levels: Yes, Sometimes and Not yet. In this process the students have to evaluate their grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency. On the other hand, a rubric (Appendix 3) was used by the teacher, elaborated following the standards of the Global Oral Assessment Criteria of Cambridge in level A1. After each self-assessment the teacher supported with feedback to the students.

The intervention lasted four weeks. Over the course of these four weeks, the learners were required to record and self-assess audio conversations related to the family member's topics. These recorded conversations were then discussed by the teacher and the student to provide feedback and self-assessment, monitoring their progress throughout the study.

Every week, the students had two hours of classes. In week number one, it was taught how to practice the first interaction among the students. Vocabulary related to family members was introduced through activities with flashcards and group games. In the second week, the topic was grammar related to possessive adjectives also through engaging activities specially designed for the students. In the third week, the vocabulary and grammar on possessive adjectives were reinforced. Finally, in the last week, it was teaching the simple present tense and the final evaluation of the students.

Research Methodology

The study followed an action research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Action research is usually defined as an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students' learning (e.g., Barlett & Burton, 2004; Fox et al., 2007; Herr & Nihlen, 2007; Jarvis, 1999)

The study's independent variable was self-assessment, while the dependent variable was speaking skills. The primary objective of this innovation was: first, to explore the quantitative research question - To what extent does the use of self-assessment techniques improve the production of speaking skills in students with level A1? Second, to address the qualitative research question - What are the students' opinions about the application of self-assessments in this innovation?

Participants

In this innovation, a total of 6 students with different academic levels were invited to participate. All the 6 students were given their consent to participate in this research study. Of the 6 learners, 5 of them were 32 years old representing 83.3% while 1 were more than 40 years old corresponding to 16.6%. Furthermore, only 16.6% of the participants were male students and the rest women. All of the students identified as a member of the mestizo group. Additionally, all of them speak Spanish and come from urban areas. The participants indicated that they belong to the middle socioeconomic level. According to the Cambridge Placement Test, all of them correspond to the A1 English level.

Instruments

The initial and final recordings about family members were treated as pretest and posttest. These recordings were evaluated by the teacher based on predefined rubric criteria, encompassing vocabulary and grammar, cohesion, pronunciation, and fluency.

In order to respond the research question number 1(quantitative). To what extent does the use of self-assessment techniques improve the production of speaking skills in students with level A1? The researcher applied pre and posttest and grade them with a rubric. During this process the teacher recorded the students' conversations to later evaluated.

And for the question number 2 (qualitative) What are the students' opinions about the application of self-assessments in this innovation? The researcher used a survey (Appendix 4) with open question, in order to obtained detailed information about their opinions.

Pre and post-test

The pre and post-evaluation consist of an interaction between two students asking and answering questions about their personal and family information for approximately one minute, meanwhile they were recorded by the teacher with a cell phone.

The first record, the pretest (P1), was developed by the students before the implementation. Each pair of students recorded a one-minute conversation about personal and family information. On the other hand, the last record, post-test (P2), was recorded at the end of the implementation. To obtain comparable speech samples from the participants and check their progress over the implementation, a similar speaking task was used in the two tests (P1 and P2), in other words, the post-test record followed the same instructions as the pre-test recorded.

The survey was conducted in order to address the opinions of the participants of the innovation. It was designed with five open questions related to the effectiveness of the innovation. The survey was applied on paper format after the two weeks that endure all the process.

Data Analysis

In order to evaluate the impact of self-assessment in the improvement on the speaking skill, the researcher apply a paired-sample *t*-test. To compare and analyze the data collected from the Pre and Posttest(Quantitative), the EXCEL program was selected and its Analytic Tool Pack. Descriptive Statistics was used to determine the mean, standard deviation, the minimum and maximum of the data.

Similarly, to analyze the data obtained from the surveys (Qualitative), the researcher organized and transcript the notes of the surveys in a WORD document. Then review the data reading several times to get familiarize with their content. Next step, the researcher created codes, highlighting keywords or ideas that were similar. Finally, the similar ideas were categorized into themes, that were important to knowing the perspective of the participants.

Ethical Considerations

This research followed the procedures of ethical considerations (Bhandari, 2023). This included obtaining permission from the participants with a formal consent letter that formalized the carrying out of the study and introduced the researcher. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and they were requested to participate freely. Participants were given an assurance that all information obtained from them will be confidential and be used only for the study purpose.

In a formal report, the researcher described the study's methods to the volunteers to obtain their consent. The students were also thoroughly informed about the innovative process. To protect their privacy, their identities were kept anonymous. Furthermore, it was emphasized that all gathered, analyzed, and acquired data would be treated as confidential and solely used for academic purposes.

Results

To investigate the first research question - To what extent does the use of self-assessment techniques improve the production of speaking skills in students with level A1? - pre and posttest audio recordings were utilized to evaluate the students' speaking abilities. The results indicated a noticeable improvement in the participants' speaking production. In the pretest (first audio recorded) displayed an average score of 6.00 whereas the posttest (last audio recorded) showed an increase with an average score of 9.00 This enhancement was further evident when comparing the minimum and maximum grades.

Table 1

Pretest and Posttest Descriptive and Interferential Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	P. value
Pretest	6	5,00	8,00	6,00	0,89	0,00
Posttest	6	7,00	10,00	9,00	0,63	0,00

Derived from this dataset, the *p*-value obtained a value of *p*=0.00. This outcome indicated a statistically meaningful outcome, signifying that the innovation exerted a favorable influence on the enhancement of speaking proficiency.

Additionally, to investigate the second research question regarding the improvement in speaking skills following the implementation, four inquiries were examined.

Question 1: What did you considerate were your flaws before this innovation? The majority of students indicated their problems related with the speaking skill. They do not know how to pronounce the words and their lack of confidence to speak even some basic vocabulary.

"I was scared to pronounce the words incorrectly" S6

"I did not know how to pronounce some words" S2

Question 2: What did you consider where the challenge of self-assessment? Most of the students stated do not find a mayor challenge because the check-list was pretty clear. Just one student found difficult to evaluate the pronunciation.

"It was easy for me because of the check-list"

"It was difficult for me to evaluate my pronunciation"

Question 3: What did you like about this innovation? Some students state that like to have a check-list because it was a good guidance in the process of self-assessment and also the feedback from the teacher.

"I liked to use the Check-list for the self-assessment"

"I liked the feedback from the teacher after every practice, because I could improve"

Question 4: What did you consider were your improvements after the innovation? Some students agreed feeling more confidence to practice speaking exercises and improve their pronunciation.

"I improve the pronunciation of new words"

"I felt more comfortable pronouncing the words"

Discussion

The present action research aimed to investigate the effectiveness of self-assessment in enhancing students' speaking skills in volunteer students. The research question centered on whether implementing self-assessment strategies would lead to improved speaking performance and foster students' metacognitive awareness.

The findings of this study revealed a notable positive impact of self-assessment on students' speaking performance. Throughout the intervention, students actively engaged in evaluating their speaking recordings against pre-established criteria and providing thoughtful feedback to themselves. This process allowed them to identify areas of improvement and

make necessary revisions, ultimately leading to improved speaking quality. Self-assessment affects the students' or individual understanding because it emphasizes their high-order thinking, self-reflective, and self-regulation, and they can manage themselves to achieve their goals (Khabbazbashi, 2017).

Blanche and Merino (1989) suggested that when self-assessment procedures are put into practice effectively, they have the potential to lead to more autonomous learners, help teachers become aware of their students' individual needs, and increase learners' motivation The role of the teacher in facilitating the self-assessment process is necessary. For example: providing explicit instructions on the self-assessment criteria, modeling self-assessment practices, and offering constructive feedback during the self-assessment process contributed to the flow of the intervention.

The incorporation of checklists and rubrics in this innovation also proved to be valuable. These tools facilitated students' self-assessment and allowed teachers to evaluate their work objectively (Andrade, 2001) suggested that simply handing out and explaining a rubric may increase students' knowledge of the criteria for an assignment and help students produce work of higher quality.

At the culmination of the innovation, following the application of these various procedures before mentioned, students demonstrated a favorable disposition towards self-assessment, primarily attributable to the knowledge they had acquired. Despite the relatively brief duration of the instructional period, they articulated a heightened motivation to continue learning.

Conclusions

The poor performance of A1 level students in speaking production due to the lack of the correct education methods lead to students to demotivation to improve. To address this issue, a self-assessment approach was implemented, leading to positive results in their speaking skills.

The outcomes of the study indicate that self-assessment significantly contributed to the improvement of students' speaking abilities. Students participating in several activities according to their level using Self-assessment, improve their performance. These activities and technique increased students' motivation to learn English, especially in learning speaking skills.

Clear instructions and feedback provided to students facilitated their comprehension of task expectations, which in turn aided them in achieving the desired learning goals. The use of rubrics and the check-lists helped students develop a deeper understanding of the assessment criteria and enabled them to succeed in meeting the established objectives. Incorporating audio-recorders engaged students and encouraged a sense of responsibility in their participation. As result, students' opinions were positive about self-assessment.

Limitations

The primary obstacles encountered during the innovation process revolved around the appropriate space for the classes. Due to the innovation was not applied to students in an educational institution, volunteers receive the classes in the living room of my house that was accommodate properly. However, in certain occasion we were interrupted and the students lost their concentration.

Another significant constraint was the restricted time available. With only two hours of in-person classes per week, students struggled to balance their innovation activities and regular daily tasks simultaneously, leading to delays in providing timely feedback.

Recommendations

Prior to commencing an innovation with volunteers, it is essential to find a right place where the classes can be taken without interruptions, to eliminate any distractions during their work. To achieve optimal outcomes, students must feel comfortable and focused while they are receiving the classes.

Incorporating a more extended time into the lesson plan is ideal, as they offer opportunities to train students better in their learning journey. By doing so, they can acquire the necessary knowledge and skills.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Pre and Post Checklist Categories for self and peer assessment

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Rubric Criteria

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Post- survey. / Encuesta final

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

Demographic Information Survey / Encuesta de Información Demográfica

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Grades from the Pre and Post-tests

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

E-portfolio

Available upon request.