



**Speaking Skill Development Through Self –Assessment at Elementary Level**

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### **Speaking Skill Development Through Self – Assessment at Elementary Level**

Speaking as a skill is an act of communication that plays an important role in learners' language development. It is perhaps one of the most important human skills, and because we do it continuously, we do not often stop to examine the processes involved in it (Burns, 1998).

According to Richards and Nunan (1990), the ability to speak is something of an enigma in language teaching. So, the content of speaking classes varies due to the diversity in the classroom. As a result, the goals and techniques vary depending on the student, the teacher, and the overall context of the class.

About the class context, the common obstacle is a lack of interactive opportunities and little time for the active use of foreign language. For this reason, it is not easy for children to assimilate different phonemes and structures in speaking. At the same time, when they try to express or understand the target language, their minds first use the mother tongue. This is something they struggle with when learning English for the first time. The same occurs when listening because a foreign language is not naturally acquired into their primary schemes.

Although being a teacher is demanding, English teachers may look for ways to improve learners' performance by seeking help from several teaching methods. Also, Vygotsky (1978) stated that the use of material tools could transform children's thinking. For instance, tying knots, counting fingers, and pointing to an object could be suitable to reach a goal. This type of mediation or scaffolding, supported by Vygotsky (1978), is an educational practice in which students retain and apply new knowledge and establish a relationship with the environment. Therefore, this supportive interaction should be under the teacher or adult guidance as a key element in the learning process.

In addition, to enhance oral production skills, such as fluency, vocabulary, and oral interaction of students, the design and application of innovation were proposed as complementary

material using self-assessment. Therefore, this strategy will allow the student to recognize their progress, achievements, and difficulties.

The project's purpose was to measure the impact of self-assessment in developing speaking skills. On that account, a lesson plan was designed with a specific topic in which students had to describe the main ingredients to make a fruit salad as well as the appropriate vocabulary and clear pronunciation. The participants employed checklists to self-evaluate their progress. For the most part, the study's results compared students' pre- and post-test performance along with interviews to validate the results.

### **Literature Review**

This research has been selected to enhancing verbal form of communication skills through the use of self-assessment. The revision of bibliographic material permitted to present relevant information about this topic.

### **Speaking**

Speaking is one skill in language learning and has been the focus of much research developed by linguistics and psychologists for years (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Additionally, speaking is the most important skill among the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Darancik, 2018) it is considered a tool of communication between two or more participants in shared time and the purpose is to express ideas, feelings, or information. People who have speech impairments have a hard time pronouncing different speech sounds. It usually affects young children who are just learning to speak. In these situations, the teacher could speak slowly, use hand gestures, use simple phrases, and maintain a calm environment free of stimulating sounds.

According to Leong and Ahmadi (2017), speaking is one of the skills to develop and enhance communication. Additionally, speaking seems to be one of the most arduous skills that students can acquire since it requires practice.

Ur (1996) established that some problems that commonly happen in the classroom are lack of knowledge and vocabulary, mother-tongue use, uneven participation, and inhibition. However, these speaking problems can be major challenges to effective foreign language learning and communication development from the participants. Regarding lack of vocabulary, Harmer (1991) argued that the students have nothing to say because the teacher does not choose a topic that the learner already knows. Ausubel (1963) emphasized the need of prior knowledge from the students in order to have desirable meaningful learning. Thus, it is complex for the student to respond when the teacher asks about an uncommon topic because they do not have an idea to express it.

Rao (2019) indicated that speaking is a complex and dynamic skill that involves simultaneous processes and a speaker needs to almost instantly activate knowledge and skills. Moreover, speaking skills are one of the most challenging skills for language learners to acquire and it is believed to be the most important of the four language skills. It is important to focus learning on oral aspects to strengthen student's communication skills through activities that simulate real-life situations.

### **Micro-skills of speaking**

Brown (2004) stated that the micro-skills in speaking refer to producing smaller chunks of language such as phonemes, morphemes, words, English stress patterns and rhythmic structure. The student that uses micro skills utters the distinctive sounds of a language clearly enough so that participants can distinguish them. Hence, this study proposed the development of some creative activities in various situations where the speech of language appears naturally with something

meaningful in it to the participants. According to Cameron (2001), children must acquire speaking habits as well as to participate in discourse. In addition, micro-speaking skills are key features of the target language that allow seeing how these are used spontaneously by the participants.

### **Fluency**

The term fluency is associated with communication. It is also used as a criterion to measure one's speaking competence (Lennon, 2000). Speaking fluently means being able to communicate one's ideas without having to stop and think too much about what one is saying. Richards (1992) defined fluency as “the features which gave speech the qualities of being natural and normal” (p. 141). More specifically, fluency is associated with speed and related to rate, hesitations, repetitions, and corrections. Besides, the most common aspects of speaking fluency measured by the studies are the number of words in a determined time, the number of pauses known as hesitations, which could be due to a lack of vocabulary or even nervousness; and finally, the repetition of the same discourse to make corrections (Santos & Ramírez-Ávila, 2022).

Nonetheless, the rates of filled pauses in spontaneous speech, or repetitions did not impede speaking development in EFL students. These speech disruptions are typical in spoken narrative or expository discourse in classrooms (Nunan, 2003).

### **Self - Assessment**

Brown and Harris (2013) defined self-assessment as a “descriptive and evaluative act carried out by the student concerning his or her own work and academic abilities” (p. 368). It means that it involves students applying success criteria related to a learning goal based on their efforts.

Moreover, Panadero et al. (2016) defined it as a “wide variety of mechanisms and techniques through which students describe (i.e., assess) and possibly assign merit or worth to (i.e., evaluate) the qualities of their own learning processes and products” (p. 804). Undoubtedly, self-assessment

gives the participants the opportunity to get to know themselves, generates autonomy, and makes it easier for all the teaching and learning activities carried out by themselves throughout the course to be organized in a coherent way.

According to Gardner (2000), "self-assessment is the best way to help learners to monitor their progress and identify their language level" (p.49). Moreover, self-assessment is also important due to it increases students' motivation and helps students to develop a range of personal, transferrable skills. Besides, the self-assessment process can help "to prepare students not just to solve the problems we already know, but to solve problems we cannot at the moment even conceive" (Brew, 1995, p. 57).

Therefore, self-assessment in speaking allows students to comprehend the enhancement of their linguistic skills throughout the process, adopt measures to accomplish the aims, and start an improvement plan. In like manner, self-recording of speaking skills is a recourse of self-assessment in different ways. Moreover, several studies directed on self-assessment pointed out that applying self-assessment in the student evaluation process enhances learner autonomy (Başak, 2019). For example, students and teachers can revise the audio as often as necessary, as well as reflect on mistakes for improvement.

Many students do not innately know how to self-assess. Teachers need to directly teach students how to self-assess and provide opportunities for students to practice self-assessment and receive feedback and assistance. Students, particularly lower-achieving students, tend to need support to reflect on their learning and often benefit from guidelines or instructions that they can follow. Providing students with feedback on their progress enhances the impact of self-assessment. Also, providing opportunities for students to engage in group discussions and evaluation supports the accuracy and impact of self-assessment.

This tool is most successful when it is used as a formative assessment tool and students know it won't count towards their grades. Students are more likely to accurately self-assess, and it also provides opportunities for students to adapt and revise their approach to learning.

Consequently, the adoption of self-assessment supports students in identifying strengths and weaknesses at the same time, determining how efficient was the work according to a specific rubric from the teacher.

### **Innovation**

The innovation was focused on improving English speaking skills by using self-assessment with a checklist as an instrument (Appendix 1). The innovation was implemented completely online via Zoom due to the politics given in the school and following ethical considerations. To establish communication with the participants, the teacher created a slide presentation so the students could see pictures, videos and some keywords used in the innovation (Appendix 2).

Hence, the project began on May 3rd with second grade students after the respective ethical considerations and permission from their representatives. The participants' level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), was Pre-A1. The innovation was applied to seven participants of second grade as volunteers for four weeks, two and half hours per week, giving a total of ten synchronous hours.

Participants work with three topics "Fruits, shapes and colors" that contain vocabulary related to daily interactions with the environment; such as likes and dislikes, identifying the fruit and its color by watching the picture, matching the pictures with the correct quantity, and action verbs for describing the preparation of a fruit salad. The lesson plan (See Appendix 3) incorporated activities that develop speaking practice focused on self-assessment. In addition, all the utterances

were recorded by the teacher. Moreover, some tools like YouTube, Canva, and Wordwall, helped participants to interact and receive feedback as formative assessment.

At the beginning of the innovation, the teacher took the participants' placement test taken from the Cambridge website that proved they manage a Pre-A1 English level (See Appendix 4). The teacher shared Canva presentations, videos and songs during the class. At the end of the meeting, the teacher provided general feedback to boost participants' self-confidence and teach them to self-assess by using a checklist.

During the lessons, students learn pronunciation and word stress with vocabulary related to fruits. For example, a full slide was shared with the vocabulary, pictures and phrases so that the students could practice the pronunciation with the rest of the classmates. They took turns in order to participate in an organized way. All the micro speaking skills were recorded to be heard later. After every class, participants self-assessed their work and showed the information to the teacher via WhatsApp.

In addition, every class lasted one hour for two days, and thirty minutes on the third day of the week. During the lessons, participants could assess the different skills that integrate the process of learning, such as interactive communication, new vocabulary, pronunciation and answer to very basic questions. For example, from greeting to raising their hands as a rule of the session.

The instructional design of the last lesson was adapted to the virtual model. It consisted in presenting the procedure of a fruit salad with the main action verbs. So, participants brought one or two fruits and a plastic knife to chop the fruit and see the shape (especially in bananas). Then, they mixed the fruits in a plastic cup to finish the process. This task was supported and supervised by the participants' parents who were present all the time supporting with the Zoom application and with the online activities provided.



The checklist, as a form of self-assessment, was provided to participants by the teacher as a way to promote learner autonomy. This checklist was on a three-point scale. Participants self-assessed themselves on each of the seven questions developed on the checklist. The scale ranged from 5= “Yes”, 3= “Sometimes”, and 0= “Not yet”. (See Appendix 1).

To aim the purpose of the checklist, the participants were encouraged to evaluate their own learning. It is relevant to remember the advantage of teaching how to self-assess to know what students have done well and what they could do better next time. The checklist’s descriptors were found in The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2018, p.70).

Finally, to evaluate the innovation, a pre-test and post-test were taken before and after the four weeks. After the participants finish the innovation project, the teacher sent them a survey form to collect their views on participation as a feedback resource to the teacher.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Action Research**

This study is considered an action research project because is based on self-reflection about a common problem. This study adopted a sequence and determined the problems to be solved. In the context of this innovation, the action research involved action, evaluation, reflection, and evidence. It also included quantitative and qualitative data, such as the pre and post-tests, and interview responses respectively, which were necessary to study the progress.

Koshy (2010) described action research as:

A constructive inquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from the

experience. It is a continuous learning process in which the researcher learns and also shares the newly generated knowledge with those who may benefit from it. (p. 9)

Once the innovation finished, the researcher turned the checklist into a rubric to grade students. The dependent variable is speaking, and the independent variable is self-assessment.

### **Participants**

The study involved a group of seven participants: four females and three males. They belong to a private school in Daule. Students' ages were between 5 – 6 years old, attending the second grade. The participants obtained a Pre – A1 level proficiency based on the online test they took from the Cambridge website. Most of them belong to the upper middle-income population, thereby they have unlimited access to an internet connection. For that reason, the parents were invited to have their children take part in this project, which they voluntarily accepted. On the contrary, three parents did not respond to the invitation, therefore there were only seven confirmed children as participants in this action research

The participants were chosen by the teacher due to the trust developed with their parents and academic relationship with the participants during last year classes. It is necessary to state that the school did not allow the implementation of any other particular study but the scholar's weekly lesson plan for the classroom.

### **Research Questions:**

The present research looked to answer:

1. To what extent did self-assessment improve speaking skills during the innovation?
2. What is the student's opinion toward using self-assessment?

### **Hypothesis:**

It is expected that self-assessment will improve the speaking skills of Pre-A1 English level students.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

An achievement test was used in this project to measure the participants' speaking abilities. There were pretest and posttest sessions and several sessions of treatment between the pretest and posttest. The data was collected via a recording device and then it was transcribed for further analysis.

Firstly, the researcher conducted an online placement test (see Appendix 4) before applying the innovation. Interviews were conducted by the researcher (see Appendix 5). Participants had a choice to be interviewed in L1 or L2. Their recorded interviews were translated and corrected where necessary following ethical considerations.

Also, participants use the checklist that was based on the rubric used to self-assess, so students can know the descriptors to improve. This action was implemented at the beginning and the end of the innovation.

### **Pre and Post-test**

The first speaking skills of weeks one and two were considered as the pre-test. This audio was recorded by the teacher with the first and second topics about favorite fruits and colors respectively. The post-test is the last audio that refers to the short description of the fruit, and the action verbs learned in the process of making fruit salad.

### **Rubric**

A rubric of certain specifications was prepared for the purposes of test development. This rubric is based on the studies of Bosker et al. (2013), and it focused on three aspects of speaking: rate, hesitations or breakdowns, repetitions, and corrections. The rubric was composed of four

descriptors: (1) Use of language (2) Pronunciation (3) Fluency (4) Oral performance. The rubric was used to score students' speaking abilities. It was designed on a 1 to 5 scale, with one being the lowest score and five being the highest. This can be seen in Appendix 6.

### **Interviews**

To gather qualitative data on this innovation, the author obtained information from participants' opinions on self-assessment by using an interview process where some of them were selected randomly among the group (see Appendix 5) to answer the three questions set in the interview. The participants answered the interview in Spanish which was recorded on Zoom.

The instrument of this innovation attempted to answer the following research questions:

Q1. To what extent did self-assessment improve speaking skills during the innovation?

Participants took an online placement test from Cambridge Assessment English webpage to determine their English level (See Appendix 4). To evaluate their speaking skills a pre and post-test were implemented to determine enhancement in oral production. The researcher contrasted the recordings at the beginning to the last one to measure the improvement. The pre-test took place in the first week and it was assessed with the rubric (See Appendix 6). They also reflected and scored themselves with the checklist (See Appendix 1). The participants were working on expressing their names and what fruit liked or disliked, and the video lasted about four minutes.

The post-test took place on week four, and in this final video, the participants talked about the description of a fruit, including its color, likes and dislikes and mention the verbs for making a fruit salad. The activity was done individually and the video lasted about seven minutes because participants used real fruits to mix them. Thus, the teacher compared the results with the first and last one videos.

To evaluate the videos, the researcher applied the rubric (See Appendix 6) which had four descriptors and a quantitative grade from one to five, with three as a passing grade and five being the top one. The first sub-skill is the Use of Language which assesses the words or vocabulary they managed and the utterances they made. The second one is Pronunciation, which graded the intelligibility of speech of individual and stress sounds. The third one is Fluency, which evaluated the ability to tell words smoothly with the correct speed and pauses. Finally, an Oral performance which referred to responding and maintaining interaction. The participants were graded from one the lowest score to five the highest.

Q2. What is the student's opinion toward using self-assessment?

The interview was guided to define the issues of using self-assessment. Four students were chosen randomly to answer three questions about their conclusions and feelings during the innovation to improve their oral skills. The questions and answers were in Spanish but they were translated into English in order to answer the research question number 2: What is the student's opinion toward using self-assessment?

The interview can be seen on Appendix 5.

### **Data Collection Analysis**

Due to the small sample size, the data from the rubric during the pre-test and post-test was analyzed through a single-subject design. Grades from the pre-test and post-test, were uploaded to an Excel document for further analysis. Descriptive statistics were calculated including the mean, standard deviation, and *p* value.

The analysis was carried out in Microsoft Excel using the Analytics Tools Pack. Similarly, qualitative data were collected through a post-interview questionnaire to support research question

2. The post-interview questionnaire was composed of three questions. The researcher organized students' responses into positive or negative answers.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher of this study requested consent and permission from the student's parents via WhatsApp. The participation of the students was voluntary in all the sessions. Furthermore, the author explained that participants' real name was under anonymity and confidentiality using a fictional or no name (Zeni, 1998, p. 17). Also, they were reminded they could stop their attendance at any time. The participants and their parents understood the purposes of this project. During the synchronous sessions, the researcher was mindful of school or family issues of the participants and accommodated each session to the best time for them. Finally, it was resolved that the project will be used by the researcher whenever it is required.

### **Results**

To answer the first research question: *To what extent did self-assessment improve speaking skills during the innovation?* The data was calculated In Microsoft Excel obtaining the following results of descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviations and p-value as shown in the table:

**Table 1.**

#### *Pre-test and post-test*

	N	Mean	Min Mean	Max Mean	St. Dv.	Min St.Dv.	Max St.D.	p value
<b>Pre-test</b>	7	1.35	1.00	1.90	0.67	0.53	0.74	0.00
<b>Post-test</b>	7	3.35	3.30	3.40	0.61	0.53	0.82	0.00

The pre-test results showed that most of the participants got grades less than 3 because each of the sub-skills was rated from 1 to 5 points. The mean of 1.4 corresponded to a time before the innovation because they needed improvement in the use of language, pronunciation, fluency and

oral performance according to the rubric. Even though with the assistance of the teacher or parents their results were not good enough.

After the innovation, the results fluctuated. In the post-test, participants received grades up to 4, with a mean of 3.4. The Standard deviation in the pre-test is 0.67 which means that students' grades were closer to the mean. On the other hand, in the post-test, the standard deviation is 0.61, demonstrating that participants' scores were not so far from the mean. These values indicated that the scores have an improvement after the application of the innovation.

The p-value is 0.00 was less than 0.0009 demonstrating positive self-assessment practice results.

**Table 2.**

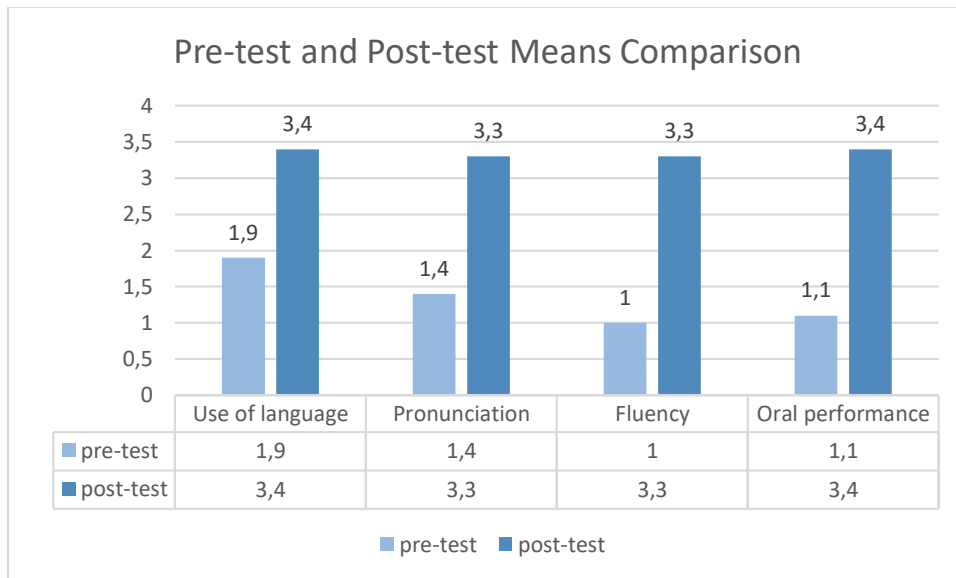
*Descriptive statistics of the rubric descriptors*

Descriptors	Pre-test			Post-test		p. value
	N#	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Use of language	7	1.9	0.74	3.4	0.53	0.00012
Pronunciation	7	1.4	0.74	3.3	0.82	0.00001
Fluency	7	1.0	0.53	3.3	0.53	0.00022
Oral performance	7	1.1	0.64	3.4	0.53	0.00000

Table 2 shows the values for each descriptor of the rubric in the pre-test and post-test. Fluency and oral performance show more improvement with an increase in the mean from 1.9 to 3.4. In addition, pronunciation and fluency values incremented significantly although in the pretest the values were slightly lower than the other descriptors. The standard deviation does not differ on a large scale between 0.74 and 0.53 points. The p-value is 0.0 for all descriptors which is concluded as a significant difference in the development of speaking skills at the end of the innovation.

**Figure 1.**

*Pre-test and post-test mean comparison.*



Regarding the second research question: What is the student’s opinion toward using self-assessment? The researcher took excerpts from students’ answers to analyze the qualitative data from four participants. They were quite satisfied with the innovation and the responses were positive. For instance:

“The use of self-assessment helped me to measure my progress.” (S2)

“It was an opportunity of self-evaluating myself.” (S1)

“I received feedback from my teacher timely.” (S3)

“It helped me work with honesty and being more autonomous.” (S4)

Some of the responses presented a progressive aspect. For example:

“I could correct my mistakes when speaking” (S2)

“I was a little bit afraid of speaking” (S1)

As a consequence, most of the participants did a good review of the innovation. They are able to recognize that using self-assessment allows them to think about their work based on their weaknesses or strengths. On the other hand, some participants were unsure how to self-assess their work due to a lack of confidence in speaking.



### Discussion

After four weeks of the innovation, some findings appeared from the results. The objective of this study was to improve speaking skills through the use of a self-assessment strategy by doing creative activities for second graders. During the innovation, students recorded the dialogues to self-assess their work. It was noticeable that in the post-test the students got a high score in comparison to the pre-test. Furthermore, the learners during the self-assessment time, recognize their weaknesses and strengths in terms of use of language, pronunciation, fluency and oral performance. This answers the first question: *To what extent did self-assessment improve speaking skills during the innovation?*

In the same way, Richards (1992), stated that students get engaged in a task they are truly interested in, and they aim to carry it out in the target language. In other words, the presentation project used essential language and the necessary interactive tools to motivate students during the innovation. Besides, the positive results indicated that self-assessment also helped develop learners' autonomy which corresponds with Başak (2019), who argued that this practice reinforces students' self-sufficiency because they do not depend fully on the teacher's feedback.

About the second research question: What is the student's opinion toward using self-assessment? The findings revealed that students felt they up-graded their speaking skills after participating in the study; hence, they felt motivated.

Gardner (2000) argued that the use of a self-assessment tool provides the learner with immediate feedback to determine language proficiency and to reflect on learning strategies. Also, the use of technology to carry out this innovation was beneficial in the educational area in some ways. The activities were not flat, the students' participation was age-appropriate and thanks to the

Zoom application was possible to apply the innovation and the utilization of data collection instruments.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this project was to establish if self-assessment supports learners to promote their speaking abilities. The analysis of the results guides to the following conclusions: The application of self-assessment on second graders had an effective result in their speaking skills. In like manner, self-assessment influenced the motivation in students' learning by focusing their dedication on tasks and self-reflect to achieve their goals.

Therefore, it can be concluded that self-assessment is a powerful learning strategy in which students can assess their knowledge through encouragement that allows them to make judgments about their learning process. In addition to the advantages mentioned before, it is clear that Zoom has become an essential tool that has allowed teachers to contact students imparting knowledge about any educational topic, as happened in this case.

### **Limitations**

At the beginning, the implementation was arduous for the research and students. The school where I work did not allow me to develop the intervention in the classroom due to their policies. It was difficult to find students who wanted to participate voluntarily. Although the sample in this study is limited, the parents of the students who accepted showed me their support at all times and agreed their children could participate in this graduation project.

Also, some children did not have certain abilities to develop the tasks proposed in the lesson plan, due to this, I changed some activities for easier ones. Another limitation was the English level of some students for interpreting different instructions. Moreover, one of the problems was the

difficulty of language development in their mother tongue which delays the mastery of language skills.

Furthermore, some of the participants could not attend one or two classes because of some personal activities in the schedule provided by the teacher. Therefore, the lessons were revised quickly in the next session to maintain the balance. Besides, certain connection problems prevented the normal development of the class.

As for self-assessment, some participants were unable to differentiate effort from ability and consequently judge their performance based on the amount of effort they put into a task resulting in optimistic self-assessments.

### **Recommendations**

According to the number of participants, it is recommended to apply a similar project with a representative sample to compare the results. Besides, it is recommended to extend the period of a research study so that the researchers are able to detect developments or changes in the objectives of the target population.

Furthermore, teachers should use the self-assessment strategy to familiarize students with this practice so that they can be involved in the process of their performance. Likewise, inform parents about the benefits of self-assessment in children so that they learn to be self-sufficient in their work.

Finally, it is recommended to apply the innovation in face-to-face classes to take advantage of the academic environment and physical resources avoiding external noises and connectivity issues.

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**Appendix 1**

**Self-Assessment checklist**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 2**

**Presentation**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 3**

**Lesson Plan**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 4**

**Placement Test**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 5**

**Interview**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 6**

**Rubric**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 7**

**Evidence**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 8**

**E-portfolio**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 9**

**Pre and post grades**

Available upon request.