Self-Assessment to Improve Speaking Skill in A2 Students

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The acquisition of a new language is a complex process no matter the age of the learners. As Krashen (1982) proposed "Language learning is a complex process that involves the mind, body, and emotions" (p. 3). The speaking skill is essential for the proper communication. However, it tends to be relegated or forgotten when being learned. Students need to find a way to practice when learning by themselves and teacher must find new ways to improve students' speaking skill. Lewis (2015) said "learning a new language is not easy, but it is possible with hard work and dedication" (p. 13). It is collaborative work and every person involved in this process should do their best to accomplish their objectives. English, in this case, is important because of the necessities of communication among countries due to the fact that English is the language used for politics agreements.

Learners of a second language are not usually in an environment where they can have the opportunities to put in practice what they learn in their English lessons, so practicing is done just in classroom. Many students may start to think that it is not important to speak English because they do not have to use it in their daily activities. As Crystal (2003) noted "Learning a new language is like learning a new way of thinking" (p. 285). L2 learners need to find ways to practice. On the other hand, teachers have the job to encourage them to see beyond and implement activities that help students express their thoughts and feeling in this language because a language is better taught when this is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning (Krashen, 2013).

The present research was carried out in 3 weeks of classes in a private high school. The participants were young learners whose age range is from 15 to 16 years old and their English level is a possible A2. This research consisted on training students to self-assess, so they could follow the step of the research that are: the pre-assessment, assessment and the final task.

Literature Review

Self-assessment

Self-assessment is a fundamental aspect of education, enabling students to become independent, reflective, and lifelong learners (Hattie & Timperl, 2007). This aspect is a process in which learners evaluate their own learning progress and performance. It can be used in a variety of educational settings, from elementary school to university, so self-assessment can be a powerful tool for promoting learning, as it can help learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses, set goals, and track their progress.

There are many different ways to conduct self-assessment. Some common methods are reflection, self-test and portfolios, so it depends on the teacher to find ways to implement it, and self-assessment can be used in conjunction with other forms of assessment, such as teacher-made tests and quizzes. The effective conduct of self-assessment can help learners to become more engaged in their learning, take more responsibility for their own learning, and improve their academic performance (Boud & Molloy, 1996).

There are important benefits when self-assessing, for example, self-assessment can help learners to become more motivated to learn, as they are actively involved in the process of evaluating their own progress. Self-assessment can help learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses, set goals, and track their progress, so this can lead to improved learning outcomes (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

The effectiveness of self-assessment in language learning is supported in the findings of this study. Willis and Willis (2007) found that self-assessment strategies, such as setting learning goals, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, can enhance language learning outcomes in second language students. Supporting the findings of this study Al-Eryani and Al-Eryani (2012) stated that self-assessment can increase students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in speaking tasks.

Challenges are also present when students self-assess but teachers with solutions are ready to assist them whenever is possible. Lack of experience in self-assessing is a challenge everyone has to overcome in life, but with a training on how to effectively self-assess provided by a teacher this is no big deal. It is possible that students get confused when they do not know exactly if an answer is correct or not due to the subjectivity, so self-assessment can be subjective, and learners may be biased in their own favor as Brookhart (2008) noted "Self-assessment can be a challenging task, as it requires students to be honest with themselves about their strengths and weaknesses" (p. 101).

The solution for the subjectivity issue is a rubric, a specific rubric that can provide students with clear and objective criteria for self-assessing. Self-assessment can be time-consuming, as learners need to take the time to reflect on their learning and identify their strengths and weaknesses, the solution for this is to provide feedback, this feedback can help learners to identify areas where they need to improve (Carless, 2006).

Teaching speaking to A2 students

The ability to speak a language is crucial in today's globalized world, where communication is key to success. As an English language teacher, I have encountered many students at the A2 level who struggle with speaking. This essay aims to explore the strategies and techniques that can be used to teach speaking to A2 students, with references to relevant literature.

As Celce-Murcia (2001) explained that it is important to understand that speaking is a complex skill that involves not only linguistic knowledge but also social and cultural awareness. Therefore, it is essential to create a supportive and communicative classroom environment that encourages students to speak. According to Krashen (1985), "language learning is a social process, and learners need to be actively involved in interaction with others to develop their speaking skills" (p. 10).

One strategy that can be used to promote speaking skills is group work. This technique enables students to practice speaking with their peers and receive feedback on their performance. Additionally, it allows students to learn from each other and to develop their social and cultural awareness. For example, Ehrman and Oxford (1995) found that group work improved students' speaking accuracy, fluency, and complexity of their speech about grammar structure and vocabulary.

Another technique that can be used to teach speaking is role-play. This technique involves students taking on different roles and acting out a particular situation. This technique not only promotes speaking skills but also enables students to develop their creativity and empathy. For instance, Richards and Rodgers (2001) explained that role-play enhances students' linguistic ability and their ability to use language in context.

Furthermore, it is essential to incorporate authentic materials in speaking activities (Herrel & Jordan, 2015). Authentic materials refer to materials that are used in real-life situations, such as newspaper articles, TV shows, and podcasts. This technique enables students to learn language in context and to develop their listening and speaking skills. For example, Swain and Lapkin (2002) found that using authentic materials in speaking activities improved students' speaking accuracy and fluency.

Students should get feedback on their speaking performance. Feedback enables learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to develop their speaking skills. Additionally, feedback can be used to motivate learners and to promote self-reflection. For example, Ellis and Shintani (2014) said that feedback improves students' speaking accuracy and fluency.

Innovation

The innovation consisted in training students to self-assess in order to improve their speaking skill. The participants are all students of 2nd BGU whose English level is A2. This innovation took place in high school in Manabí, located in the central zone of the city. The

innovation was developed in three weeks with five teaching hours each as part of a normal learning unit where all the skills are studied, and their lessons were all presential. Specifically, the students pretended to be part of a travel agency. They chose a touristic city they wanted to talk about and searched information of different places like attractions and restaurants in that city. Each student impersonated someone from the travel agency and presented the city they chose and provided all the information to an audience.

During three weeks, participants were provided of the knowledge about the categories in the rubric and checklist they had to work with. Also, they learned the grammar topics from the unit that were simple present tense and simple past tense, and the vocabulary of the unit. The innovation was planned using an innovative instructional design for the unit (Appendix A). All of the activities presented in the backward design were classified into acquisition, meaning making or transfer, and they were developed to use all the content to fulfill the objective. In order to reinforce these activities, the teacher used games, rounds and chants.

The innovation was developed in three weeks divided in three days each week to have a total of one hundred twenty minutes per week. Each session or class the students had different activities with different purposes. In the lesson plan, activities for self-assessment, homework, reading, writing can be found.

During the first week, students learned how to self-assess by watching a video made by the teacher. The teacher played a video made by himself about Toronto city as an example of the final activity. The teacher self-assessed the monologue he did in the video using the checklist that was also shared with the students in the class. In this way, students understood how they had to self-assess their monologues. As homework, students had to finish creating the monologue about a city they chose and record it in a video of one minute, after that, they had to self-assess.

In the second week, students learned how to use the grammar required for the unit as it was simple present tense and simple past tense. They made the script for the presentation and

they corrected some mistakes from the previous task. With the grammar required they had to film themselves again as a homework and self-assess once more. Feedback was given in this step, so students could improve the script and the presentation of the monologue. Providing feedback was key for the participant to better understand the activity and to keep them motived (Shute, 2008).

In the third and last week, students reviewed vocabulary from the unit and had in-class practice with games and chants. They polished the grammar and vocabulary of the script and they practiced the monologue with the teacher, so they could be ready for the last video and self-assessment. Students presented their monologue in front of the class and the results of the innovation were visible.

Research Methodology

In this study, the self-assessment approach was utilized to improve the speaking skills in the participants who are students form high school as a part of an action research project. Action research is a systematic approach that aims to identify, solve problems and improve practices by collecting data and reflecting on one's own practice. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), action research is a cyclical process consisting of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In addition, action research offers the researchers and practitioners a clear and philosophically appealing way to make improvements, foster learning, and develop the individual and the organization (Cardno, 2023).

The researcher began with the planning stage, which involved defining the problem, developing research questions, and designing the self-assessment approach. The next stage was acting, which involved implementing the self-assessment approach and collecting data through pre- and post-assessments. The observing stage involved analyzing the data and identifying patterns and trends to determine the effectiveness of the self-assessment approach. Finally, the

reflecting stage involved reflecting on the findings and making adjustments to the approach as needed.

The research methodology in this study involved the application of a pre-assessment to establish the starting line of the students and their actual speaking abilities. After the pre-assessment, the next step was to apply the self-assessment approach follow by another self-assessment application in order measure the students' progress and improvement in their speaking abilities. In this research, qualitative and quantitative instruments were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the self-assessment approach in the students' performance in improving their speaking skills.

Research question:

- Does self-assessment impact speaking?

Participants

The present study involved 17 students whose age range is from 15 to 16 years old. They were in the second year of high school in a private school in Santa Ana, Manabí. At the beginning of the study, the students had an A2 English level according to the Common European Framework. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all of the participants of the study were homeschooled the previous year, so they had some inconveniences with the target language during the present school year. All of the participants in the study were Ecuadorians.

Instruments

The pre-task activity was executed to verify the level of English in the speaking ability of each student. Using a website called flipgrid, each student recorded a video talking about the city they chose, and they sent video to the teacher. After that, the students were trained to self-assess, and they used a checklist that was explained and provided by the teacher. Individually, students watched their own videos and they self-assed their monologue.

For the final task, the participants uploaded the final a video with their monologue with improvements from the feedback of the teacher and the self-assessment results. The teacher evaluated the recordings of the pre-task and the final task through a rubric, to verify the speaking skill level of the students. The criteria were: content, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation. This instrument was previously explained to the students during feedback to avoid any confusion. The descriptors range is from 1 to 5, being 5 the maximum grade to obtain.

Data Analysis

To carry out this analysis, the data collected through a rubric was used. The Microsoft Excel tool and a paired-sample-*t*-test were used to make a comparison between the pre and post-test results.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the investigation process, a letter was addressed to the highest authority of the Institution, which in this case is the principal. The students were also explained and prepared about the objective of the development of this study in the field of education.

Results

For this innovation, the sample were 17 students that completed the activities for the pre-assessment, and the final task. The students obtained different grades from 1 to 5 according to the rubric designed for this purpose.

The self-assessment implementation has helped the participants in more than one way. They are more engaged in self-evaluation, they are better at setting goals, and they reflect on their own progress developing metacognitive skills, a growth mindset, and a sense of ownership over their learning. Self-assessment had impact on the students´ speaking and in their confidence.

According to the results obtained from the t-test, with a calculated t-statistic of -15.051 and 15 degrees of freedom, the p-value for a one-tailed test is 9.24975E-11 and for a two-tailed

test is 1.84995E-10. These p-values are much smaller than the alpha level of 0.05, indicating strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no difference in means and conclude that there is a significant difference in means between the pre and post grades.

The table one contains the grades and means of each of the students corresponding to the pre-assessment task. Besides, some other important data is found like the median, the standard derivation, minimum grade as well as the maximum grade.

Table 1

Results self-assessment/pre-task

	Content_Pre	Content_Post	Grammar_Pre	Grammar_Post	Vocabulary_Pre	Vocabulary_Post	Pronunciation_Pre	Pronunciation_Post
N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
Mean	1.88	3.59	2.18	3.71	2.24	3.71	1.76	3.24
Median	2.00	3.00	2.00	4.00	2.00	3.00	1.00	3.00
Standard deviation	0.781	1.00	0.951	0.849	0.903	0.849	1.09	1.15
Min	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	3.00	1.00	2.00
Max	3.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	5.00

Discussion

The mean difference indicates that the post-test results are better than before the implementation of the self-assessment. So, according to these results, positive changes are visible, and it can be said that self-assessment improved the students' speaking skill. Also, participants were more involved in their role as learners by setting learning goals, developing metacognitive skills and reflecting on their own progress. Al-Eryani and Al-Eryani (2012) found that the use of self-assessment can increase students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in speaking tasks, and that supports the findings of this present innovation.

Conclusions

To conclude, this study focused on investigating how effective self-assessment can be to improve A2 students' speaking skill in a high school in Santa Ana, Manabí. It was presented in this study that the acquisition of a new language is indeed a complex process and this can become a serious challenge when learners try to communicate orally, for this reason, self-assessment was implemented and it had a positive impact on the participants' oral communication. The data was collected from the pre-task and the final task, and a rubric that was adapted from the Cambridge Starters level assessment scales, so the participants' speaking abilities could be assessed.

The positive impact can be translated as a significant improvement in the speaking abilities of the participants according to the data analysis and as this is evidenced in the scores on the speaking rubric. The results of this study are consistent with previous research that has found that the self-assessment approach constitutes a relevant part of the teaching-learning process since it has some advantages such as: it enhances student motivation, it provides deeper understanding of subject matter, and it develops lifelong learning skills..

On the other hand, it is important to mention that to implement self-assessment, students must be trained to self-assess properly. In this case, the participants received information and examples from the teacher. One of the examples was a monologue made by the teacher about the city of Rome. It was the same activities the participants had to perform but about a different city, and this was presented to the participants in a video. After the presentation of the video, the teacher self-assessed himself using the checklist in front of the class, so the participants had a clear idea of what they had to do next. However, self-assessment can sometimes cause confusion in students because they may overestimate or underestimate their performance that is why the proper use of the check list es vital for this process.

Limitations

During the implementation of the innovation, many challenges were overcome. For example, it was the first time students were trained to self-assess properly and some of them were quite confused nevertheless with patience and attentiveness they understood why self-assessment is important and as Costa and Kallick wrote "Self-assessment is not just about being able to identify strengths and weaknesses. It's also about being able to set goals, track progress, and make adjustments to your learning." (p. 33) The confusion some students presented was due to their lack of experience when self-assessing.

Students needed information of the activities they were about to perform, so they were provided with different sources of information like slides, pdf document and websites. They also needed examples of the activities for example a video was created of the teacher talking about Rome which was presented in class, so they had this access to video and they could use it as a guide to create their own video. The difficulty here was about having everything ready from the first day of the innovation application.

Another complication came from fripgrip, it is a website that allows people to film videos and it was useful during the innovation but it was not running with some of the participants' computer due to internet issues or the computers were outdated. These participants found ways by their own to fulfill the assignments.

The innovation was no easy job, but there was no big obstacle to overcome. The participants were willing to do their best and the teacher worked hard to help them improve their speaking abilities.

Recommendations

Students need to be trained so they can self-assess, and this is crucial job to do. Planning the activities properly is quite helpful, and instead of just explaining how to self-assess. Showing students how this can be done is interactive, so the participants do not get bored. Once they see how to do it, they can start trying by themselves. After all that, feedback is the key to continue.

Feedback allows students to identify problems, be motivated and make better decisions with the information provided.

Another important issue is to provide students with the information and materials they need to review in order to fulfill the assignments. Some students need to double check the requirements to be confident in submitting their presentation or homework. On the other hand, the creation of real example from the teacher of what they have to do is crucial for them to not get overwhelm or frustrated at the moment to fulfill their work.

When implementing technology in the activities that students have to fulfil, there are many aspects teachers must be aware of, for instance, not every student possesses the equipment or the internet connection that is needed at home. Providing students possible solutions for expected complications can make students feel more confident and motivated to continue with their assignments.

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Appendix A

Backward design of the innovation

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Rubrics for Self-assessment to improve speaking in A2 students.

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Statistics Report

Available upon request.

Appendix D

E-porfolio

Available upon request.