



**The Influence of Formative Peer- Assessment to Develop Speaking Fluency  
for 7th grade EFL Students**

Quimí Mora Samuel Eduardo

**Coordinator:** María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Research Report

**Advisor:** Msc Rodrigo Antonio Guerrero Segura

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-19-N°.140-2020. Cohort 2022 - 2023. Author's email: [samuel.quimi@casagrande.edu.ec](mailto:samuel.quimi@casagrande.edu.ec). Guayaquil, November 12, 2023.

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Since speaking is one of the most fundamental productive skills around English learning, peer assessment has been explored in function of an active students' involvement during skill acquisition process. Moreover, this kind of assessment requires feedback or grades or both to their peers on a product or a performance based on the criteria which may be determined by the students themselves for that product (Douglas, 2010, p. 451). Thus, teachers offer a guidance tutoring function role, while students start an active role since "students can learn a lot through peer evaluations and by doing them they also automatically learn how to improve their own speaking" (Usman et al., 2018, p. 324).

Based on this fact, the classroom becomes an ideal place able to produce the most exercises to interact among students with their teachers' tutoring function. According to experts, "curriculum for teaching speaking skill should expose learners to authentic, practical settings for speaking English and encourage active learner involvement in the lesson" (Talley & Hui-ling, 2014, p. 38). Due to this factor, students can become main characters in their academic progress using an innovative skill. Thus, the aim is not only getting a grade on students' performance but also improving their own real-life speaking topic contexts based on the actual education perspectives.

Although this detail, difficulties of obtaining successful speaking learning outcomes are provided during interaction activities. An important number of students display a lack of interest and intrinsic motivation, which causes a low interaction process during spoken production activities and as a consequence, students do not fulfill the objectives and the expectations of the class.

## Literature Review

### Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is a set of activities through which individuals make judgments about the work of others to generate a better interrelation process among students (Reinholz, 2016, p. 305). Based on this, peer assessment in speaking skill can be a fundamental strategy in terms of developing the skills and its proficiency in the class.

Language skills assessment in the learning process requires a selection from teachers to look for a speaking skill improvement. As Brandsford et al. (2000) explained, acquiring new knowledge follows a “progressive formalization” process, which starts from their basic prior knowledge until their meaningful explanations as a mixture of words and symbols. In addition, instructors must use multiple standards to guide learners to achieve their goals. As a result, students exhibit self-confidence, significant performance, and metacognitive skills improvements.

In terms of benefits, peer assessment can have a positive impact among students’ thinking skill as well as self-confidence development. According to Douglas (2010), peer assessment promotes students awareness of learning goals and standards. Furthermore, it is a basic factor to comprehend that peer assessment promotes a high proficiency level in students’ performances and decision making based on specific criteria, displaying comfortable aspects for themselves while developing new skills.

Likewise, peer assessment can be useful for students and teachers while improving their performances in many activities. Cheng and Warren (2005) stated that language learners are not only train in terms of reliability from the language proficiency of their peers, but also to evaluate confidently their own language skill. A similar statement was mentioned by Ahangari et al. (2013) “when assessment criteria are clearly set, peer assessment will enable students to make judgments of their peers and themselves” (p. 7).

Furthermore, some students prefer peer assessment to teachers' assessment due to a higher students' active participation to display and exchange their ideas (Wenny & Fajar, 2019). This is a reason why peer assessment is a good strategy for implementation in EFL classes with the determination of solving different negative aspects such as lack of confidence and nervousness. El-Senousy (2020) affirmed that peer assessment provides an advantage because it allows students to evaluate their peers' works and identify features and criteria in their own works and the ones which are evaluated. Indeed, the fact of creating a conscious environment with a meaningful interaction to develop values such as responsibility, and empathy, as well as a more critical and analytic aspect among peers improves the students' learning process.

In contrast to the mentioned authors, peer assessment may take too much time for teachers because it requires time for planning, teaching, observing, and training students about assessing (Falchikov, 2001). Based on this fact, the number of students can be considered a factor to take into account. Despite this, students need to be able to communicate their comments to their peers as well as provide constructive feedback about their learning process using good communication skills. Additionally, reliability of the results can be affected due to facts such as feelings of friendship and sympathy toward partners. Related to this topic, students' contributions during peer assessment can be an aid in the development of a second language proficiency (Bostock, 2000). If this is not achieved properly, this kind of assessment might not be accurate since students are not experts, and grading would not be as real as what was expected.

## **Speaking**

On the other hand, speaking is one of the main aims of developing productive skills among the English learning community. Alamri (2018) exposed that speaking skill is a complex oral ability that requires many practice sessions to develop a high communicative proficiency. Likewise, the idea of learning transference into real-life situations can become a valid process in their active learning process to ensure students' self-confidence as well as a higher level of language proficiency development.

In terms of education, speaking is part of the four macro skills that teachers face during the process of teaching English as a foreign language. Based on that fact, this skill is essential for effective communication with people of different cultural backgrounds. As a result, the development of this linguistic skill allows students to interact each other and share experiences and cultural issues with foreigners (Ali et al., 2015, p.3). For this reason, EFL teachers need to develop their students speaking skills to communicate effectively in a real context.

Likewise, speaking is essential in terms of interaction, ideas exchanging and communication with foreign and local speakers using the target language, so it takes place as a fundamental role that tutors provide to students a real-context productive skill situation as well. In terms of fluency, Harmer (2015) highlighted that fluency refers to focusing on the content of speech to communicate as effectively as possible.

## **Innovation**

The innovation consisted in an oral interaction conversation about a show review in pairs related to what they saw at a circus performance. The name of the unit was "Smart Choices".

The implementation of this innovation took two weeks in terms of three and a half hours per week for 35 minutes each one (synchronous sessions and two asynchronous

sessions via zoom). This study was carried out in a school from Guayaquil, Guayas province in Ecuador. The two-week lesson plan was socialized to students and parents through the academic platform Moodle, as well as the feedback after each activity developed in the class. During this time, the participants had the opportunity to review and learn vocabulary about circus tricks and details and were able to ask and answer questions in pairs using different grammatical tenses to model. For this purpose, the lesson plan was prepared using an instructional design for the unit to have an outline of the students' learning outcomes, ask and answer questions, and provide vocabulary from the unit (See appendix 1).

Students were required to work on different pair tasks based on speaking and other skills and were trained to provide peer feedback after each asynchronous session, after which they also received feedback and comments from the teacher. The objective of this innovation process was to ask and answer questions in a conversation about what they saw at the circus. Thus, the different peers formed around the classroom had a conversation about what they saw at the circus, asking and answering questions to one another in a conversation.

This innovation allowed students to experience how to assess their classmates as well as develop aspects such as critical thinking and skills proficiency. Moreover, they learned the use of instruments to measure their partners' speaking improvement such as checklists and rubrics.

### **Research Methodology**

This project was implemented through action research. Clark et al. (2020) stated that action research is a fundamental process in educational research because it is taken as a measurement guide among education professionals to improve and examine their pedagogy and practice inside the classroom. It can promote a diversity of activities able to increase the students' active participation in the educational system. The research question that promoted a quantitative data in this innovation project is: 1) To what extent does the implementation of

peer-assessment will influence speaking skills performance among seventh grade school students in a private school in Guayaquil?”, whereas the qualitative data in this innovation project is related to the question: 2) What were students’ limitations on peer assessment during the implementation?”

In order to work in the innovation process, the instruments that were used to collect quantitative data for research questions were pretest-posttest, a rubric, and a checklist. The instrument that was used to collect qualitative data for research questions was an open-ended-question survey.

According to Roberts and Ilard (2003), the function of pre and posttest rubrics was to evaluate students’ progress and measure the desired aspects to value speaking production. Thus, a pre-test consisted in a conversation about their famous movie for a minute, which was graded by students and the teacher using a rubric. Then, they created their project based on famous circus tricks, which was graded progressively using the checklist to assure students’ development, and at the end of the project, students did a survey to express their opinions and perspectives of their participation. This process covered two-week practice with three and a half hours per week using the unit book, and considered as a formal assessment.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were a group of 16 students of 7th grade, aged 11-12 years old at a private school in Guayaquil. From this category of students, the 43.75% were girls and the 56.25% were boys. These students decided to participate with the consent of their parents. The school is in an urban area in the south of the city. Most students are from A2.1 to A2.2 level.

### **Instruments**

The instruments provided to collect the quantitative and qualitative information answer the two research questions: 1) “To what extent does the implementation of peer-

assessment will influence speaking skills performance among seventh grade school students in a private school in Guayaquil?”, and 2) “What were students’ limitations on peer assessment during the implementation?” The pretest-posttest, the rubric, the checklist, as well as the survey were checked, revised and approved by two experts in the field at Universidad Casa Grande.

The first instrument used during this innovation process was the pretest and posttest, which had as a goal to use vocabulary appropriate for the audience, using Grammar Tenses (Simple Past – Simple Present), Comparatives and Superlatives during their speech. and show a good understanding of parts of the topic. Likewise, at the end of the project, during post-test, students defined vocabulary words about circus tricks and words that might be new to most of the audience, showing a full understanding of the topic by following the conversation with their peer, asking, and answering some different questions without any problem.

These pieces of information were graded with a rubric, adapted from the Cambridge Flyers A2 level for the speaking skills of students. The instrument already described was used to measure some criteria topics, such as Vocabulary, Grammar and Spelling, Pronunciation and Content, categorized on excellent (10 points), very good (9 points), good (8 points), needs improvement (7 points), and did not meet the required criteria (6 points) to place students’ performance. Brookhart and Chen (2014) stated that rubrics are an efficient, clear, and easy way to focus learning goals, criteria, and performance descriptions.

During the development of the implementation activity, checklists were used to assure an appropriate students development until the post-test era. The goal about using this instrument is to use an evaluation in pairs, with a scale of Yes / No / Not Yet to evaluate each partner's performance with criteria, in terms of Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation and Content (see the checklist in Appendix 2). Tek Ong et al. (2017) mentioned that “Observation checklist can be used to facilitate useful observation in a variety of ways.” (p.33-45).



At the end of the project, students expressed their opinions and perspectives of their participation using an open-ended survey with four questions about the different project stages, such as: 1: Was the project an effective peer-assessment and fluency strategy? Explain your answer, 2: What was the students' learning experience during the implementation of the project?, 3: Can you describe one aspect to continue working on about peer assessment and fluency?, 4: What did I learn during the elaboration of the project's final product?. The positive and negative comments were analyzed taken into consideration and implemented to know students' limitations and experience about the innovation and its application.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data was organized in order to answer the research question: To what extent does the implementation of peer-assessment will influence speaking skills performance among seventh grade school students in a private school in Guayaquil? The grades from pre and posttest were registered in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and descriptive statistics such as: minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation, were run to compare the data in the pretest and posttest using a paired sample *t*-test with the Analytics Tool Kit.

Likewise, inferential statistics like *p*-value was calculated to measure the impact of the innovation unit on the students. This operation was performed using the calculator of the website GraphPad Software. Similarly, the rubric information obtained during these stages in the project, were calculated using Microsoft Excel with the Analytics Tool Kit and the data of the checklist was organized and analyzed into categories students detailed using Yes / Sometimes / Not yet answers.

To answer the second research question: What were students' limitations on peer assessment during the implementation?, an open-ended survey was created to analyze students' answers and categorize them into positive or negative opinions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Stokes (2020) mentioned that “any research project undertaken in a classroom with children generates ethical encounters in its iteration, which merit reflection and analysis.” (p. 11). First, the researcher asked for permission to the authorities such as principal, vice principal and English coordinator to apply the pedagogical innovation in the school. Later, the author explained to the voluntary participants the objectives, activities of the research, as well as getting consent and authorization from the parents or relatives. Besides, the author signed a document with the purpose of protecting the privacy and anonymity of the research participants.

### Results

Results are presented around the research questions. They are described below:

**Research questions 1.** To what extent does the implementation of peer-assessment influence speaking skills performance among seventh grade school students in a private school in Guayaquil? The data collected was systematized to provide the results from the pretests and post-test applications. The summary of the results is described below in table 1:

**Table 1.**  
*Descriptive statistics*

| N  |          | Min  | Max   | M    | SD  |
|----|----------|------|-------|------|-----|
| 16 | Pretest  | 6.00 | 8.00  | 7.87 | .55 |
|    | Posttest | 8.00 | 10.00 | 9.28 | .73 |

Note: Summary of results of the pre and post-test

According to the information, pretest and posttest results helped the researcher to check, apply the innovation and to validate the effectiveness of peer assessment. The mean score of the pretest was 7.87. However, in the post-test, the mean was 9.28, displaying an improvement of 1.41 points. Likewise, results indicate that the maximum score in the pre-test was 8, but in the post-test was 10 which was the highest one. As well as in the pre-test, the minimum score was 6. The difference between the means was  $MD=1.41$ .

To determine if the difference between the means was statistically significant, the researcher ran a paired sample *t*-test. This operation was performed using the *t*-test calculator of the website GraphPad Software. Results are presented below:

**Table 2.**

***Descriptive Statistics of the Self-Assessment Pre-test and Post-test***

| PRE-TEST |      |      |    | POST-TEST |      |      |    |
|----------|------|------|----|-----------|------|------|----|
| MEAN     | SD   | SEM  | N  | MEAN      | SD   | SEM  | N  |
| 7.87     | 0.55 | 0.13 | 16 | 9.28      | 0.73 | 0.18 | 16 |

Note: Summary of results of the pre and post-test

Based on the information obtained into the unpaired *t*-test results, *p*-value and statistical significance displayed that the two-tailed *p*-value is less than 0.0001. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be statistically significant. Likewise, in terms of confidence interval, the mean of Pre-test minus Post-test equals -1.4100, which reflects a 95% confidence interval of this difference from -1.8767 to -0.9433

From the information obtained on the results of the descriptive and inferential statistics, it is stated that innovation had a positive effect on participants with the evidence that the implementation of peer-assessment could improve speaking skill on students, having a meaningful result in the educational field.

**Research question 2.** What were students' limitations on peer assessment during the implementation? The summary of the results is described through positive and negative comments provided by the students, who analyzed, took into consideration and implemented to know students' limitations and experience about the innovation and its application.

The results showed that student's perspectives were negative before the innovation, as the student #4 who mentioned "*I couldn't express my ideas due to the lack of vocabulary*". Some students did not accept to practice by their classmates as student #15 pointed out "*It was difficult for me to practice because my partner didn't want to have extra practice sessions.*"

Likewise, most of them mentioned they felt nervous at the beginning of the innovation project, expressed through expressions such as “at the beginning, I made many mistakes in grammar” as the student #1 already pointed out. On the other hand, the students expressed different opinions about the innovation, like student #2, who said “I liked the new vocabulary words about movies and books”. Student #5 loved the experience due to the fact to “Talking to my friend in English, without our teacher’s guide, was really interesting and curious”.

As part of the teachers’ reflection, it can be noticed that the process of developing this project was generating a positive atmosphere among pupils, due to the fact of sharing experiences among other classmates, and talk about their likes in terms of movies, books, and others. To sum up, peer-assessment innovation process in the classroom generates positive opinions among students with the purpose to reduce fear and lack of motivation for developing speaking through activities able to develop proficiency as well as confidence while talking about everyday topics with their peers.

### **Discussion**

Results obtained in this study to answer the first research question, to what extent does the implementation of peer-assessment influence speaking skills performance among seventh grade school students in a private school in Guayaquil? showed that peer assessment achieved an improvement in their speaking skills. After the innovation, it was evident that the peer assessment of students’ own interests improved their speaking skills. These findings agree with the results of Wenny and Fajar (2019). They highlighted that peer-assessment usage offers a positive effect with the purpose of improving speech.

Similarly, in terms of answering the second research question, the survey made by them exposed that approximately 77% of the students found peer assessment as a very useful detail the implementation of peer assessment in their lessons. These findings are similar to

Cheng and Warren (2005), who stated that language learners not only train in terms of reliability from the language proficiency of their peers, but also to evaluate confidently their own language skill.

In addition, the survey revealed that peer assessment involved terms such as students' pronunciation improvement, interaction among students as well as English level improvement. From the information already obtained, the process of developing this project generated a positive atmosphere among pupils, due to the fact of sharing experiences among other classmates, and talk about their likes in terms of movies, books, and others. These findings coincided with the ones of Chen (2015). In addition, this researcher established rubrics and checklists as a clear form to determine learning objectives, criteria, and performance descriptors in an effective way to become a successful guide for students when peer-assessing. Based on this fact, the changes are not only useful for students but also for teachers to accompany pupils for continuous support using an established criteria.

In conclusion, the use of peer assessment combined with innovative and meaningful activities can become into valid strategies to have students' interaction to one another inside and outside the classroom, increasing their self- confidence and encouraging them to speak.

### **Conclusions**

Peer-assessment can generate a high proficiency in terms of oral communication, coherence, and organization of oral message. Overall, it was showed as another positive aspect that during and after the application of the innovation, students developed other skills such as critical thinking, reasoning as well as self-confidence, showed before, during and after the performance of the project as well as displayed among different activities from the subject inside and outside the classroom.

This research study found out as an objective that speaking is one of the most difficult skills to develop when learning a new foreign and second language, as well as identify how

peer assessment can influence the students' speaking performances. This research study also found out that feeling comfortable during speaking skills acquisition in a new language is quite strange. This is because students feel anxious and demotivated, so it takes substantial practice to master it. Thus, this methodology was applied with the aim to observe that students felt confidence in their performances because their classmates were the assessors rather than the teacher.

This aligns with the theory reviewed in the literature part section of this research study emphasizes the benefits of peer assessment on speaking because facilitates continuous learning throughout life. In addition, this study involved interesting experiences for students. Likewise, peer assessment achieved integrity, tolerance and respect between pupils, displaying an active participation in their learning process to provide positive comments addresses to their peers' performance including. This research study also provided the real fact that the participation from students was very important because it contributed to the students' speaking improvement during this innovation.

Similarly, and after the application of the problem, the implementation of peer-assessment in combination with a checklist and rubric displayed to be useful techniques to improve oral skills among students as well as develop their confidence to speak in another language inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, pretest and posttest evidence using the rubric during this study revealed that students speaking performances grades improved using these techniques. This reflects the real fact that the teacher's goal is not only to improve students' grades but make them understand and use the language properly.

To summarize, the application of this study was part of students' speaking and personal development from the beginning until the end of the implementation of the innovation. It was found out that the students experienced the benefits of peer assessment as well as overcame the difficulties and problems identified before and the results. Although

they expressed lack of confidence and a stressful class environment during the first practices, peer assessment reflected in a strategy to encourage self-assessment, with a positive effect on students' development showed that at the end of the research study, they felt more confident in their performances.

### **Limitations**

A limited period of time provided by the school did not allow to go deeper in the exploration of this study. This project was applied during the second quimester, with just a couple of weeks and sixteen students. The short class hour time periods interfered on the process. It was not possible to work with students using extra activities to check proficiency because they had to continue the curriculum on other subjects in English with different content and vocabulary, which caused a short period of interrelation with the innovation project.

In addition, peer assessment in speaking embodies some other aspects that were not considered in this study, for example, non verbal communication. However, they used a live interaction and real life atmosphere where they were able to transmit the message with an assertive and appropriate scenarios.

### **Recommendations**

This study was executed with a minimum sample (16 participants). It is recommended for future researchers to apply their innovation projects on a wider participants sample, considering an integration with other subjects to optimize results. In addition, this innovation research suggests that other researchers could apply peer assessment activities with research methods like questionnaires or checklists as part of grading process. Thus, it is necessary to represent a real life topic proficiency using research methods to evaluate in pairs, and other performance criteria in the rubric could be added, for example: costumes, creativity, body language, intonation, and gestures, among others. As a final

recommendation, the different roleplays performed by students could be part of an English festival, where students could demonstrate their knowledge, progress and at the same time, they become an inspiration to acquire a second language among other students.

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**Appendix 1**

**Backwards Design Plan**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 2**

**Rubric and Checklist**

Available upon request.

**Appendix 4**

**Open-ended survey**

Available upon request.