



Self-Assessment to Improve Speaking Skill in A2 Students

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In today's world the importance of English is known to almost everyone. Much of this communication nowadays is carried to others in this language since English is known globally as the exchange language. This exchange of communication happens in different fields of knowledge. English has become a language of international commerce and trade (Ahmad, 2016).

English learners find difficulties improving their speaking skill. For non-native speakers, speaking becomes difficult because vocabulary most of the time is limited, making for speaker difficult trying to express themselves effectively even though by doing one on one conversations that may require basic or vast use of English. Most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak (Ur, 1996).

For many learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) speaking is challenging because grammar is different in their native language so learner may think how to speak something in their native language but in English becomes challenging leading to on and off motivation in practicing speaking in English.

Student's speaking at national level has not had the expected development. One of the causes is the fact that students lack the influence of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in their lives. Constant use of mother tongue (L1) creates the disadvantage of not being able to bring the use of English in real life communication considering that English is a compulsory subject (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). In a recent study conducted by Education First (EF) on English proficiency index, Ecuador's 2022 ranking fell from previous year's order of 81 (Low Proficiency Level) to 82 (Low Proficiency level; Education First, 2022).

The study demonstrates how self-assess help students into improving their speaking skill. Boud (1995) stated that: Self- assessment encourages student commitment while learning about a subject: comprehending, deciding, and defending judgments. In other words, students become more involved in the learning process.

Literature Review

The capacity to speak correctly allows students to have effective and direct communication with each other's by sharing ideas, thoughts, or knowledge in a spontaneous way. Mart (2012, p. 91) stated that "Speaking is being capable of speech, expressing or exchanging thoughts through using language".

Speaking is not only important for students in Ecuador but also for teachers as well considering that most of the teachers are non-native English speakers, the teacher's objective is to improve student's speaking skills by training them. Lessard-Clouston (2017) suggested that teachers who are non-native speakers share a joy with their students which is sharing their learning as they teach and motivates their student into language learning and speaking.

Content-Based Learning

Content based learning is intended to be an educational model that promotes learning about different fields of knowledge, this occasionally is from the student interest starting from science projects to news or films. Student learn about any different topic using the language their trying to learn, rather than their native language (British Council, 2010).

Content-based learning goal is to provide to language learners knowledge in content and in language. Content-based instruction is "the teaching of language through exposure to content that is interesting and relevant to learners" (Brinton, 2003, p. 201). Based on the previous quote

is important to mention that CBI means that students learn and improve their communicative competence while acquiring context of learning about certain topics.

Self-Assessment

Providing students, the capacity of understanding their weaknesses and their strengths is what self- assess is all about. Vos (2000) saw assessment as providing feedback to the students on their learning process. This previous statement is not only meant for students in their school periods but also in their lives because it summarizes the fact that students start to realize their own needs or fields for improvement in areas like their professional development. For language learners' strengths and weaknesses are an important part of their learning process (Boud & Falchikov, 1989).

Development in cognitive factor is consider to be an advantage on self-assessment application in class, students become more effective deciding based on their strengths or their weaknesses, how to apply their learning gives them autonomy in other words students become capable of noticing and giving corrective feedback while interacting but it does not mean that it makes the teacher not part of the process. Self-assessment is about students developing their learning skills. It is not about individuals giving themselves marks or grades. In addition, it is not about supplanting the role of teachers (Boud, 1995, p.17).

Self-assessment helps the teacher to create the necessary environment that most of the time is missing inside the classroom, in some cases is necessary for students to engage in different topics and participating in class for this to happen which is the goal is necessary good rapport and motivation for speaking with no pressure of scores. Developing rapport and positive

environment inside the classroom has been associate to favorable outcome for students, stimulating students and reducing student concerns (Ellis, 2004).

The application of self-assessment has its disadvantages as well. Validity and reliability may become an issue under the use of self-assessment (Burns, 2010). Students and teachers have different opinions while monitoring activities or progress. Leach (2012) stated “Students prefer and expect to be assessed by experts and see it as the teachers’ responsibility” (p. 19). Those opinions can affect the progress of students, becoming lost in the teaching learning process and not correcting or improving their mistakes because they do not think they are receiving the expected help.

Most of the students are used to being assessed by their teachers, the application of self-assess is a new concept for students, if students do not understand why or how they are doing what they are doing, students become frustrated and will not do it at all. It is important to take the time to explain the reasons behind the implementation of the new learning strategy and then its benefits. With the help of a rubric, or a checklist, and practice, students can self-assess any aspect of their classwork including a sustained monologue. Students who have engaged conscientiously with self- assessment, and then receive feedback from a tutor on how objectively they have self- assessed, take the feedback very seriously (Race, 2001 p.13).

Innovation

In this study participants were explained what is self-assessment and the importance of its application. The goal of this innovation was to help students to improve their speaking skill and use their understanding to stablish conversation and give opinions about outdoor activities according to their level which was A2 level. This study was carried out in a 4-week lesson plan

which included a total of 4 hours per week, adding up a total of 16 synchronous sessions for participants to actively engage with learning objectives.

Some common errors from previous units were that students were not able to provide dialogues but just simple answers; sometimes repeating what other students said before with no intention of developing their own response. They were just finishing an unwanted task.

Before starting with the innovation, in week 1, a pre-assessment was done to understand and record participant's level of speaking in English. After the pre-test, self – assessment task was incorporated, during the first week, teacher's role was to familiarize and guide students to activities. According to Ur (1996, p.120), “Classroom activities that develop learner's ability to express themselves through speech would therefore seem an important component of a language course”.

Second and third week more complex activities were introduced. Looking to engage speaking skill of students. Biggs (1999), stated that: Assessment was lined up to a course meant educational outcomes and a mean in which learning objectives can be monitored. Assignments were explained to participants in advance so they could understand the goal of each assignment. he teacher trained students on how to use the rubric to self-assess, provided with feedback week by week, and started discussions with students for improving their work. Black and William (1998), motivated teachers to use questioning and forums as an opportunity to increase students' understanding.

The final week was dedicated to evaluate students based on posttest. (Appendix A). According to Council of Europe (2018, p. 69), “A2 level students can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines. likes/dislikes or short

series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list”. This was the core of the posttest that consisted in speaking a 1-minute presentation. It was graded using a rubric.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted as an Action Research, study considering that the author of this study is directly involved in it. Action research is an analytical process that pursue improving issues that affect the lives of people every day (Stringer, 2008). This action research study applied both quantitative and qualitative instruments to evidence: what was the impact of self-assessment on student’s speaking?

Participants

This study was composed by 30 students from 10 EGB level on English A2 level from a public institution. The ages of participants varied between 14 to 16 years. 70% of the classroom were composed by men and 30% were women, all participants were Spanish native speakers who self-identified also as Mestizos

From the participants, 85% of the students were part of a low economic status with access to technology, while the remaining 15% belonged to a low economic status with almost no access to technology. About 90% of students had been in the same school so they were familiar with the learning process and almost all of them had the same English level, 10% were new students and were not so familiar with the learning process and from that group 2% even though were new demonstrate a higher level compared to their classmates.

Instruments

For this study, students self-assessed to improve their speaking while using a rubric and the checklist (Appendix B). The rubric (Appendix C) and checklist were validated by experts in teaching English as well as an expert in the field of instructional design. The rubric was piloted in the first week of this study where students had to speak about topics discussed in class where the Rubric became helpful to understand participants level. Rubrics are a way to make learning outcome explicit for learners (Brookhart, 2018).

To measure to what extent the effect of self-assessment improved speaking, the following aspects were evaluated from a scale 0 to 10, zero being the lowest score and ten being the highest score. The rubric chosen for this study is an analytic rubric. In an analytic rubric, the teacher scores individual parts of the product first, then sums individual scores to obtain a final score (Moskal, 2000; Nitko, 2001).

The pretest and summative assessments during this study were monitored. Evaluating various aspects in different assignments such as: comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, fluency. The impact of self-assessment in participants was either positive or negative measured through results on checklist and observation on their attitude during the application of this study as well. The assessment plan should help students "guide their work along the way" (Schack, 1994, p. 39).

For the posttest, a final task was given as a formative assessment or evaluation. The students received the necessary feedback during this study. The moment the final task was done, participants were ready for it. The goal for the task was that students were capable in front of outsiders of the classroom to give a detailed 1- minute presentation of their preferences with outdoor entertainment during holidays or travelling going according to the academic units

making this task authentic for participants. (Appendix D) shows the difference between pretest and posttest once students received feedback about their work.

Rubric

The main intention of the rubric was to help students to self-assess their activities. The rubric used was implemented in accordance with Common European Framework of References for Languages and adaptation of A2 level evaluation scales of Council of Europe (CEFR, 2018). The rubric's goal was for students to improve the quality of production, grammar, fluency, pronunciation and intonation. Rubric is a tool to evaluate work quality from students based on performances from excellent to poor (Schafer, 2004).

Data Analysis

The analysis was done in Microsoft Excel using Analytics tools pack. The validity of the pretest and posttest rubrics has been supported by additional investigations. The results will be presented as a graph and will specifically answer the research questions. Descriptive statistics like mean, minimum, maximum, standard deviation, and effect size will be computed after the recommendation has been implemented.

The information gathered from this study was entered to Excel, a sample sustained monologue was done in class as the pretest, the information was analyzed and compare between scores from the pre and posttest this data was shown in a document helping to determinate if student had progress through the application of self-assessment alongside content-based learning for improving speaking skill.

Ethical Considerations

This research strictly followed ethical standards, consent letters were sent to the institution, also consent letters were sent to parents and respective authorities gave their approval for the conduction of the project, participants also were informed of the purpose of the study and its objectives. The researcher compromise to keep confidentiality and only use the collected data of this research for this study. According to Ravid (2000), “when you research your own practice, you should ensure the rights, welfare, and well-being of the study’s participants” (p. 227).

Results

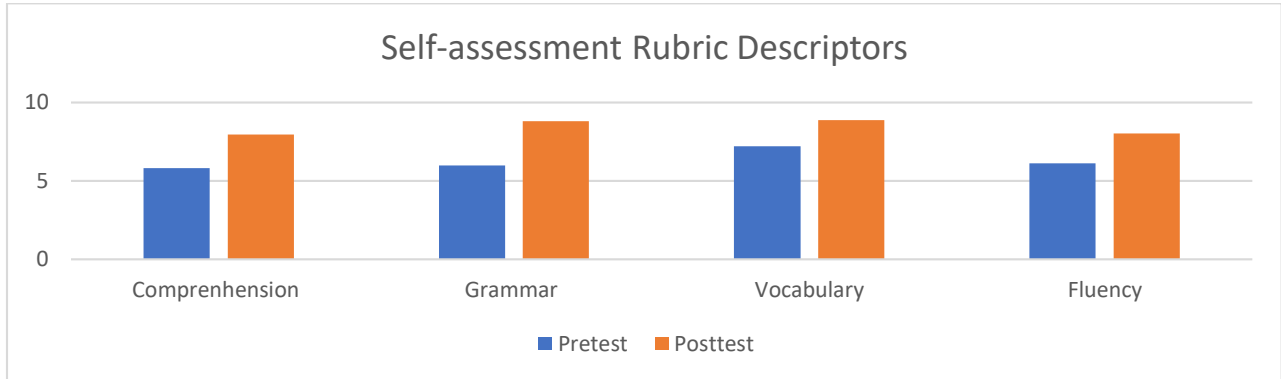
This section shows the outcome of the research through graphics and tables to present data. Participant’s progress was determinate from the beginning until the end of the process. This section agrees with questions and other instruments that were previously mentioned.

First Research Question

The first question: what was the impact of self-assessment on student’s speaking? The result obtained from students’ pretest and posttest are demonstrate in figure 1. This is based on the rubric’s descriptors: Speaks clearly, comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation. Students improved in four of the six different descriptors. The mean revealed notable differences changes from pre and posttest in the previous four descriptors.

Figure 1

Teacher’s grades – rubric descriptors (pretest and posttest)



At the beginning of this research, students faced difficulties with their speaking skill and for them the use of self-assessment inside the classroom was completely new, noticeable in the results. Before implementing self-assessment, all the components that make student speaking were 5.95. After implementing self-assessment, results were higher and encouraging. Student’s improvement in their speaking were shown in table 1 and students final score in speaking with all the components were 7.49.

Table 1

Pretest & Posttest

	N	MIN	MAX	MEAN	St. Derivation
PRETEST	30	5	6.83	5.96	0.44
POSTTEST	30	6.83	8.16	7.49	0.35
Valid N (Listwise)	30				

Based on the previous checklist of eight items, is important to highlight that comparing these results, at the beginning students did not feel the confidence to speak. However, students mentioned and talk about the fact that this study gave them boost in their confidence to speak in English even though mistakes were made.

Discussion

The action research aims to determine whether the application of self-assessment helped or not to improve students speaking skill. Results obtained in this study indicate that self-assessment with content-based learning helped students to improve their speaking. Using self-evaluation engaged students into making judgement and track progress of their own work. According to Boud (1995, p12), “The defining characteristic of self-assessment is the involvement of students in identifying standards and/or criteria to apply to their work and making judgements about the extent to which they have met these criteria and standards”. Self-assessment encourages students to understand how their own work meets the goals set for the unit or class.

Results demonstrated that participants changed their opinion during this study. In the beginning of the process, it was perceptible that the majority of the participants felt nervous and uncomfortable with the idea of evaluate themselves, however at the end of the innovation they felt trustful and reliant to self-assessment. Murray-Harvey (2000) used the assessment process as a way of encouraging students to take more responsibility for their learning.

While good and encouraging results were shown, participants reported some difficulties with the use of self-assess, primarily because students were reluctant to score or judge their own work considering that is the teacher’s job to do it, for that students received proper training on self-assess, a brief introduction to avoid also that students were very strict with themselves.

Conclusion

Results of this study proved that self-assessment was effective in order to improve student’s speaking. This innovation affected in a positive way learner’s speaking skill, by

promoting also a better classroom environment between teacher and students. Self-assessment allowed students to trust themselves and their capacities all of this made this innovation also attractive for student's interest in learning how to speak a new language. This innovation helped participants change their perspective about speaking by strengthen their motivation and confidence to speak.

Limitations

This innovation process had very noticeable limitations, some students did not have any prior knowledge of English, even though they learned in a specific proficiency level, not all of them understood everything. Another limitation was student's willingness to practice or use English outside the classroom alongside the fact that duration of the innovation was not sufficient because it only lasted (4) weeks (16 hours in total).

Recommendations

It is recommended more time for the innovation and the application of it, at least six months to obtained better and more truthful results. One recommendation is to consider the application of self-assessment to improve language skills not only speaking but also the other skills. It is important to consider the application of self-assessment in the whole year of study to understand student's opinion and development.

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Appendix A

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix C

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix D

Pretest and Posttest scores

Available upon request.

Appendix E

E-Portfolio

Available upon request.