

Developing Speaking Skills Through Self-Assessment of High School Students' Interaction

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Research Report

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Developing speaking skills in students is one aspect to consider in our classrooms. Speaking is a crucial form of communication in day-to-day interactions (Gayratovna, 2021). It helps students to participate in class and have casual conversations, not only among peers but also people in general. For this reason, implementing speaking strategies, as an ongoing process, can positively impact students' interactions in order to produce and convey the precise message.

There are various factors at some public schools in Ecuador that prevent the development of this skill. For instance, in a public school in Cuenca, there are only three hours of English instruction per week in all the classes. Students only learn vocabulary and grammar in written production and do not have the opportunities to practice speaking activities. According to Prayuda (2021), affective factors also avoid the development of students' speaking skills since students feel nervous when they have to talk. It is a common problem also detected at this public school where students forget their words and get blocked. Consequently, students cannot use the language learned to speak English. It is difficult for them to produce short and simple sentences or express their ideas naturally. Hence, researchers consider that one strategy that can help students from 2nd grade of high school develop and improve speaking skills is self-assessment of their spoken interactions. This strategy enables students identify their strengths and work on and improve their weaknesses when speaking in English.

Therefore, this study seeks to improve the 2nd level of high school students' speaking abilities by using the self-assessment strategy to produce basic sentences during interactions. This study's research question is: To what extent does the use of self-assessment improve the students' speaking skills?

Literature Review

Speaking

Speaking in a second language worldwide has become an important goal people want to achieve (Rao, 2019). This is the reason why speaking is a demanding skill that students need to develop when studying English as a second language.

Maryanti et al. (2021) stated that "Speaking is one of the basic language skills that have to be mastered by EFL students due to its significance and its use for communication" (p. 2). Therefore, this is one of the abilities that all second language learners must acquire in order to share and transfer meaning. In spite of its difficulty, it develops a competent speaking level which must be maintained with effort and constant practice (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021).

According to Arta (2018), one of the benefits of speaking is that it allows students to collaborate together through pair or group work. This collaborative activity helps students to decrease anxiety, encourage active participation, and increase self-esteem and confidence. Suban (2021) claimed that after Communicative Language Learning (CLT) was established, the standards of language learning have changed positively since it is facilitated by feedback, language exposure, and meaningful input providing learners with more opportunities to practice the language (p. 4).

However, in many language classrooms, these benefits cannot be achieved. One of the main reasons is that teachers focus more on grammar and writing skills rather than oral production (Pakula, 2019). According to the author, teachers may reflect on their teaching practices and how they should teach speaking in order to enable students to become competent speakers of a second language. Another reason that prevents students from achieving the benefits is because of their low affective filter. Students feel blocked and cannot keep a conversation going due to affective factors, such as

motivation, positive environment, emotions, and self-confidence (Rugel, 2020).

Therefore, this author stated that by working on students' affective filters will increase participation in the English class and improve the quality of speaking skills.

To explore how to improve speaking skills, Muñoz and Contreras (2018) applied transactional communication strategies with thirty-five students at a public school in Colombia. This strategy had to do with successful conversations where the message was understood even if the interaction was not accurate. By applying different stages (preparing, modeling and eliciting, and practicing and reviewing), the study outcomes were positive since speaking skills improved in various aspects. For example, students learned new vocabulary, improved grammar structures, reduced the pauses when expressing orally, increased fluency and motivation, had more oral interactions, and became great speakers.

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is defined 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" (Panadero et al., 2016, as cited in Yan, 2023, p. 2). Through this technique, students have to identify different criteria and reflect on their performances based on the feedback provided by the teacher.

There are several benefits that self-assessment brings to teachers and students. One of them is that it allows teachers to promote reflective thinking in learners. This technique, which has to be applied regularly, has guaranteed continuous progress by improving different aspects of students' tasks (Anh et al., 2022). According to Alek et al. (2020), self-assessment helps students explore, grow, identify, and understand their functionality regarding any activity they are performing. When self-assessment is

assured, it benefits students to enhance their abilities, knowledge, and skills by reflecting on their practices and making changes for better future development (Pop & Khampirat, 2019).

However, teachers should be careful when applying this technique. According to Mohamed and Razali (2019), when learners assess themselves, the reliability of their discernments might be imprecise because the process of language learning is too complex and students are unable to compare themselves with native speakers. Hence, the authors suggested that teachers can work first on their students' affective factors to facilitate the language and prevent them from influencing in this technique.

A study conducted by Alek et al. (2020) at a vocational high school targeted to identify students believes into using self-assessment to evaluate their speaking performance. According to the findings from this study, self-assessment proposes several advantages for students during their English learning process. Students, by engaging in self-assessment, can increase their motivation to reach their learning objectives and progress on their communication with peers and teachers. Additionally, self-assessment encourages individualized learning, promoting the development of student's skills for future performances.

In addition, there are some factors that teachers must consider on how to train students before the implementation of self-assessment (Mohamed & Razali, 2019). First, the teacher should emphasize the importance and benefits of self-assessment in learning. It is the teacher's responsibility to assist pupils through the procedures and make sure they comprehend new concepts about the assessment criteria, in both rubrics and checklists to use them properly. Furthermore, by giving students the possibilities to practice, revise, and enhance their work, they learn how to evaluate themselves and pinpoint areas where they can do better.

To sum up, the literature review explains the key theoretical foundations in order to obtain a better understanding of this research project. It analyzes different concepts regarding the study and the research question which aims to know how self-assessment can help students improve their speaking skills. Therefore, the objective of this literature review is to examine and discuss these theories in a real educational context.

Innovation

This study portrayed the effects of self-assessment on improving speaking skills. The innovation was applied for about four weeks with sixteen periods of class in total, which meant four hours per week. Participants were twenty-seven students in the 2nd level of high school who managed the A2 English level according to the results of a placement test. For the implementation of the teaching plan, the materials were: worksheets, workbooks, students' books, videos, power point presentations, and basic materials such as notebooks, pens, markers, and the whiteboard.

The lesson plan included activities to practice vocabulary as a first step. This vocabulary was related to places, tourist attractions, facilities, and objects. Later, they had opportunities to participate and improve their speaking skills through pair interactions by using "There is/There are" as the grammar point, plus the vocabulary learned (see Appendix 1).

During the first week of class, students were trained about the importance and usage of self-assessment. They were guided on how to use a checklist to assess their own performances. Besides, the teacher explained to the students that they would not be penalized if something did not comply with all the criteria in the checklist. The teacher also asked them to be honest and objective when they self-assess. Moreover, as part of the training, the teacher recorded a video having a one-minute conversation with

another person, as a model. The first time, students watched this video without the checklist, but the second time, they were given a checklist for them to score.

For the pre-test, a fully scripted conversation was shared with the students. It included the new vocabulary and grammar part for the students to have an idea of how to interact with a partner about the topic. With this model, they had to develop a similar conversation in pairs by looking at photos of New York City and describing it by using the grammar point and a word bank. Later, the students were given some time to practice their interactions. After that, students were recorded in a one-minute conversation. Lastly, they had to fill in the checklist to assess their performances. After the teacher listened to their dialogues, she checked the videos in order to see what she needed to reteach for the next class and elicited individual word pronunciation and repetition practices. In addition, she helped the students identify their strengths and weaknesses and made students realize that they could improve those aspects of their checklists for the next interactions.

For the following two weeks, students worked on several activities and developed two self-assessment practices, following the same process as the pre-test. The teacher monitored and assisted the students who had questions about how to work on these practices.

For the post–test, students applied the non-scripted activity that was performed in the same pairs using the content previously practiced. This time, they had to talk about their real context: tourist attractions in Cuenca. Likewise, they were given some time to create their conversations and practice. After the students completed the final task and were recorded, they were also provided feedback and filled in their checklists to assess their individual performances once again (see Appendix 2), to be graded by the

teacher who used a rubric that focused on grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, useful expressions and comprehensibility (see Appendix 3).

During the whole implementation, the role of the teacher was of a guide and motivator for the students who were experiencing this new technique. Since speaking is seen as a difficult skill to develop, students tended to be insecure about speaking interactions. The teacher provided students with patience and assistance for the students to feel confident at the time to interact with a peer.

Research Methodology

Action Research

In order to find out how well students' speaking abilities can be improved by applying self-assessment strategy, this study collected and analyzed data using quantitative action research methods. Coghlan (2022) defined action research as an approach that focuses on implementing actions and generating knowledge or theories based on those actions as they occur. For an English teacher, action research is a proper approach to develop in the classroom, since it combines taking action and generating knowledge that benefits pupils in solving a current problem on any skill.

According to Abrenica and Cascolan (2022), action research is assessing one's teaching contexts with a self-reflective, critical, and methodical approach with the intention of intervening in the problematic situation to bring about improvements and even better practice. Hence, this research will assist teachers to know if the suggested technique could benefit students' speaking skills.

Participants

The study was conducted at a public school in Cuenca, Ecuador, with twentyseven students (nineteen female and eight male students.) The school's name, location, and any other relevant details would be kept confidential to ensure privacy. The specific issue that was studied had to do with the 2nd level of high school, with 16-year-old students, all of them Ecuadorian who belong to a middle social class.

The research approach involved both the teacher and the students in a direct manner. Before the implementation, a placement test was carried out with twenty-seven students who were willing to participate in speaking interactions. The placement test measured their current proficiency in English level, having the following results: A 51.85% of the students had an A2 level, 44.44% A1 level, and 3.70% B1.

Instruments

The main instruments used to gather information for this research project were a pretest and a post-test which aimed to answer: To what extent does the use of self-assessment improve the students' speaking skills?

The first recording of students engaged in speaking interaction activities served as the pretest. To measure students' speaking skills, participants were asked to perform an oral interaction in pairs. In addition, a rubric was developed to assess students' video recordings before and after the implementation of the self-assessment strategy. The rubric provided a structured evaluation of the students' performances with specific aspects that involved grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, useful expressions, and comprehensibility. Furthermore, the rubric was divided in four different levels: 2 (exceeds expectations), 1.5 (meets expectations), 1 (approaching expectations), and 0.5 (does not approach expectations), having a total grade out of 10 points at the end (see Appendix 3).

After practices, a post-test was applied based on the topics planned for this innovation. Students interacted with the same partner by using the vocabulary learned during the innovation. For this assessment, the teacher applied the same rubric as the pre-test to analyze and contrast students' speaking skills.

Another instrument used for this research study was a checklist. The checklist was structured to gather quantitative data and was divided into seven specific categories, each targeting their English (L2) language skills. These categories included: Ability to use "There is/There are" in positive and negative sentences, proficiency in using "There is/There are" in yes/no questions and short answers, capacity to produce questions with "How many... are there?", identification and use of singular and plural nouns related to places, facilities, and attractions in a city, application of useful expressions during conversations, interaction with classmates with reasonable ease, and clear pronunciation of words. The checklist employed a rating system with three parameters: "Yes," "Sometimes," and "No yet," to self-assess their language skills (see Appendix 2).

To ensure the checklist's validity, it was reviewed by a language education expert to confirm that it tests the intended language skills. The inclusion of both English and Spanish languages in the checklist ensured that students can self-assess, promoting reflection of their oral strengths and weaknesses. Through the use of this checklist, students were empowered to analyze their progress.

Data Analysis

After the data collection, the researcher completed the analysis of the data by following these steps. First, the teacher graded the tests and computerized the students' grades on an excel document. Next, the tabulation of the results obtained from the pre-

test and post-test was done. Subsequently, the standard deviation from the grades was obtained to know how far or close the students are from the mean. By acquiring those results, the research classified the participants' grades to determine the number of students who experienced a positive or negative outcome on their speaking skills. Finally, the *p*-value was also calculated meaning that the study was statistically significant.

Ethical Considerations

This research followed the procedures of ethical considerations. According to Hasan et al. (2021), ethical considerations are important to complete the research method since factors like truthfulness, reporting data, privacy, confidentiality, and results are linked with it. First, the researcher sent a letter to the school's principal to ask for permission in order to work with the students from the 2nd level of high school, class "A." The permission was approved and granted by the principal of the school.

Later, the author gave the students a consent letter for their parents to read and approve it if they permitted their children's participation in the research. The teacher and the students read this letter together. Students were invited to participate in this study and were also explained about the research objective and benefits. Davison et al. (2022) claimed that it is important that researchers educate participants about the implications that the study could have and affect them directly or indirectly. Moreover, the students were emphasized about the importance of protecting their privacy and anonymity during the research.

There were thirty-six students registered in the class who were given the consent letters, but nine parents did not allow their kids to participate. It was due to the fact they did not want their children being recorded. However, these students did participate in the interactions without being recorded. It was explained that the data collected would

be used for a future study, and the videos and photos would not be uploaded on social networks.

Results

The general question guiding this study aimed to know the extent in which self-assessment improves the students' speaking skills. Table 1 shows a positive difference between the pre-and the post-test results. The pretest minimum grade was 2.50, and the maximum grade was 6.00. On the other hand, the posttest minimum grade was 6.00, and the maximum was 10.00. In addition, the analysis revealed statistically significant improvements in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, useful expressions, and comprehensibility. The mean scores increased from pre-test to post-test (pre-test=3.83; post-test= 8.50), illustrating that the self-assessment strategy influenced students' speaking skills across various dimensions.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics from the pre-and post-test.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	27	2.50	6.00	3,83	0.91
Posttest	27	6.00	10.00	8,50	0.93
Valid N (listwise)	27				
P Value	0,00				

The second component addressing the main research question involved a checklist designed to measure the influence of the self-assessment strategy on students' self-perception regarding their speaking skills. This checklist encompassed seven specific categories, each focusing on different aspects and employed a rating system with three parameters: "Yes," "Sometimes," and "No yet," providing students with a framework to assess their recordings.

Based on some notes regarding the students' opinions after completing the checklists from the first practice, they realized that they had more weaknesses than strengths since they were not able to comply with the specific categories from the checklist. They felt insecure and not prepared to interact with each other because of some reasons. Students felt nervous, unconfident, and afraid that their classmates make fun of them because of their poor pronunciation or scenic panic. Moreover, they were afraid of forgetting their conversations since they used to memorize their lines instead of understanding them. Nevertheless, after the implementation and according to different notes about the students' comments on using the checklist, there were some positive results. The students became active participants who showed interest all the time. In addition, they identified now their strengths such as having good pronunciation, speaking fluently, feeling confident about what they were expressing since they now understood what they were saying. They also expressed the importance of using checklists as tools that allow them to identify their weaknesses to work on and improve them at the end.

In summary, the results from both the pre-and post-test indicate a positive impact of the self-assessment strategy on students' speaking skills. The quantitative data, presented in the table, offers an overview of the improvements observed in the students' self-assessment throughout the study.

Discussion

Several insights emerge when comparing and contrasting the results of the study with the theories and definitions presented in the literature review. The literature review highlighted the benefits of self-assessment in promoting reflective thinking and continuous progress among learners (Anh et al., 2022). This study supports the results since it showed that students, through the different practices, could identify and reflect

on their strengths and limitations in their English-speaking abilities by using the self-assessment strategy continuously.

Self-assessment is crucial for students to explore, grow, and understand their functionality and development in various activities (Alek et al., 2020). This theory supports the study results since the students who participated in this innovation had the opportunity to experience different procedures to increase their motivation and recognize their learning objectives to improve their spoken production.

The findings also support a favorable view of the literature review regarding the advantages of self-assessment in language learning when it is used properly (Pop & Khampirat, 2019). The observed gains in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and general presentation abilities point up how useful and assured self-assessment is as a tool for students' introspection and ongoing learning. By emphasizing the function of self-assessment in encouraging self-reflection on the students' practices in the learning process, the study offers fresh perspectives to the body of knowledge already available on the topic.

The positive outcomes of this study are similar to previous studies mentioned in the literature review. Muñoz and Contreras (2018) got positive results by applying transactional communication strategies where accuracy is not a priority, but the message. Similar stages were used for these studies. For example, reviewing vocabulary to prepare students, modeling and eliciting, and practicing by assigning student's roles. In addition, the feedback was also provided after their interactions. In both studies, students showed improvement in vocabulary, grammar structures, fluency, and motivation.

On the other hand, the literature review also stated a weak point regarding the complexity of the language learning procedure and the possibility of inexactitude in the results of learners' self-assessment (Mohamed & Razali, 2019). The researcher evidenced this point during the pre-tests when a student, despite he knew about the topic, started to laugh because he was nervous. This situation did not allow him to finish his interaction. Hence, the teacher confirmed that this aspect is important and recommended to help students complete the self-assessment procedure correctly since they are not native speakers and this process, which is not self-explanatory, is new for them. Additionally, Mohamed and Razali's (2019) suggested that educators must focus attention on affective factors. According to Rugel (2020), working on students' emotions and self-confidence, plus providing them with a positive environment is important to increase motivation and participation during the interactions. Even the study took more time than planned, the researcher did put emphasis on these recommendations to avoid inaccuracy of students' judgments and make students believe that they can achieve their goals.

Lastly, something new that was found in the study which is not stated in the literature review is the students' initiative and autonomy in enhancing their oral interactions. Despite material use was not a graded criterion, students demonstrated effort and interest by including elements like hats, cameras, and flashcards during their interactions. This idea suggested that self-assessment impacted students' speaking skills and fostered creativity and engagement in the learning process.

Conclusions

As a result, the study reached the proposed objectives by illustrating how the self-assessment technique can enhance students' speaking abilities. The results

highlighted the possibility of pedagogical strategies addressing obstacles in language learning settings and offering information to researchers and teachers. This study identified the problems that students find in developing their speaking abilities, especially at public schools. As highlighted in the introduction, limited English teaching hours, a predominant focus on written production, and a low affective filter were recognized as preventing factors in fostering oral communication. Therefore, the goal of this research was to enhance students speaking skills by exploring and applying the self-assessment technique to produce simple sentences in oral interactions.

The results obtained from both the pre-and post-test evaluations and the checklist support the affirmative impact of the self-assessment strategy on students' oral communication. Students showed and mentioned that they felt comfortable during the post-tests since they have experienced several practices and opportunities to interact in English, fostering the production of simple sentences and facilitating conversations.

Moreover, students' self-perceptions were positive since they evidenced their significant improvements in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, useful expressions, and comprehensibility in comparison with their pre-tests. They could create and understand their last conversations for their post-tests without major difficultly and in a short period of time.

The results highlighted how well the self-assessment technique influences and develops students' spoken communication skills. Thanks to this technique, students increased a better understanding of their strengths and failings which made them reflect on and polish their interactions.

Limitations

While the study aimed to observe issues regarding the development of speaking skills in students, some limitations were encountered during the implementation of the innovation and the research process. First, the overarching limitation arises from the constrained English teaching hours in the public-school setting. With only three hours dedicated to English instruction per week across all grades, the time available for implementing the self-assessment strategy and speaking interaction activities was restricted. Moreover, there were days that the students had different activities to do by the Ministry of Education during the English hours of class, avoiding the continuity of the process. These limitations may have influenced the depth and duration of exposure students had for the intervention, extending the number of planned weeks for the innovation. Second, the classroom was located near the food court making it difficult for the teacher to record the videos because of the noise from outside. Finally, the low confidence level in a few students affected their believes on how well they can do. These few students did well at the beginning of their post-tests, but then they could not conclude their conversations successfully.

Despite these limitations, the study provides insights into the use of self-assessment and speaking interaction activities to improve students' speaking skills.

Future research endeavors should consider addressing these limitations to further refine and enhance the effectiveness of such interventions in diverse educational settings.

Recommendations

This study's positive outcomes carry implications for educators and curriculum designers. Integrating self-assessment strategies, particularly those centered around speaking interaction activities, can be a viable approach to enhance students' speaking

skills. Due to the fact that self-assessment is not self-explanatory, it is recommended to familiarize students with the technique in order to gain experience and facilitate its application development. Also, making a lesson plan that includes the students and the teacher's goals, the practices and activities to be developed by students is relevant. This plan will help teachers be well organized at the moment of applying the innovation and prepare all the material needed. This lesson plan will also help to stablish an ongoing process to give the students the opportunities for constant practice and advancement. In addition, teachers need to make students aware of ethics when evaluating themselves to assign real grades based on their performances. Finally, it is crucial to work on students' affective filters. Teachers need to be aware that learning a second language can be difficult for students; therefore, instructors must facilitate it by providing a positive environment in the class, caring for students' emotions and wellbeing in order to promote motivation and active participation without being afraid of speaking in a second language. With these recommendations, teachers, as well as students will be the beneficiaries of this technique having positive outcomes regarding speaking skills. Students will achieve their speaking goals by producing and conveying their messages during conversations.

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	Appendix 1
	Lesson Plan
Available upon request.	
	Appendix 2
	Checklist
Available upon request.	
	Appendix 3
	SPEAKING RUBRIC
Available upon request.	
	Appendix 4
	Consent letter
Available upon request.	
Trumusa upon requesti	
	Appendix 5
	Field notes
Available upon request.	
	Appendix 6
	e-portfolio
Available upon request.	