



Implementing Self-Assessment to Improve Students' Speaking Skill

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Research Report

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Self-assessment is an element of the educational process since it involves the student's commitment to their learning process and their achievements. Student's self-assessment strengthen, review, or reorient their goals and needs and develop metacognitive skills. This process is also necessary to analyze and evaluate the previously established objectives. Preparation and planning are the first steps when implementing self-assessment. Within this context, the teacher must establish the objectives and evaluation criteria that students must know. Besides, this entire process must be carried out based on dialogue or negotiation. When students are already immersed in self-assessment, teachers must guide them so that they can properly apply the instruments and techniques.

On the other hand, speaking is a skill that consists of transmitting messages through verbal language according to the needs of the listener. The development of this skill is a process that must be strengthened with the application of various strategies so that students can develop their communication skills. For example, communicative teaching introduced numerous forms of interaction with the classroom and language practice in natural or authentic situations. Furthermore, students at an A2 level should already be able to describe their experiences, events, wishes and aspirations, as well as briefly justify their opinions or explain their plans. However, some factors limit the students' oral participation in class, ranging from lack of oral practice to incorrect pronunciation of unknown words, or even fear of criticism. Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the impact of self-assessment on the improvement of the speaking skill in EFL students.

Literature Review

One of the principles for teaching second or foreign languages is to promote autonomous learning outside the classroom (Brown, 2004). Self-assessment derives its theoretical justification from this principle and stands out as one of the pillars of learning (Ariafar & Fatemipour, 2013). The ability to set personal goals both inside and outside the classroom, and to pursue them without the presence of external stimuli, are key to learning the English language (Boud, 1995). Intrinsic motivation is also necessary for the successful acquisition of any skill as well. Brown and Hudson (1998) agreed with these theoretical foundations because self-assessment and peer assessment can offer multiple benefits. For example, students can intervene directly in their own learning. Autonomy is also encouraged, and motivation is increased due to their self-involvement (Chalkia, 2012).

However, some subjective factors should also be considered during self-assessment. According to Brown (2004), students may be overly critical of themselves or be overly flattering. Students may not have the necessary tools to carry out an accurate self-assessment or do not know how to use these tools. Students may not be able to discern their own errors when direct performance assessment is involved. Brown (2004) also stated that cultural and educational background could also influence the accuracy of self-assessment. All these factors could have an impact on perceived competence and the accuracy of the assessment (Joo, 2023). For these possible scenarios, it is recommended to integrate self-assessment with other methods to guarantee a comprehensive evaluation. The role of the teacher is necessary so that students know the self-assessment process and what they should observe during their oral production (Leger, 2009).

Students should know the different types of self-assessment and peer assessment to apply them correctly. For this study, for example, direct performance assessment involves

students monitoring themselves in oral production using a rubric for that purpose (Brown, 2004). Brown (2004) also suggested that EFL learners should watch English news, movies, and television programs and then self-assess their comprehension and ability to summarize the information.

Within the self-assessment process, rubrics also have an important role. According to Boud (1995), rubrics help students observe their strengths and identify areas that need development. These instruments also offer a framework for evaluating performance expectations and encouraging self-assessment. Additionally, they encourage students to take a proactive role in their learning journey by facilitating a structured assessment of their progress (Talanquer, 2015).

On the other hand, speaking skills, serving as a comprehensive showcase of acquired knowledge, accuracy, and vocabulary (Masruria & Anam, 2021). It also encompasses sub-skills, such as fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, interactive communication, and discourse management (Nurdiana & Khalistha, 2019). Speaking is a complex facet of language acquisition, driven by the human need for social interaction and bridging cognitive realms. Communication through spoken words requires not only linguistic mastery but also the ability to express thoughts coherently and convey them with engaging pronunciation and intonation (Pinto & Díaz, 2020). Proficiency in these sub-skills collectively contributes to a spoken communication repertoire (Brown, 2004).

However, several authors have recently reported problems with their students' oral performance. For example, Sayuri (2016) found that lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, shyness, or not having anything to say limited students' oral production. Riadil (2020), and Ratnasari (2020) exposed that students hesitated to speak fearing ridicule from their classmates' laughter. Additionally, Pinto and Diaz (2020) described that their students

did not receive feedback about their performance or the necessary requirements to achieve satisfactory results when speaking in previous classes.

Due to these previously identified factors, self-assessment can be a solution (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2014). Students must also judge the quality of their work and their performance by following explicit criteria to perform better when speaking (Sintayani & Adnyayanti, 2022). In the self-evaluation process, students must question and reflect on themselves, to generate self-awareness and participation in the exchange of ideas (Jiwandani et al., 2021). Self-assessment enables students to not only recognize their weaknesses but also to identify their strengths, thereby discovering areas for improvement in order to enhance their speaking abilities (Vera & Pinargote, 2023). Students generally show a favorable attitude towards self-assessment, even when it is applied over a short term period (Chalkia, 2012). During the self-assessment, students can ask and discuss aspects of pronunciation and new words, and this influences oral production significantly (Masruria & Anam, 2021). Self-assessment generates a positive change in their oral performance and students appreciate this strategy to improve their academic results (Pinto & Díaz, 2020).

In conclusion, given the essential role of speaking skills for students, and recognizing self-assessment as a viable strategy for its enhancement, it is imperative to research deeper into the impact of self-assessment on students' speaking abilities. Additionally, exploring students' perspectives regarding the incorporation of self-assessment practices in classroom settings is crucial for further understanding and implementation.

Innovation

The innovation involved integrating the self-assessment method to enhance speaking proficiency within a standard learning module that included all language competencies. It lasted eight instructional hours, with a duration of four weeks.

Throughout this period, participants engaged in vocabulary acquisition, language comprehension, and communicative exercises tailored to foster oral expression.

The innovation was implemented through an instructional design framework for the unit (refer to Appendix 1). Students engaged in task-based assignments using FlipGrid, independently analyzing their submissions. The incorporation of self-assessment aimed to facilitate the transfer of learning across all activities within the unit. To achieve this objective, the teacher structured the unit with specific learning outcomes in mind, subsequently determining assessment methods and crafting learning experiences aligned with the desired goals. These experiences were tailored to promote transfer, meaning-making, and the acquisition of speaking skills.

This type of assessment can be carried out immediately or after the performance. Students can also give an oral presentation and complete a checklist that evaluates their performance on a scale of 1 to 5. Finally, students can record a short video on Flipgrid. They can then watch this video again and complete a questionnaire to identify aspects of oral production that require improvement. From the outset of the innovation, students received instruction on utilizing a speaking rubric for self-assessment (see Appendix 2). In the subsequent weeks, students were introduced to unit content through a variety of activities that included all the skills, such as; listening, reading, speaking, and writing, both individually and in groups. Subsequently, they submitted their speaking tasks via FlipGrid as a home-based activity. The speaking rubric guided students in self-assessing various aspects, including grammar and vocabulary, discourse management (such as length, organization of ideas, fluency, and cohesion), and pronunciation. Additionally, students maintained two learning logs to facilitate self-assessment and metacognition,

enabling them to reflect on strategies for improving their speaking tasks based on the feedback provided.

Research Methodology

This is a mixed method action research. Action research is a tool for educators to evaluate and improve their teaching practices (Creswell, 2011). It also facilitates collaborative problem solving by integrating theory and practice between researchers and participants. All this within an iterative process that includes problem identification, intervention, and reflective learning (Hernández et al., 1997). The mixed method involved the use of quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data emerged from the pretest-posttest along with a rubric to determine the extent to which students' speech improved after self-assessing their monologues. Qualitative data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire to explore the students' perceptions regarding the integration of self-assessment practices in the classroom.

Participants

The participants in this study were 10 students from a private institution whose ages ranged between 20 and 27 years. The educational center is in Guayaquil, Ecuador. All students had completed three English courses at the institution, achieving satisfactory grades. The study group comprised individuals from middle-class backgrounds, ensuring consistent access not only to computers but also to smartphones equipped with internet connections within their homes and study environments. This contextual information provided insights about the students' educational background and the technological resources available to them.

Instruments

Two instruments contributed to data collection: A pretest-posttest and an open-ended questionnaire.

Pretest-posttest.

The purpose of administering the pretest-posttest was to determine the extent to which students' speech improved after self-assessing their monologues. The activities carried out during this stage are described below.

Pretest. During this stage, the students recorded a monologue on video that lasted one minute about food and drinks they like. After that, they had to upload to Flipgrid and then evaluated themselves with a checklist. This speaking rubric was taken from Cambridge and was adapted for level A2. This resource had four variables: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and content. Each descriptor within these variables was rated on a five-point scale.

Posttest. During this stage of the project, the students were asked to record another monologue but this time they had to deliver a speech to convince their friends about what to eat for Christmas dinner. After that, they uploaded it on the Flipgrid platform with the difference that this time they were already familiar with the self-assessment speaking rubric (see appendix 2).

Questionnaire

This instrument served to explore the students' perceptions regarding the integration of self-assessment practices in the classroom. The instrument was designed in Google Forms and included a section to collect demographic data and another section with four open-ended questions related to self-assessment practices in the class. The instrument was administered after the intervention. The researcher sent the link to all students, and they had 24 hours to answer all the questions.

The design and administration of these two instruments was supervised by the tutor and by an expert with 24 years of experience in English teaching and research to guarantee validity, reliability, and consistency. Besides, a pilot test of these instruments was carried out on students of another level.

Data Analysis

Data collected for this study were analyzed and processed quantitatively and qualitatively. The pretest-posttest data were recorded in an Excel sheet to generate descriptive statistics that included mean, mode, median, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation. This methodical approach not only sheds light on the central tendency and dispersion of the data, but also serves as a model for replication (Creswell, 2011).

On the other hand, data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed and processed qualitatively, taking the deductive method as a reference. Deductive reasoning involves drawing conclusions based on premises that are generally assumed to be true (Creswell, 2011)

Ethical Considerations

In the context of this research, several ethical considerations were considered to ensure the responsible conduct of the study. As the participants were all over 18 years of age, the requirement for parental authorization was deemed unnecessary. However, ethical principles such as informed consent and confidentiality were upheld throughout the research process (Yip et al., 2016). Communication was maintained with the participants to ensure they were aware of the research objectives and their role in the study. Confidentiality measures were implemented to protect the identity and privacy of participants, ensuring that their responses and contributions remained anonymous and secure (Mirza et al., 2023). Academic honesty was adhered to with all sources and references cited and credited as well.

Results

The results described in this section were presented around the research questions that were addressed at the beginning of the study.

Research question 1. To what extent did EFL students' speaking improve after self-assessing their monologues? A summary of the descriptive statistics is presented below.

Table 1.*Descriptive statistics of the pretest.*

<i>N</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
10	Vocabulary	4.1	0.7
	Grammar	3.9	0.8
	Pronunciation	3.7	1.3
	Content	4.3	0.8

Note: *M* and *SD* represent mean and standard deviation respectively.

The results presented in Table 1 demonstrate that students performed in pronunciation $M=3.7$, $SD=1.3$; and grammar $M=3.9$, $SD=0.8$, at the time of the self-assessment process. This means that the students had pronunciation and grammar errors in their oral production. On the other hand, the score that stands out was content $M= 4.3$, $SD=0.8$. This means students could express ideas with some organization and coherence. After obtaining these results, the researcher designed an intervention plan that included elements of the backward design model, and self-assessment to improve speaking skills. At the end of the process, a new test was administered, and its results are presented below:

Table 2.*Descriptive statistics of the posttest.*

<i>N</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
10	Vocabulary	4.5	0.7
	Grammar	3.9	0.8
	Pronunciation	4.0	1.2
	Content	4.4	0.8

Note: *M* and *SD* represent mean and standard deviation respectively

The results presented in Table 2 demonstrate that the indicators that stood out were vocabulary $M=4.5$, $SD=0.7$; and pronunciation $M=4.0$, $SD=1.2$. The content reported a moderate improvement $M=4.4$, $SD=0.8$. On the other hand, the grammar construct remained

stable $M=3.9$, $SD=0.8$. This means that after the intervention the students were able to speak with a natural accent and proper intonation. They could also use a wide range of vocabulary and organize their thoughts logically and coherently. However, grammatical structures were maintained with occasional errors when speaking. Now to identify the extent to which the speaking of the EFL students improved after self-assessing their monologues, a summary of the two results obtained is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3.

Descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest

N	Criteria	Pretest		Posttest		Comparative	
		M	SD	M	SD	MD	PMD
10	Vocabulary	4.1	0.7	4.5	0.7	0.4	9.8%
	Grammar	3.9	0.8	3.9	0.8	0.0	0%
	Pronunciation	3.7	1.3	4.0	1.2	0.3	8.1%
	Content	4.3	0.8	4.4	0.8	0.1	2.3%

Note: M, SD, MD and PMD represent mean, standard deviation, mean difference, and percent mean difference respectively.

Table 3 shows the values of each descriptor of the oral expression rubric obtained during the pretest and posttest. The vocabulary construct showed a greater increase compared to the analysis of means by 9.8%. The next aspect that stands out was pronunciation with an increase of 8.1%. Content showed a moderate improvement of 2.3%. However, the grammatical aspect remained constant.

Research question 2. What were the students' perceptions regarding the integration of self-assessment practices in the classroom? Perceptions are thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about people, situations, and events (Riadil, 2020). Within this context, students felt that self-assessment S1: *“helped improve their speaking skills.”* Additionally, the rubric was considered by S2: *“a useful tool for evaluating specific speaking criteria, such as vocabulary,*

grammar, pronunciation, and content. S3:” This allowed students to “*work more consciously on their language skills and make adjustments to communicate more effectively.*”

Additionally, they identified S4, 5:“*the areas that required more practice to improve English.*” Therefore, students' perceptions were mostly positive as they collectively recognized S6,7, 8, 9, 10: “*the benefits of self-assessment in fostering self-awareness, specific practice, and motivation to improve oral skills.*”

Discussion

Starting from the premise that self-assessment offers benefits (Brown & Hudson, 1998) and is an opportunity for students to intervene in their learning, in this context, this process served to improve the speaking skills. The constructs of vocabulary (9.8%), pronunciation (8.1%), and content (2.3%) showed a significant improvement. Students could now organize their thoughts logically and coherently according to the situation and sounded more natural, with intelligible accent and intonation. They were able to express their ideas using countable and uncountable nouns related to food and drinks appropriately. These aspects are important since communication through spoken words requires not only linguistic mastery but also the ability to express thoughts coherently and convey them with understandable pronunciation and intonation (Sayuri, 2016). These results coincided with the findings of Pinto and Díaz (2020) and Masruria and Anam (2021) who reported that self-assessment offered students the opportunity to ask and discuss aspects of pronunciation and new words and this influenced their oral production.

Self-assessment also generated a positive change in oral performance and students appreciated this strategy as a way to improve their academic results (Riadil, 2020). The only aspect that remained constant was the grammatical aspect due to the short time the implementation lasted and additionally communication was privileged over grammar construct. These results coincided with the findings of Chalkia (2012) who also implemented

speaking self-assessment for a short period. Therefore, the role of the teacher is necessary so that students can learn about the self-assessment process and know what they should observe during their oral production (Ariafar & Fatemipour, 2013).

Regarding the students' perceptions of the integration of self-assessment practices in the classroom, these were positive since it allowed them to evaluate their learning products, and these results coincided with Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2014). Students judged the quality of their work and their performance following explicit criteria of a rubric to perform better when speaking. In the self-assessment process, students reflected on themselves and not only focused on their weaknesses but also identified their strengths and the aspects they needed to improve to speak better. These findings were consistent with the authors Vera and Pinargote (2023) and Jiwandani et al. (2021).

Conclusions

Findings confirm the benefits of the implemented strategy to achieve positive results in spoken skills. Pre-test and post-test scores showed improvements in vocabulary, pronunciation, and content. The only aspect that remained constant in the overall class was the grammatical aspect. Students still make mistakes that did not interfere with the exchange of ideas. Additionally, students' perspectives on the inclusion of self-assessment practices were explored through an open-ended questionnaire. The data collected was qualitative and it highlighted the positive value that students placed on this strategy used in other contexts. The strategy demonstrated adaptability, as evidenced by its implementation in various content areas. In conclusion, the impact of self-assessment on improving speaking skill in EFL students was positive. Furthermore, this research not only identified a relevant problem but also provided a viable solution. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on language teaching methodologies.

Limitations

The main limitation was related to class size. The study was conducted in a small class of only 10 students and findings may not be scalable. Time constraints emerged as a major challenge during class delivery and implementation of the self-assessment strategy. The study was conducted with a relatively homogeneous group of participants in terms of language proficiency and cultural background. This homogeneity may have limited the generalizability of the findings to more diverse student populations. The study was conducted under the direction of a single instructor, which could introduce biases associated with individual teaching styles. While efforts were made to improve the reliability of self-assessment using rubrics and teacher expertise, the subjectivity inherent in self-assessment remained a challenge.

Recommendations

Taking as reference the limitations previously addressed, this researcher recommends replicating the study with larger groups to evaluate the scalability of the self-assessment strategy. Future research should explore extended time frames to evaluate the sustained impact on language proficiency. Replicating the study with a more diverse cohort would improve the external validity of the results. It is also recommended that future research involves multiple instructors to evaluate the generalizability of the self-assessment strategy across various teaching approaches. Future research should explore additional strategies to mitigate subjectivity and improve the objectivity of self-assessment results.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Portfolio

Available upon request.