The Use of Self-Assessment in the Development of the Speaking Skill

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Research Report

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As globalization expands through different countries, language barriers start to collapse, and one of the most common languages in the business world today is English. Therefore, students have the need to graduate with minimum requirements in English according to the CEFR standard to continue their educational development abroad.

The education system has improved in Ecuador, and students seek new boundaries of education. The United States of America is the country which most students select to continue their studies. Improving their communication skills is fundamental in their educational development, and schools should provide all the required tools to continue their journey. The Asamblea Constituyente de Montecristi (2008) on Ecuadorian Constitution, art. 26 says: "Education is a right of all the people during their life and a duty of the state." (p. 4). Each institution whether being a school, university, and so on, has the obligation to achieve this goal.

The reality of the fact is that the required level for studying abroad is B2 in the CEFR and most students do not achieve the minimum requirements for postulating in foreign universities. Throughout 19 years of career as an English teacher, and present classes, the issue that most of the students go through is the lack of participation in class lessons, therefore they do not have enough contact with the language. Students do not take advantage of the English program because of distinct reasons such as lack of motivation or shyness and because of that students do not reach their maximum potential. As a teacher, in my experience, class participation is limited to 15% of the class and that percentage of the class is usually the students with better grades and language production.

With the implementation of the self-assessment innovation, the students will be able to see the result of their development firsthand. By providing criteria and rubrics which students themselves may find engaging, they will identify their strengths and weaknesses and find a purpose and guide to improve their aptitudes and motivation.

The aim of this study is to determine to what extent does using self- assessment encourages participation by improving students' spoken fluency. This proposal aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the implementation of self-assessment improve speaking ability?

2. What were the students' perspectives of the techniques applied to improve their speaking skills?

Literature Review

Speaking

Speaking is a skill which helps interaction in language performance, which requires pronunciation skills. Additionally, it can be face to face conversation or telephone conversation; speaking may be directly interactive such as, making a speech for an audience and speaking may be non-interactive for instance, a recording for a radio broadcast (Reyad &. Alhaj, 2020, p. 97). Burns and Joyce (1997) viewed speaking as "an interactive process in which individuals alternate in their roles as speakers and listeners and employ both verbal and non-verbal means to reach their communication goals" (p. 17). While on the other hand Richards (2009) emphasized the importance of finding strategies that help learners develop fluency, accuracy as well as appropriate language use when it comes to approaches for teaching speaking.

We understand the importance of speaking as a social function in our society and there are different ways that speaking happens in our society. The main functions of interaction have been summarized as followed:

- Has a primarily social function.

- Reflects role relationships.

- Reflects speaker's identity.

- May be formal or casual.

- Uses conversational conventions.

- Reflects degrees of politeness.

- Employs many generic words (Richards, 2009)

Language has various ways to be implemented in our society and it is important to recognize the function that it represents. By identifying these cues, teachers will be able to identify the functions of language that should be applied for language practice in class activities.

Fluency

An aspect that goes hand in hand with communication is fluency. Richards (2006) defined fluency as ongoing communication that occurs naturally when a speaker has a meaningful and comprehensible interaction even though there are limitations in his or her communicative competence.

To incorporate fluency, activities that demand students' communication must be applied. Ricards (2006) stated that fluency is obtained by creating opportunities where students will use class activities that demand negotiation of language meaning, correct misunderstanding, and work to prevent breakdowns in the language. Permana et al. (2021) defined fluency in speaking

as the natural ability to speak accurately, spontaneously, quickly, and comprehensibly as possible without making a lot of mistakes which could distract the listener from understanding the message.

Fluency is an important part of evaluation in English examinations. Fluency is one of the descriptors for testing English competence together with coherence. IELTS exam is an example of how fluency is used in the criteria (British Council, 2024).

Self- Assessment

There are several aspects to consider about self-assessment and mostly positive. Self-assessment should be considered as part of a formative assessment. Students become aware of their own progress by analyzing their work. It is important that the criterion of the assessment is clear and concise for the students, allowing full understanding of their strengths and weaknesses (Başak, 2019, p.11). Additionally, through "self-assessment, students activate their creative process in a meaningful way which allows them to receive feedback to ensure that their efforts are headed in the right direction" (White, 2019, p.43).

Self-assessment is not only about students grading their work. Thawabieh (2017) mentioned how students getting involved contributed to building their confidence, achievement, and satisfaction with their grades by making them feel that they were part of the process. It also contributes with other skills as White (2019) claimed that self-assessment is about reflecting on the degree to which students are solving their own problems and answering their own questions. A similar opinion was on behalf of Masruria & Anam (2021) that concluded that self-assessment improved students' motivation by identifying the progress they achieved or knowing how close they are to reach the criterion. Andrade (2019) concluded that self- assessment is an effective

method of achievement and self-regulated learning when used formatively and guides with training.

Teaching students how to assess themselves is of consideration for the purpose of this report. Joo (2016) suggested a scoring criterion devised by a teacher and a training session given to students using sample responses is a consistent way of having a deepened learners' understanding of the speaking variables. The idea is to have students have a similar grading criterion as the teacher when it comes to self-assessment. Hence, implementing a training session is highly recommended.

On the other hand, Ross (1998) stated that because of the wide range of the effect size across studies, it suggests that there is susceptibility to extraneous variables in self-assessment of speaking. Additionally, the score of speaking was lower than reading or listening which indicated that learners might be unexperienced when it comes to estimating their own speaking ability.

Additionally, the criterion varies from student to student depending on their knowledge of the content. By knowing the parameters better, he will grade more precisely. In the results of a study Kaderavek et al. (2004) demonstrated that students with better narrator skills and older were more accurate when self- assessing. On the other hand, younger children and poor narrators frequently overestimated their abilities.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is not a main concern in CLT. They focus more on communication rather than accuracy. According to Richards (2006), the importance of the purpose of getting the

language across by any activity overcomes the motivation of the correct use of grammar or pronunciation.

On the other hand, Mahmood (2021) concluded that pronunciation instruction is very important because it is the main source of understanding. If learners cannot utter the correct version of a word then they are not able to communicate correctly. Pronunciation is key for proper communication to secure correct understanding of the language.

Innovation

To implement the innovation and analyze the outcome, first a test was conducted to identify the level of the class in accordance with the CEFR framework. Once the level of the class was determined, an introduction of the class was performed so students identified what the content of the class was going to be about.

Additionally, students were instructed on how to assess speaking using a checklist by watching videos of presentations and receiving feedback by the teacher based on their marks. As students knew the content, a speech of a given topic was sent as homework which students had to upload in a virtual application and this would be used as a pretest. The teacher would have access to the video for later analysis.

Next, the teacher proceeded to introduce the content of the class (Toulmin model) to improve the structure of their argumentative presentations. The students completed three practice presentations and after each class with the added content. Students would self-assess, using the checklist, to identify the improvements they have accomplished if any. For the third class, the content was about grammar and the role it played in the structure of their presentation. Students would proceed with the modifications and do a practice presentation once again which would

also be analyzed by the students with the checklist. Another practice was implementing the format and vocabulary used for argumentative speeches and assessed as well.

For the final posttest, a summative test was arranged where students were given a new topic with specific guidelines with standards they had to accomplish. The students had to complete the task and then present their speeches which were recorded for the analysis with the pretest. Students then had to self-assess their presentations and get general feedback from the teacher.

Research Methodology

Design

This study is an action research. Efron and Ravid (2013) stated that the goal of action research in the educational field is to improve practice while also being in the context of the conducted research themselves. For this study a pre-experimental pre-post design with one experimental group was used. According to Stratton (2019), a pre-test and post-test may be used to evaluate participants' perceptions and attitudes towards an event or to identify their comfort with a new concept being applied. The experiment was carried out in the summer of 2023 semester over a period of 5 weeks with sessions that were held for three weeks.

Participants

The study was conducted in a private school in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador where the author works. Participants were in the eleventh grade. In total, there were 11 students whose ages were between 13-15. Among the participants six of the students were females, and the other five were male. Students participated in a Cambridge examination which identified them as B2 level students according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Assessment and Measures

In this study, the independent variables were the students' self-assessment surveys and the video recordings. For the dependent variable, students' speaking fluency was considered. There were four designed instruments to collect the data.

Tests

To answer the first research question of to what extent does the implementation of self-assessment improve speaking ability. A pre and post-test was applied. The tests consisted of two video recordings that were used as a speaking test. The first video, the pretest, was prepared by the students before the implementation of the innovation of self-assessment. Each student had two minutes to present a speech based on a proposal for a debate speech. The second video, post-test, was done after the implementation. To obtain samples which may be compared to check their progress after the implementation, the instructions were the same in the pre-test as for the post-test. The speech was evaluated by the author by following a criterion for the two evaluations.

Self-Assessments Rubrics

To develop this project, different rubrics were used to improve students' performance and evaluate their progress (Appendix 2 and 3). The rubric (Appendix 2) was created by the author, and it was examined by an expert in the field, and then it was used to evaluate the two speeches (pre and post-test). The rubric considered five descriptors: Grammar, Vocabulary, Delivery, Content, and Organization. In which delivery covered two aspects: fluency and pronunciation. Each aspect of the rubric had a grade range from $0 – 5$, 5 being the highest. Each point has a specific criterion which students had to fulfill.

Additionally, another rubric (Appendix 3) was used to self-assess after each new speech presentation. The language of the rubric was in first person and in simple form for students to understand and assess more accurately. The rubric evaluated grammar, delivery, content, and vocabulary, and the options were divided into three parts such as yes, sometimes, and not yet. Students would use these rubrics to compare their answers to prior presentations.

Survey

To answer the second research question, what were students' perceptions of the techniques applied to improve their speaking skills? A form was completed anonymously by the students. The survey can be found in Appendix 4.

Data Analysis

Quantitative

Once the results were obtained by examining the recordings using the criterion of the rubric, the data analysis tool pack of MS Excel was used. The statistical results of the pre-test and post-test were revised using the Null hypothesis to obtain the maximum, minimum, mean standard deviation, and the p-value. The results were obtained by using a paired t-test which offered the results for the findings of this study.

Qualitative

The data for this study was collected by using a survey questionnaire using their mother language to avoid any misinterpretation. The answers provided a clear understanding of the participants' perception of the innovation being applied. The data was read carefully and repeatedly to make a reflective categorization of the informants' answers. After transcribing the

data, a coding system was used to classify the information looking for similarity among the transcripts to group and see how it answered my research question. Once the data from the survey was classified, the answers were then tabulated and presented in a graph to illustrate the results and identify the students' opinions. Atlas.ti was used to verify reliability of the results.

Ethical Considerations

Felzmann (2009) addresses ethical issues in children's research that takes place in school settings. The research covers three fundamental areas of ethical concern: the informed consent process, confidentiality, and harm and benefit. First, permission was asked by the author to conduct the research with students on the school premises. Permission was granted by the Director of the educational institution. Next, the second baccalaureate students were invited to participate in this study where the author explained the purpose of the research and got consent and authorization from parents. The author made sure to consider all the aspects of confidentiality to maintain anonymity of the participants. Lastly, participants were informed of the use of the collected data and how it will be used as a future study.

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Results

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The inquiry of the two research questions will be answered in this section with the results obtained in this study. Each issue will be addressed separately for better understanding.

The Implementation of Self-Assessment in the Classroom

To answer the first research question: "To what extent does the implementation of self-assessment improve speaking ability?" the findings of the pre and post-test were used then the descriptive statistics were calculated, and the results were as followed:

Table 1

|	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Sig (p)
Pretest	25	10	22	17.45	3.55	0.00
Post-test	25	20	25	23.81	1.77	

Note: N=Sample, Min= Minimum, Max= Maximum, M= Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, Sig(p)= Significance

Table 1 shows that there is an improvement when comparing the results of the pre-test and the post-test. The minimum passed from 10 to 20 while the maximum went from 22 to 25. Therefore the mean values went from 17.45 to 23.81. The p-value also demonstrates an improvement in the grades with a score, after the comparison of the pre-test and post-test, under the requirement of 0.05. The standard deviation of the post-test is closer to the mean value than it is in the pre-test.

Students' Perspective on the Applied Techniques

To answer the second research question "What were the students' perspectives of the techniques applied to improve their speaking skills?" Qualitative data was collected. One question was multiple choice while the other two questions were open-ended. The questions focused on the students' perspectives of before and after the innovation.

Table 2

After the practice sessions, do you feel you have improved in your English presentations?
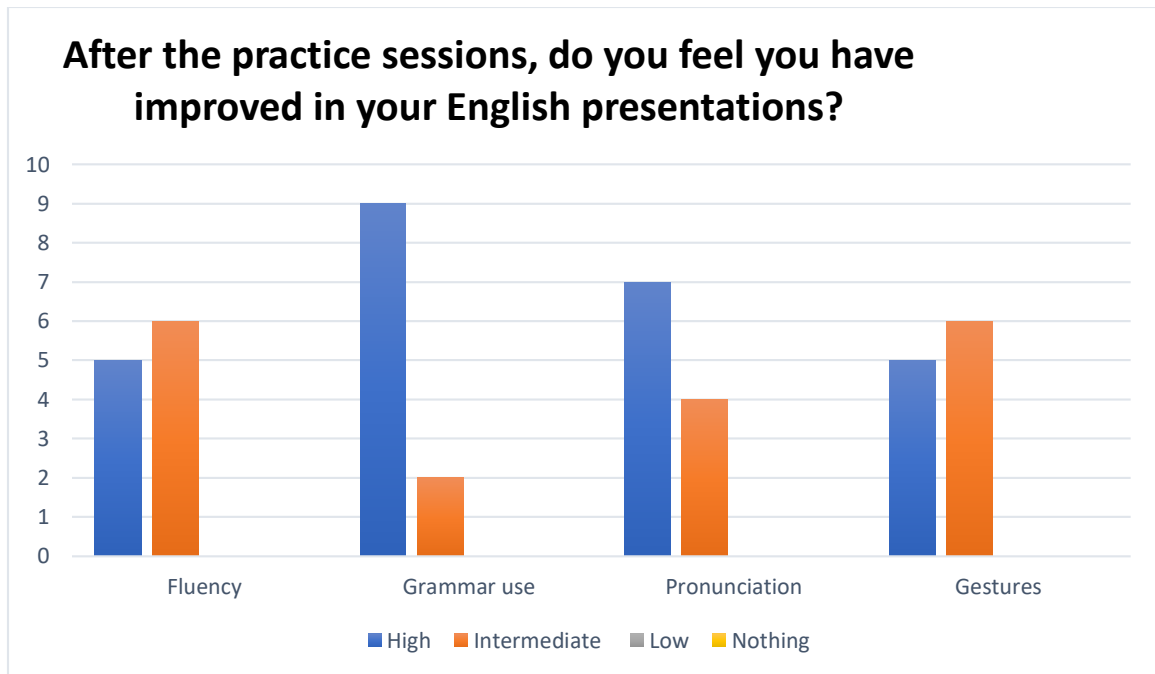
In this graph (table 2), question 1 was "After the practice sessions, do you feel that your English presentations have improved?". The possible choices were Fluency, Grammar Pronunciation, and Gestures, where they could choose among the options of high, intermediate, low, or nothing. In fluency, 4 of the 11 students believed to have improved in their fluency with the innovation whereas 6 students believed to have somewhat improved their fluency.

On option three, which focuses on pronunciation, 6 students believe to have improved their pronunciation and only 4 believe to have had an average effect. The students' perception on improving their language acquisition is positive in the manner of the objective of the innovation.

Question 2. Do you believe you would have improved without assessing your presentation? Explain why. The students agreed that thanks to the self-assessment, they had improved from their previous activity. Most felt that identifying what they did wrong contributed to improving their next presentation. Most students agreed that giving themselves feedback was a

valuable tool for language learning. Some extracts of the students' interviews mentioned the following:

- Learner 3: "No, because learning from mistakes is essential. I have not studied debates for many years, so I do not believe I am always right. Receiving feedback helps me improve my debates much more".

- Learner 7; "No, since making the revisions helped me notice my mistakes, which I tried to improve in my next presentations".

There was one student that had a different response to the question. Student 10 said "Yes, the feedback of the teacher is more important." Meaning that even though she believes that the teacher's feedback is more important, she does accept that feedback is relevant for the learning process.

Question 3. Did you feel comfortable with the innovation or were there uncomfortable circumstances? The students felt that there was nothing that made them feel uncomfortable. The innovation was applied naturally and was perceived as part of a normal class. In fact, there were some who believed that it was a great technique for teaching English since they got to practice. Student 11 felt that he gained more confidence with his final presentation. Some of the insights provided from the students are the following:

- Learner 2; "It is a good way to teach and learn, I didn't have any inconvenience with it".

- Learner 3; "I'm not sure which innovation you're referring to, but throughout the entire process, I felt everything was okay".

- Learner 5; "I liked it because it was simple to check, and it helped me to reflect on my strengths and weaknesses".

- Learner 11; "I felt comfortable. More than anything, it helped me feel confident with myself when I did my final presentation".

Discussion

Regarding the first research question, to what extent does the implementation of self-assessment improve speaking ability? This study determines that the implementation of self-assessment had a positive effect on their speaking skill. Like the thought of Andrade (2019) where she mentioned that it is an effective method for achievement and self-regulated learning. It is also supported by Masruria & Anam (2021), who also concluded that self-assessment influenced speaking skill in a positive way. Additionally, the research found more positive results when applying self-assessment. Andrade (2019) mentioned that out of 25 studies, investigation on correlation between self-assessment and achievement, 20 studies and two meta-analyses demonstrated a positive association between self-assessment and learning.

For the second research question, what were the students' perspectives of the techniques applied to improve their speaking skills? This study revealed that students perceived that they had improved in their speaking skill. Fluency and pronunciation were where students felt that they had better results. This solves one of the enigmas where Richards (2009) mentioned how challenging it is to create strategies that help develop fluency and accuracy. Applying self-assessment will contribute to developing these aspects of the speaking skill.

Additionally, another finding in this research was the acceptance on behalf of the students that self-assessment was one of the main reasons they improved in their speeches and how they were able to correct their mistakes. This supports what Thawabieh (2017) mentioned that self-

assessment builds confidence, achievement, and satisfaction with their grades by feeling that they were part of the process. Moreover, this research also demonstrated that learners were not affected by the implementation of the innovation in their classrooms. The innovation never disrupted the positive environment that an English class should have and were even motivated and confident when presenting their final speech.

Conclusion

As it was mentioned in the introduction, speaking may be one of the most difficult skills to practice in class time, whether by lack of motivation or not enough authentic material. This research has demonstrated that the implementation of self -assessment has certainly increased reflection and language practice firsthand by students. Through self-assessment, we can conclude that the experience was gratifying to most participants and the outcome of their speaking skills had improved. This was evident with the result of the pre-test and the post-test which showed a considerable improvement in their speaking scores.

After the questionnaire survey was done to the students, we can reach the conclusion that self-assessment has stimulated students to identify their weaknesses and seek new ways of improving their speaking skills. Overall, self- assessment has shown to impact the language learning process as they can guide themselves by constant evaluation of their language application to find a way to improve their practice. It should be recommended to teacher-students to take advantage of the benefits that this innovation contributes to students and teachers alike.

Limitations

The school's platform did not provide sufficient storage space for students to upload their presentations which were too heavy. Padlet (digital platform application) had to be used where students uploaded their recordings to later be analyzed for self-assessment.

The schedule of the class was not best suited to apply the study since the chosen class had English on two times a week. In several cases, this aspect slowed the development of the study since the self-assessments were done weekly and demanded more time to conclude the research.

Recommendations

The teacher should be able to supply alternatives when students are not able to have access to technology. Allowing students to use their computer or providing a computer lab for students to complete their assessment of the videos. Another option could be to extend the time to complete the task or recover an assignment.

Practice the language presentations in the class as well. For the student to get used to an audience and make it part of their routine to feel more natural when it comes to presenting. Having the students present only for the final test could make them more nervous and have a different effect on the result.

The teacher should describe the process of self-assessment and the importance of honesty when it comes to grading. By explaining the benefits that the innovation has in improving their language, students will have the confidence to grade more accurately to identify their weaknesses and their strengths.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Survey Questions and Answers

Available upon request.

Appendix 5

E-Portfolio

Available upon request.