



**Improving Speaking Skills with Self-assessment Through an Audio Diary**

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Research Report

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## SELF ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE SPEAKING

### **Improving Speaking Skills with Self-assessment through an Audio Diary**

People communicate orally, to tell their friends, family or classmates their anecdotes, feelings, experiences, and routines. Moreover, people talk to themselves or talk to others to remember facts or use it for learning something a minor group of people opt for other systems to communicate such as writing or photography.

There are many resources that adolescents, who are learning a second language, can use to portray their lives. One of the resources is technology; according to Ahmadi (2018), technology can motivate students to learn a second language.

When a student is learning a foreign language, they usually display some difficulties with their speaking skills. They usually cannot have a fluent conversation; they tend to mix their first language (L1) with the second language (L2), or in some cases, students do not organize their ideas either due to the lack of vocabulary or poor grammatical structure. For those learners, it is almost impossible to produce satisfactorily in L2 (Jaya et al., 2022).

Technology can help learners to develop activities that allow them to improve their speaking skills. They use devices such as mobile phones to communicate, investigate, do homework, and take pictures. Besides, they can use those devices to record their voices in English to improve pronunciation and fluency. Idayani and Sailun (2017), Sosas (2021), and Nguyen (2022) agreed that technology aids in language learning; it promotes speaking ability, motivation and creativity in students.

This action research was applied to seven students of different grades. They were chosen since they cannot speak fluently in L2, and their pronunciation differs from their levels. Most of the students have been studying in the same institution since kindergarten, and

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they have had between 6 and 8 hours per week of the English subject. It is expected that the practice of self-assessment techniques through an audio diary (or voice recording) will help the students improve their speaking skills and enable them to communicate in English. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does self-assessment help students improve their speaking skills?
2. What do students think about self-assessment after recording their voices?

### **Literature Review**

Concepts are an essential part of the teaching and learning process; they permit a better comprehension of the context; this section contains definitions related to Speaking and self-assessment techniques.

#### **Speaking**

There are a lot of definitions around the word *speaking*. For Bahadorfar and Omidvar (2014) “Speaking is a crucial part of second language learning and teaching, it’s an art of communication and one of 4 productive skills, that must mastered in learning foreign language.” (p. 9). In other words, speaking is an interactive process where individuals share information, it is the natural communication method. In the prioritized curriculum with emphasis on skills (Ministerio de Educaciòn, 2022), one of the main curricular objectives is to interact quite clearly, confidently, and appropriately in a range of formal and informal social situations with a limited but effective command of the spoken language (CEFR- B1 level).

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Learners should know basic and significant elements of speaking. Pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary are some of the key elements that help students to communicate understandably in L2 (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

### **Self-Assessment**

Self-assessment is the process through which learners test themselves. It is a resource to achieve success in each action that is carried out. In the self-assessment lies the importance of self-diagnosis to determine what things we need to improve and what others we are doing well. There are several definitions related to self-assessment. For example, Noonan and Duncan (2019) defined self-assessment as a process of constructing, validating, applying, and evaluating criteria applied to students' work.

Also, Bandura (1997 cited in Ross, 2006) expressed that “students who perceive themselves to have been successful on the current task (i.e., who recognize it as a mastery experience) are more likely to believe that they will be successful in the future.” (p. 6). Therefore, learners with great confidence in their capabilities to accomplish the target tasks are more likely to pass the course.

Research developed in an Ecuadorian navy by Moncayo and Ramírez-Ávila (2022) concluded that recruits improved their self-confidence when speaking English, especially when speaking in public, due to implementing a self-assessment technique. In another intervention carried out by Cañete and Inostroza-Arauz (2022), the results revealed that the students improved their performance in their presentations through the implementation of self-assessment technique and the use of a checklist as an effective tool.

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Despite the benefits of self-assessment, students are not truly prepared to take on self-assessment. This may be because students are not acquainted with the technique, or they lack the self-awareness and reflection skills to accurately evaluate their own work. Moreover, learners may struggle with prejudices, such as overconfidence or self-doubt, which might alter the results. Also, traditional assessment is more considered in the education system, Falchikov (2006 cited in Schuessler, 2010) it does not allow innovative practices such as student self assessment, which reduce students' practice in the theme. Besides, social longing, fear of negative results may cause students to inappropriately assess their own work to please others.

It is helpful that teachers introduce students to the concepts and elements of self-assessment. Oscarson (1989 cited in Mohd & Abu, 2019) proposed that teachers use questionnaires, rating scales and checklists and others when conducting self-assessment. This requires taking time at the outset of the activity to know what is needed, and to purvey an effective guide on how to judge their own contributions. Learners need to be well supported to develop criteria that match with expected outcomes. If self-assessment elements are set up and plainly communicated, students will obtain positive results.

### **Innovation**

This innovation was about recording the students' daily routines on any electronic device to improve their speaking skills. It lasted two weeks..The teacher gave students the directions they had to carry out during the innovation and presented the instruments.

A plan was developed to organize the activities carried out by teachers and students (appendix 1). The objective in the first week was to describe daily routines by using simple present and past tenses and adverbs of frequency. Students were asked to name three

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activities they did and did not do and their frequency. Students reported their routines to the whole class. After that, students used the checklist (appendix 2) for self-assessment to monitor how they did the task.

As a pretest, students recorded an introduction about themselves. They had to say their names and ages, where they lived, and their favorite free time activities. The recording would be about two minutes long and sent to the teacher to evaluate them employing the grading rubric which contains the descriptors: Grammar, vocabulary, details (description, activity, originality), and pronunciation. It was designed on a 1 to 5 scale (see Appendix 3). During the two weeks, students continued doing activities to reinforce their knowledge and develop activities. Students watched videos of writing and speaking tasks in simple present and past, adverbs of frequency, and vocabulary; all the activities focused on speaking skills.

In the second week, the objective was to structure sentences orally using present and past tenses, adverbial phrases, and related vocabulary. Students continued performing some speaking tasks before the last recording. As a post-test, learners recorded an audio of the activities they carried out during the day, from early morning until late at night. They used the checklist to self-assess, and the teacher provided individual feedback with the rubric.

### **Research Methodology**

According to Efron and Ravid (2019), action research is an investigation that educators conduct to improve student learning. In addition, doing action research means taking action to improve teaching and learning practices, collecting data to measure the impact of those actions. Action research has cyclical steps: Step 1, identify a problem; Step 2, gather background information; Step 3, design the study; Step 4, collect data; Step 5, analyze and interpret data; Step 6, implement and share the findings.



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### **Participants**

The action research took place in an institution in Machala city, which has three levels of the education system (kindergarten, school, and high school). There were seven participants: three men and four women. Their ages were between 13 and 17 years old. According to an online mock test taken in the same school as part of its academic process, their English proficiency level obtained was A2. The students were chosen due to their difficulty in speaking skills when they had to perform dialogues, carry out presentations, answer questions, and so on.

### **Instruments**

#### **Pre and posttest**

To answer the quantitative research question of to what extent does self-assessment help students improve their speaking skills. A pre and posttest was applied, and the procedure was implemented in two weeks. To start, the students had to record two audios, in the first audio (pretest) they introduced themselves by sharing their personal information and daily routines, the activity occurred before the explanation of the implementation of self-assessment. For the posttest, students record an audio of 2 minutes, they compared both audio applying self-assessment and realized how they improved the ability.

#### **Survey**

To answer the qualitative research question: what do students think about self-assessment after recording their voices? A survey was applied, in which the students responded to four questions regarding their self-assessment thoughts and whether they improved their speaking skills. The survey contained open-ended questions (see Appendix 4).

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### **Data Analysis**

#### **Quantitative Data**

To assess self-assessment speaking skills, a checklist, and a grading rubric were used to score them. The data obtained were tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet. The statistical results of the pre-test and post-test were revised to obtain the maximum, minimum, mean standard deviation, and the *p*-value, to correlate the results whether the activity and technique helped students to enhance their speaking skills.

#### **Qualitative Data**

To answer the question: What do students think about self-assessment after recording their voices? The data was collected in a survey questionnaire. The researcher coded the answers with keywords to find similarities and organized them in a word document into positive and negative to know the participants' reflections about the implemented strategy.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

The present action research was applied to improve the academic process around English language acquisition, especially speaking skills. Collaboration and participation need to be voluntary, and participants must be autonomous and free to withdraw at any time without any consequences (Banegas & Villacañas, 2015).

First, consent letters were sent to the authorities and parents, which were approved by both. Second, it was necessary to explain clearly to the participants the research's goals and procedure, "open communication is the key to overcoming the split between researcher and researched, between theory and practice" (Zeni, 1998, p. 18). Finally, the process was carried out with total privacy and confidentiality.

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### Results

This section includes the results gathered from the pre-test and post-test. The data was calculated using a spreadsheet, obtaining the following results of descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviations, and *p-value*. Table 1 portrays the results of the *Pretest and post-test descriptive and Inferential Statistics*

**Table 1**

*Pretest and Posttest Descriptive and Inferential Statistics*

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>St. Dv.</b>	<b>p value</b>
<b>Pre-test</b>	7	2.04	1.75	2.5	0.36	0
<b>Post-test</b>	7	3.4	3.0	4.0	0.48	0

The mean in the pre-test was 2.04, and in the post-test was 3.4. The results show a difference. In the first task (audio about their personal information), students had limited use of grammar structures, poor vocabulary, did not organize their ideas coherently, and the pronunciation was not fluent. Meanwhile, in the post-test (a recording of their daily routines), students increased their grades because they could structure the statements to a reasonable degree, they used appropriate words and expressions to talk about everyday situations, the pronunciation was clear and appropriate to the task.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive and inferential statistics per construct*

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Criteria	Pre-test					Post-test				
	N#	Mean	Min	Max	SD	Mean	Min	Max	SD	p. value
Grammar	7	2.6	2.00	3	0.53	3.4	3.00	4.00	0.53	0.00003
Vocabulary	7	2.0	2.00	2	0.00	3.1	3.00	4.00	0.49	0.00002
Details	7	2.1	2.00	3	0.38	3.0	3.00	4.00	0.38	0.00020
Pronunciation	7	1.4	1.00	2	0.53	3.3	3.00	4.00	0.53	0.00009

To answer the second question: *What do students think about self-assessment after recording their voices?* A survey with four inquiries was taken after the innovation. Most of the students agreed that the self-assessment application was beneficial to enhance their speaking skills. For instance one student mentioned “self-assessment technique guided me to evaluate myself to improve my pronunciation.” (student 6)

However, one student said that he did not feel comfortable using the strategy: “At the beginning, I did not feel very comfortable, but today I can speak quite well.” (student 4). Also, they rated the experience to improve their speaking as very good, “I rate my speaking skills very good.” (student 1); “I could rate my speaking very good” (student 4).

Regarding the time of the implementation, two students responded it should have been more days or weeks: “It should have been three or four weeks.” (student 1); “I would like it had more days.” (student 5), contrasting the other students which answered that the time was right: “The time was right.” (student 2).

Most of the students’ answers were positive, which means they agreed with the effectiveness of the video recording of their daily activities and the use of the technique to evaluate their performance related to improving their oral production.

## Discussion

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The objective of this innovation was to improve speaking skills through self-assessment techniques. For that, two research questions were answered. The first question is: *To what extent does self-assessment help students improve their speaking skills?* It was answered when students realized their weaknesses and worked on them through the self-assessment technique.

According to Noonan and Duncan (2019), self-assessment is a process to evaluate the student's performance. In this sense, the students who participated in this intervention could evaluate themselves and improve their speaking skills through engagement activities such as recording their voices using technology, which is an excellent tool to enhance speaking ability, motivate, and produce orally Nguyen (2022).

For the positive results obtained in the application of the self-assessment strategy, it is found that self-assessment is beneficial for students' confidence, similar to the research developed by Moncayo and Ramirez-Ávila (2022) in an institution with recruits, they improved their self-confidence when speaking with the application of self-assessment. Also, self-assessment helps students succeed in their future work. Ross (2006) manifested that students' success depends on the confidence they have to do the common tasks. Besides, self-assessment permits students to enhance their capabilities.

Four descriptors in the grading rubric determined the grades of each learner, also, a checklist was used for students to verify their improvement. Those tools were used to first to give feedback on the students' performance, and second for students' self-evaluation and perception about their work. Likewise, the conclusion that Cañete and Inostroza (2022) had in their research.

### **Conclusions**

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In this research, the main purpose was to help students increase their confidence in participating in speaking exercises using technology.

The implementation of this case study was relevant for the teacher and students. The first reason is the confidence that learners have during the speaking activities, and second the results. The self-assessment allowed students to realize their weakness around speaking in L2 and work just in it to improve.

Also, the voice recording, compared to an audio diary, contributed to enhancing pronunciation and fluency. At the same time, they increased their vocabulary and structured sentences correctly according to the verbal tenses. It is necessary to say that those students will continue practicing speaking activities to increase their level and achieve a higher one.

### **Limitations**

A limitation to implementing this case study was the few participants. Due to the parents of the rest of the students did not allow their children to participate in this intervention because they did not want to have more tasks to do. Another restriction was around the authorities; the principal recommended not grading students on the institution's platform, which demotivated students to participate.

### **Recommendations**

This study revealed that through self-assessment, students could improve their speaking skills, enhance their pronunciation, and increase confidence in themselves. For those reasons, applying the self-assessment technique with teachers' support is recommended.

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Teachers should include the use of self-assessment in their planning. It is a tool to evaluate students, and enable them to take responsibility for their learning.

Teachers should give students a clear explanation about the technique. By proposing activities which hook them and also how important it is to be sincere when they score their tasks.

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# SELF ASSESSMENT TO IMPROVE SPEAKING

## **Appendix 1**

### **Pre and Post Checklist Categories for self-assessment**

Available upon request.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Plan**

Available upon request.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Speaking Rubric**

Available upon request.

## **Appendix 4**

### **Survey**

Available upon request.