



**Peer-Assessment to Improve Speaking Skills in B1 Students through Oral Performance  
in a Private University**

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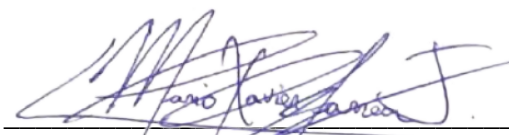
**Modality:** Research Report

Presented as Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Magíster en Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros con Mención en la Enseñanza de Inglés. CES: RPC-SE-19-N°.140-2020. Cohort 2023 - 2024. Author's email: [mario.larrea@casagrande.edu.ec](mailto:mario.larrea@casagrande.edu.ec)  
Guayaquil, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024.



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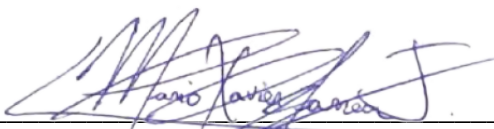
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## **Peer-Assessment to Improve Speaking Skills in B1 Students through Oral Performance in a Private University**

The acquisition of proficient English speaking skills is a component of language education for university students, not only for international communication but academic and professional purposes. In a private university in Guayaquil, second-year students are required to master English as a foreign language prior the culmination of their careers, as mandated by the Consejo de Educación Superior del Ecuador (2022) and by the institution itself, which requires a minimum B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

These students, who have been predominantly raised in non-English speaking environments, struggle with a lack of self-confidence in spoken English. This difficulty might emerge from a lack of practice, insufficient vocabulary, frequent use of their native language, and a sense of negativity towards being evaluated by a teacher. Therefore, linguistic insecurity and anxiety represent a complication, by obstructing active participation in conversational and professional contexts.

It is necessary to recognize that the lack of confidence in speaking is a consequence of insufficient immersion in speaking activities. In response to that problem, this research explores peer-assessment as a solution to improve the communication of feedback, as it can reduce insecurity associated with being evaluated by an authority figure. Instead, peer-assessment involves students evaluating each other, with the purpose of determining whether incorporating it can boost English language proficiency and provide insights into the effectiveness of this technique. The study aims to foster collaborative work and encourage constructive criticism by answering to two research questions that intend to measure the impact of peer-assessment in university students.

## **Participants**

The study involved a group of volunteers from a private university in Guayaquil, aged between 23 and 27 years old, with a total of 8 individuals. The participants included 62.5% men (5) and 37.5% women (3). These participants were in their second year of college and studying different academic majors: 37.5% were in International Business (3), 25% in Mass Communications (2), and 12.5% each in Graphic Design (1), Advertising (1), and Education (1). Their socioeconomic background ranged from middle to upper middle class, ensuring a certain level of access to online resources.

In terms of English proficiency, participants demonstrated an intermediate level, specifically a B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), reflecting their previous exposure to English in academic contexts. Internet access was available to all participants, facilitating online interactions and interventions. All participants resided in Guayaquil, and were requested to participate through a direct selection between different careers, intended to preserve objectivity.

## **Results**

To answer the first research question: “To what extent is peer-assessment effective in enhancing the English-speaking skills of second-year university students?”, the results showed a difference between the pretest and posttest. As depicted in Table 1, students’ mean score in the pretest was 13.25, while in the posttest it improved to 18.13, indicating a statistical enhancement in their speaking skills after the implementation of peer-assessment.

### **Table 1**

#### **Descriptive statistics: Pretest and posttest results**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. Deviation</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Pretest</b>	8	11.00	15.00	13.25	1.49	0.00
<b>Posttest</b>	8	15.00	20.00	18.13	1.73	

The minimum grade in the pretest was 11.00, with a maximum of 15.00. In the posttest, the minimum was 15.00 and the maximum reached 20.00, representing the highest score according to the employed rubric to grade students. Additionally, the application of the t-test gave a *p*-value of 0.00; lower than 0.05, confirming that the results are statistically significant. There is a difference between pretest and posttest and students improved their speaking skills after using peer assessment throughout the sessions.

**Table 2**

**Descriptive statistics per construct**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Pretest</b>					<b>Posttest</b>				
	<b>N</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Grammar</b>	8	2.00	4.00	2.94	0.68	4.00	5.00	4.50	0.53	0.00
<b>Vocabulary</b>	8	3.00	4.00	3.44	0.50	4.00	5.00	4.63	0.52	0.00
<b>Fluency and Pronunciation</b>	8	2.00	5.00	3.75	1.16	3.00	5.00	4.38	0.92	0.01
<b>Content organization</b>	8	2.00	4.00	3.13	0.64	4.00	5.00	4.63	0.52	0.00

The data presented in Table 2 shows that peer-assessment improved students' speaking in the areas of the grading rubric, including the following descriptors: grammar, vocabulary, fluency/pronunciation, and content organization. Overall, there was an improvement in all areas during the research, with the highest mean scores of the posttest in vocabulary and content organization. In the pretest, fluency and pronunciation had the highest score among all areas, establishing the idea that the pretest obtained a more natural or spontaneous speech, but less organized and structured than the posttest.

To answer the second research question: “What are students’ perspectives regarding peer-assessment to improve their speaking skills?”, the participants were given a survey to which they replied anonymously, to be given full freedom to express themselves after the process ended.

The survey’s results gave information about students’ perspectives regarding the use of peer-assessment through a checklist to improve their speaking skills. Based on some opinions, student B’s response to a question regarding the difficulty or easiness of using the checklist, highlighted it is useful as a guide for structuring their speaking tasks, but pointing out as initially challenging to ensure covering of all aspects for the posttest stage. Student B praised the checklist’s value in facilitating the task, but mentioned that it might also represent a high standard for students who want to cover all its aspects. This comment acknowledged how the checklist can work as a tool for setting high standards and guide students in peer-assessment.

Student C’s response to a question about the use of the checklist to evaluate themselves or their peers, emphasized the need for a “personalized” analysis in language learning. Student C also praised the checklist’s effectiveness, but suggested that some individual cases may require specific assessment. This comment focused on the adaptability of the checklist, looking for it to be adjusted to different needs.

All eight participants found the checklist to be useful, indicating a positive reception of the peer-assessment strategy. This served as a mean to understand students’ perspectives towards assessing their peers in speaking-based classes. The survey’s opinions revealed that students feel more confident when following an organized structure, even for daily topics such as reflecting on the life and achievements of an important person in the arts, but without

ignoring challenges as their struggle of thinking in English without mentally translating from their native Spanish. Overall, the survey confirmed peer-assessment's impact in promoting well-organized communication.

### **Discussion**

The results of this report align with several points of view about peer-assessment, which can improve the English-speaking skills of university students. According to the results, students showed an improvement in all the descriptors considered in the grading rubric, which was structured according to the checklist: grammar, vocabulary, fluency/pronunciation, and content organization of their video sustained monologues. This aligns with Falchikov (1995) and Gielen et al. (2010) who agreed that peer assessment is a process that encourages a group of individuals to assess their peers' performances through qualitative comments and feedback.

As stated in the first research question: "To what extent is peer-assessment effective in enhancing the English-speaking skills of second-year university students?", the results obtained in the posttest grades compared to the pretest reinforce how peer-assessment worked as a technique. Students' increase in all the areas, specially vocabulary and content organization agreed with Harris et al. (2014), who noted that peer-assessment helps facilitators in expecting that students take on the role of assessors, developing a sense of what actually means quality work. The organization of the items provided in the checklist offered learning standards that helped students to revise their own weaknesses, as they assess others, as stated by Usman et al. (2018).

Nevertheless, some barriers emerged regarding peer-assessment's application. At the beginning of the process, there was some reluctance from a small number of students to



provide random feedback to classmates they have not met before, which led to the researcher explaining the importance of objectivity, opting for leaving aside the possibility of assessing people with a prior personal relationship. This limitation coincides with Azarnoosh (2013) viewpoint, who argued the potential for positive or negative bias in peer-assessment, which requires careful management to ensure fairness.

Furthermore, to respond the second research question: “What are students’ perspectives regarding peer-assessment to improve their speaking skills?”, the students’ answers were positive towards the effectiveness of the checklist in guiding both their speaking and classmates’ assessments, though there were observations that personalized criteria could be considered to better adjust to individual needs. This proves a coincidence with the findings of Douglas (2010), who pointed out that in order to peer assess, students need a criteria which can be developed by students for a specific task. Also, the need for personalized feedback approaches Basuki’s (2016) belief that peer-assessment allows students to take responsibility for both their peers’ learning, as well as their own.

To sum everything up, this report corroborated the information from existing literature. It also provided data of how peer-assessment worked to improve English-speaking skills among university students. After attending eight classes and performing three practices apart from the pretest and posttest tasks, both the statistics, as well as the survey’s responses indicated that students improved their speaking, while also gaining confidence through the use of a checklist for assessing each other.

### **Conclusions**

The results determined that peer-assessment enhanced the speaking skills of all the participants involved. The statistical analysis concluded that there was an improvement in

their performances, with pretest scores ranging between 11.00 to 15.00, and posttest scores increasing from 15.00 to 20.00. The t-test confirmed this improvement, with a *p*-value of 0.00, below 0.05.

The use of peer-assessment throughout the eight sessions contributed to improve several areas measured by the grading rubric, which was based on the checklist. Specifically, vocabulary and content organization got the most significant increases in mean scores from pretest to posttest. On the other hand, fluency and pronunciation were the highest-scoring areas in the pretest, indicating a more natural speech, while the posttest revealed progress towards more organized and structured speeches.

The pretest and posttest revealed that students' speeches became more organized and grammatically accurate, understanding the use of reported speech, phrasal verbs and prepositions of place through different exercises and interactive activities. Initially, a lack of confidence was noticed in a few participants, as they felt embarrassed of making mistakes, yet the pretest results captured spontaneity in fluency, reflecting B1 students' prior knowledge in English. After the students' employed the checklist in each video practice to assess their peers, and received feedback from the teacher, the results showed that they focused more on respecting grammar rules and organizing their monologues according to the checklist's criteria.

All eight students responded through an open anonymous survey that the checklist was effective to guide their acquisition of grammar structures and improving their speaking, with two volunteers pointing out that it also represented a challenge for them, to cover all aspects considered. Therefore, the application of peer-assessment over three practices and two graded activities helped students to become more active participants, involved and knowledgeable of the assessment criteria. The qualitative data alongside the statistical

analysis validate that peer-assessment worked, not only to improve speaking in young adult students, but also in motivating them to participate in content development.

### **Limitations**

The research faced limitations as an initial discrepancy in some students' proficiency between writing and speaking. Two students said they felt more comfortable in writing their scripts than in delivering them orally, as they reported being too nervous. The lack of practice of those who do not sign in at English levels on time at university made some of them think in Spanish before translating their thoughts into English, being this a barrier to spontaneous speech. Addressing this issue required additional time from the researcher to encourage those participants to practice speaking more confidently.

Another limitation was related to the peer-feedback process. While the sessions were designed for random peer-assessment to maintain objectivity, some students were reluctant to assess volunteers they did not know well. Despite clear instructions on the first session, a few students who coincidentally knew each other from before, requested in private to evaluate their friends, something that could have potentially affected their feedback criteria. Nevertheless, some other participants positively accepted the opportunity to interact with new people, seeing it as a chance to expand their academic or social circles.

The survey designed to answer the second research question through students' perspectives on peer-assessment also presented limitations, as it took a week for all eight students to complete it with their own reflective answers. The continuous necessity to remind them to complete it indicated that students might prefer multiple choice questions for quicker replies. This delay in the survey prolonged the qualitative data collection.

An unexpected logistical problem also meant significant limitations. The final session, intended for the projection of all the sustained monologues to the class, had to be conducted asynchronously due to power outages in Ecuador. This briefly extended the duration of the posttest, as participants, being adult volunteers with responsibilities, required flexibility. The interaction between instructor and participants had to accommodate these interruptions, considering some volunteers' need to balance their collaboration with their personal or professional activities.

In conclusion, the need for flexibility in the schedules to accommodate the adult volunteers' responsibilities impacted the study's pace. Given that participants were contributing voluntarily, imposing extra pressure on them had to be avoided. This sometimes led to delays as some of the assignments were not submitted on time, and required adjustments in the session's dates.

### **Recommendations**

For those who would like to replicate this research, they should consider the possible lack of objectivity in peer-feedback application. Therefore, researchers need to explain instructions from the beginning to ensure that students feel prepared to give and receive feedback, regardless of any personal relationships. Instructors should focus on the importance of feedback, while maintaining an environment in which students feel comfortable assessing classmates they do not know.

Also, redesigning surveys is a recommendation, as most adult volunteers may find open or reflective questions time-consuming and challenging. Future studies could incorporate closed-ended questions and rely more on quantitative data, making this stage quicker for participants.

Finally, to give flexibility in schedules and assignment deadlines is needed when working with adult volunteers who have work or academic commitments. Researchers should be prepared for unexpected interruptions, especially in online sessions, to avoid extending the duration of the study, without forgetting to encourage students to practice speaking in their interactions outside of class, promoting a more natural use of English.

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<https://casagrande.zoom.us/j/4222434292>

Appendix List  
Available upon request