Enhancing English Speaking Skills through Self-Assessment-Based Action Research

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Abstract

This paper presents an action research study conducted in an English communicative course at a Chilean university. This investigation aimed to improve university students' speaking skills through the self-assessment methodology. The intervention was held during four weeks, in which participants were exposed to English through task-based lessons that required their systematic self-assessment to develop their speaking skills. With the use of an analytic rubric to measure whether or not there was improvement in pre and post oral interviews, a learning journal and a focus group interview, findings showed that there was a positive change in their speaking performances, and learners appreciated this methodology as a way to improve their academic results.

Key words: self-assessment, awareness, speaking, English language, action research.

Mejoramiento de las habilidades de expresión oral en inglés mediante la investigación-acción sustentada en la autoevaluación

Resumen

Este artículo presenta una investigación-acción realizada en un curso de inglés comunicativo en una universidad chilena. El objetivo del estudio fue mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral de los estudiantes mediante la metodología de la auto-evaluación. La intervención tuvo una duración de cuatro semanas en las cuales los participantes estuvieron expuestos al inglés mediante clases basadas en tareas que requirieron una constante autoevaluación para el desarrollo de su habilidad de expresión oral. Se utilizó una rúbrica analítica para medir si es que hubo mejoras en las entrevistas pre y post, una bitácora de aprendizaje y un grupo focal. Los resultados mostraron que hubo un cambio positivo en sus desempeños orales y que los estudiantes apreciaron esta metodología como una forma de mejorar sus resultados académicos.

Palabras clave: auto-evaluación, conciencia, expresión oral, lengua inglesa, investigación-acción.

Introduction

As English has become a worldwide language, learning how to speak it is a must now for most people around the globe, especially for students who are not born in English speaking countries, in which the foreign language is seen as a very important professional skill, and educational systems work hard to implement foreign language curriculums that are not always successful in allowing learners to really master the language. Aware of this situation, a private university in Concepción, Chile, developed an online multimedia platform, in which students from most majors in their first or second year, have access to practice all four English language skills: speaking, reading, writing and listening, as part of their curriculum. This English online course is not yet compulsory to all majors in the university, because it is currently financially impossible.

Speaking is the skill that the English Online Programme focuses on in more detail. The main aim of the course is to provide students with the necessary tools to help them communicate in English as fluently as possible, managing appropriate vocabulary, intonation, and grammar. Students should be able to comprehend and produce the language in a natural, contextualised way. Oral interviews are part of this English course and are conducted at three different stages: initial, midterm and final. The last two oral interviews are graded, 25% and 35% of their final course load, respectively. 20% is awarded to written online quizzes and the remaining 20% is assigned to oral recordings students submit through the platform, which can be rehearsed and recorded as many times as they want before the submission of the final draft to be graded. The course modules are divided into four levels, following *The Common European Framework* scale starting from the A1 level and finishing in B2.

However, many of these university students have failed to accomplish the minimum requirements to pass from one module to another; therefore, they cannot move from A1 to the higher levels. Students have stated that this is because they do not know how they are assessed; they claim they have not received feedback about their performance, and/or simply because they have never understood the requirements needed in order to achieve satisfactory results to be promoted from one level to another. Unaware of how the speaking assessment process works, students keep failing the course. In some cases, students have had to take the course even three times. In some other worse scenarios, some students have had to drop their majors, since the university policy allows them to fail any subject only a maximum of three times.

The university in which this action research was conducted has twenty-five thousand students and it offers classes to diverse majors. Most of these students come from different parts of the country. Their English proficiency level is measured when they have to take the English course, since the Chilean reality is extremely different, depending on their secondary studies. Few students come to the university with a reasonably good English level, and most of them do not recognise the very basic language commands.

Chilean education distinguishes three types of educational establishments at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels: public, semi-public and private. Several official reports have claimed that these three levels are unfortunately associated with education quality. Private education is almost always the one that achieves the best academic results in terms of national exams, and the number of students who successfully enter higher education.

Universities receive students who come from all three public, semi-public and private sectors, which translates into having students who have different language levels. Once again those learners who come from semi-public and private education tend to be the ones who have better entrance English levels and, therefore, seem to achieve better results in their university studies. That is why all learners have to initially go through a diagnostic process to place them in the right level, and specifically support those students whose entrance oral performance in English is weak.

Not all the students of the university have this course as a compulsory requirement of their majors. Yet, all of the university majors will eventually include it as mandatory. That is why we chose one of the classes in which there is mixture of majors; most of them belong to Engineering. These students show great enthusiasm towards learning English, and all of them have a basic language level, that is why they are so eager to learn. They all recognise how valuable to master a second language will be once they graduate. They all agreed that, despite the fact that this could be hard for them, learning English would be beneficial for their future professional careers. On this line, the self-assessment methodology seemed appealing for them. Since they showed great willingness to learn, being aware of their learning and assessment process became something urgent to them as well.

Self-assessment can be offered as an opportunity to understand the quality requirements involved in a specific speaking task, especially for students who claim to be confused about the assessment criteria used when giving their oral interviews. In this action research, learners will be required to assess themselves in order to raise awareness of their own learning process and thus improve their academic results by the end of the course. To conduct this self-assessment intervention, students were offered mock interview sessions after midterms. They were asked to record themselves, and self-assess based on a self-assessment rubric. Teacher guidance and feedback were offered throughout this study. This paper is in the context of the research grant FONDECYT 1191021 entitled *Estudio correlacional y propuesta de intervención en evaluación del aprendizaje del inglés: las dimensiones cognitiva, afectiva y social del proceso evaluativo del idioma extranjero.*

Theoretical Framework

Language Assessment

Many teachers confuse the term grading with the term assessment. This usually happens because sometimes assessing leads to a grade. According to Martinez del Campo (2013), assessment goes beyond grading, and it presents itself as a procedural phenomenon of the students' development. To assess, teachers do not necessarily need to grade their students. The main goal of assessing students is to gather information to check if in the process of learning, they have acquired all the knowledge, skills and attitudes they are supposed to.

Martinez del Campo (2013) states that there are three different phases in the process of assessing a student. The first stage involves a systematic gathering of information about the student's performance. The second stage is where the teacher gets all the information possible that would help him or her determine the student's progress and flaws, which would allow teachers to take action in order to improve and facilitate the student's learning. Dur-

ing the last stage, feedback is present. Feedback allows teachers to communicate with their students about their strengths and weaknesses, to contribute to their learning process.

Assessing is a process which pretends to analyse students' performance in order to do something about it. That is why grading and assessing are different. While assessing is a process that develops along the whole learning process, grading takes place at a particular moment, and aims to judge the degree of sufficiency of knowledge demonstrated by the student (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). While both grading and assessing are important, assessment becomes a matter of greater importance. This is because when assessing, teachers have the opportunity of giving feedback to students, in order for them to improve and become more aware of their own learning process.

Self-assessment and Learning Awareness

Self-assessment can be of great help when it comes to learning another language. This is defined by Bound & Falchikok (1989, p. 49) as "the involvement of learners in making judgement about their achievements and the outcomes of their learning". By conducting this type of assessment students become more aware of their learning process. According to Brew (1999), this is connected to power, control and authority, and how all these are transferred from the facilitator to the learner, which means that the assessment itself is not only on the teacher's behalf, but students have a say in their own learning.

Figure 1.   Learning of self-assessment (Taras, 2010)

Figure 1 shows the existing relationship between outcomes and goals, content and students' personal development. For self-assessment to be meaningful, students have to be able to understand what self-assessment means, and to what extent this will help them achieve the expected learning outcomes of a particular course. Students have to understand the purpose of a lesson, and what they are expected to accomplish at the end of it.

Tan (2008, p. 16) defined self-assessment as "the involvement of students in making judgements of their learning". By being involved, students can make different judgements on their learning process. Self-assessment has become more popular since the student-centered approach has a more formative purpose. When using language self-assessment, it is expected that students can make judgements about their own language learning achievement and proficiency. By doing so, students become more autonomous about their language learning process. In Figure 2, the benefits of self-assessment are listed.
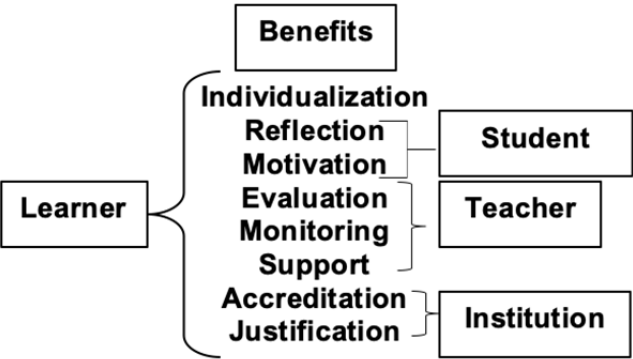
Figure 2.   The benefits of self-assessment

There are a number of factors that have to be combined to have a successful self-assessment methodology implemented in the classroom. Students should be able to reflect upon their work, and be motivated enough to accomplish what is expected, that is self-assessment. The teacher plays a major role in which she or he must be monitoring and assessing students' work. The institution in which the self-assessment process is taking place must act as a guardian of the learning process. It must guarantee that the process is actually happening and should feel confident about its efficiency and practice.

Self-assessment is one of the most important skills that learners need to have for future professional development and lifelong learning, as it develops learners' ability to be self-assessors of their own learning (Wride, 2017). By asking students to self-assess, the teacher is not only preparing them for a singular subject, but is making them acquire the ability of reflecting upon mistakes that could be a lesson for life. If the teacher takes the role of teaching the student to reflect on his or her own learning process, this will be a characteristic and ability that the learner in question would keep more than just during the duration of a course, but for his or her realisation as a professional.

According to McMillan & Hearn (2008), learners can lead to higher achievement with significant motivation when they set goals that lead to better understanding, when they define criteria, self-assess their learning improvement, reflect on their learning, and create strategies that promote learning. To achieve full proficiency in a particular subject, learners need to become fully aware of how they are being assessed; this way, when self-assessing, students can fully understand the purpose for which the entire assessment is taking place.

Self-assessment is different from other types of assessments such as testing, because it is a process that happens in the learner internally. It is also conducted and monitored by him or herself. When self-assessing, the process of feedback is done by the learner itself, is not carried out externally. In the procedure of self-assessment, feedback can be provided by comments and external scores given by the marker, as well as documents with quality criteria expected; however, elements such as learners' own ideas, emotions, values and ideas can be more easily accessed (Yan & Brown, 2017). As important as obtaining assessment results externally, it is mandatory to give importance to what the learner has to say about his or her own learning process. By making them say something about it, they are becoming

more aware of the learning process they are going through. Reflection is key when talking about self-assessment.

Self-assessment is a continuous procedure that involves editing and review. In formative assessment, this may take the form of involving learners to critique their work, as long as they monitor their progress and review (Perumanathan, 2014). At this point, self-assessment can be changing. This means that maybe the student thought he or she had achieved something, but when reviewing it, he or she might not have done so. That is why it is important to be constantly making the reflection on what has been learned, and what is under the process of achieving learning.

Self-assessment is one form of alternative assessment which seeks to make the assessment process more student-centered (Shepard, 2000; Weisi & Karimi, 2013). By creating a student-centred type of assessment, then teachers are involving students, making them part of their own learning process. By doing so, students can develop awareness of it. Self-assessment is a valid and reliable technique for assessing student performance, particularly in contexts in which self-assessments are used for formative rather than summative purposes (Ross & Starling, 2008). The purpose of self-assessment necessarily needs to be formative. For students to have something to look back to when achieving proficiency, self-assessment can be of great help. The purpose of conducting self-assessment has to be formative, and not only with the purpose of grading. If confused with that, then the entire process does not achieve any purpose.

Methods

Type of Research

The following is an action research study that is grounded in practical action, since it involves the active participation of university students in their own classroom settings (Burns, 2011). It stresses the collective dialogue between learners and research practitioners, as social and active agents who engage in producing knowledge that aims at transforming the dynamics of power inside the classroom (Fals-Borda & Rodríguez, 1987; Freire, 1982). This type of action research transforms learners, research practitioners and their own realities (Trinidad, Eos & Radley, 2019). By employing self-assessment as part of their own realities, participants become aware and reflexive of their own praxis, they rediscover learning and knowledge, and view action as transformation (Doqaruni, Vahid, Ghonsooly & Pishghadam, 2017).

Participants question and reflect critically their own learning experiences, and the way they are assessed. They become central in the process of language assessment, and significantly reduce the hierarchical relationship with the assessor. Assessment in the context of action research should be characterised as a complex process that involves different, sometimes conflicting, interests (Rahmani Doqaruni, Ghonsooly, & Pishghadam, 2018). And a process in which there is a need of empowering learners in dealing with their own learning and professional goals, creating a sense of belonging to a community of reflexive learners who seek for effective participation (Mcniff, 2014). For teachers, on the other hand, action research becomes a tool of dialogic, pedagogical and social intervention to apply necessary change in language teaching contexts (Giannikas, 2019; Taylor, Wilkie, & Baser, 2008).

Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 79) stress that "action research is about working to-wards practical outcomes, and also about creating new forms of understanding, since action research without understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless". This is directly related to self-assessment since it requires students' participation and learning awareness when implemented.

The research aims were:

- To assess the effectiveness of self-assessment on students' speaking skills.
- To explore the participants' perceptions on self-assessment as a strategy to improve their English-speaking skills.

This study was conducted in four weeks in which the aim was to find out how the imple-mentation of a self-assessment methodology could help to improve students' speaking skills. In four sessions, students were asked to self-assess. Intervention instruments were conducted in Spanish due to students' lack of proficiency in the target language. The pur-pose was to identify if, through self-assessment, students could improve their speaking skills and to explore their perceptions towards this methodology. The sessions covered the content described in Table 1 below:

Table 1:   Sessions of the research

Session	Topic	Session objective
1	Initial oral interview and analytic rubric	To measure students' English-speaking abilities regarding different topics.
1	Household Chores	To describe the frequency of household chores in pairs using frequency adverbs.
2	Directions	To locate places in the city by using different prepositions of place in oral activities.
3	Directions	To ask and give directions in the city using prepositions of place in role play situations
4	Shopping	To identify pieces of clothes, materials, designs, and colors by describing pictures orally
5	Focus group	To explore the participants' perceptions on self-assessment to improve their English-speaking skills.
6	Final oral interview and analytic rubric	To assess the effectiveness of self-assessment on students' speaking skills.

The study was divided in six sessions.

Before the intervention sessions started, participants had the initial oral interview. In sessions one, two, three and four, the second specific objective was addressed. Task based learning classes were held in order to have students constantly participate in different oral activities throughout the development of the class. A learning journal was used at the end of the class, once all the language contents had been covered.

In session five, a focus group was conducted in order to identify students' perceptions as stated in specific objective two. Only seven participants were asked to be part of the fo-cus group. These students were chosen based on their satisfactory results during the first oral interview held before the implementation of the self-assessment methodology.

In session six, twenty-two students took their final oral interview. The oral interview together with the analytic rubric were used to assess students' oral performance. During the first part of the semester, students took an initial oral interview. Then, the self-assessment methodology was implemented. At the end of this methodology, students took another oral interview. Students were assessed using the same analytic rubric. By doing this, it was expected to accomplish specific objective one.

Participants

Twenty-two A1 level students were studied. A1 level of English as stated by the Council of Europe is the first and most basic level of English. Students are between eighteen to twenty-two years old. There were eight women and fourteen men. The students have had many different experiences with English language instruction. In some cases, they had only had one hour of English instruction per week in secondary education.

The students are part of an English programme at the university level. Most students have to take this course because it is part of the curriculum; it is a sixteen-week course that has two different units. Each unit contains three different topics. Each week students have one class with their tutor (Chilean teacher of English) for ninety minutes, and one class with an English language native speaker, that lasts sixty minutes. Tutors are in charge of covering grammatical aspects of English, whereas native speakers foster communication through cultural classes which involve vocabulary. Both classes are communicative. By the end of lesson three, students take midterm assessments: an oral interview plus an online unit quiz. After that, once lesson six has been covered, students sit for final assessments which follow the same format as midterms.

Data Collection Techniques

During the implementation of the intervention plan, five instruments for data collection were used.

Oral Interview Task and an Analytic Rubric

The analytic rubric was used with the purpose of assessing both oral interviews, one before the intervention, and one at the end of it. The oral interview had three different parts. The first part was about direct questions to a student, based on the topics covered. The second part was a photo description in which students had to apply all vocabulary covered. The final part was a conversation in which students had to role-play a situation based on the contents studied. The analytic rubric used to assess this covers the following dimensions: *Vocabulary, Grammar, Pronunciation, Fluency, and Comprehension and Communication*. This instrument is formed by different levels of achievement that go from *Outstanding to Insufficient*, which are expressed as a scale to foresee a student's different levels of achievement.

Focus Group

Due to the quantity of participants (22 students), only 7 of them were asked to participate in the final focus group that was held. The questions of the focus group were in students' native language, because of their lack of proficiency in the target language. This method of data gathering was chosen due to its nature of encouraging participants to share a variety of viewpoints on the researched topic. It differs from other procedures of data collection that aim to reach consensus or solutions (Kvake & Brinkmann, 2009).

The focus group was divided into three different dimensions. The first dimension was *Methodological*. In this dimension, participants were asked questions to seek if the methodology was useful for them, their peers' reaction towards the methodology, the usefulness for the subject, the difference between their previous and actual oral performance, and if the methodology should be implemented for other students in the future. The second dimension was about the *Speaking improvement*. In this dimension, participants were asked if they believed they had improved their English-speaking abilities after the self-assessment methodology, which were the abilities of English they had struggled the most, what they could do in order to improve their English-speaking abilities, what they believed they had to do in order to improve their English-speaking abilities, and if they thought the implementation of the self-assessment methodology after every topic was meaningful for their learning. Finally, the third dimension was about this *Methodology's projection into the future*. Participants were asked about any difficulties they had experienced during its implementation, and if they would modify anything about it. For every single question, students were asked to justify their answers. There were no fixed turns assigned. The idea was for them to freely participate and convey their ideas.

Learning Journal

Learning journals are diaries to keep a record, in which students reflect upon *what* and *how* they learn. This instrument allows students to self-regulate their own learning about the subject being covered, and the different problems that could come up. To write a learning journal, each student must write a reflection of the content seen in a class at the end of it. Before the session ends, the teacher provides a few minutes for students to complete their journals. This record can be done freely or can include pre-stablished set of questions given by the teacher (Martinez Del Campo, 2013).

In this research, participants were asked to complete their learning journal in Spanish at the end of the lesson. The questions were common for each session. Therefore, for each topic, the same questions. The first question was about what had been the most important content for them. The second question aimed at knowing what topic had caused questions. Question three asked participants to reflect on what had been the most meaningful for them in the lesson. The last question was about the least important thing in the lesson. The learning journal also included a section in which students could include comments about the lesson itself.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data in this research consisted of two kinds. The first one was quantitative data associated with the two oral interviews assessed through a numerical analytic rubric. One of the interviews was at the beginning of this research, and one at the end. The second was qualitative data, drawn from a learning journal, and a focus group activity. The techniques mentioned before were used all along the intervention sessions, except for the focus group, which was run at the end of this research.

To analyse the data of the analytic rubric, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was applied. Also, the T-test was employed to see if there was a statistical difference before the initial and final application of the oral analytic rubric. With the learning journal, all results were translated into English and transcribed and processed through content analysis. Content analysis was used to process the qualitative data. The frequency was determined depending on how many times each subcategory was repeated in participants' answers. Finally, the focus group, frequency was measured according to the number of participants who agreed with each subcategory. Results were also transcribed.

Findings and Discussion

All the data gathered during and after the intervention will be presented according to each specific objective.

Specific Objective 1: To Assess the Effectiveness of Self-assessment on Students' Speaking Skills.

Findings about the Oral Interviews and the Analytic Rubric

To verify if there was improvement in participants' oral performance before and after the implementation of the self-assessment methodology, Table 2 below details participants' scores during the first oral interview versus the results of the participants once the self-assessment methodology was implemented.

As shown in Table 2, out of the twenty-two participants, sixteen improved their results after the implementation of the self-assessment methodology. In average, each participant made an improvement of three points. Four participants managed to keep their initial results showing no improvement, yet they did not lower their results. This may be due to the fact that some participants declared they already managed the language content beforehand; therefore, this methodology was not significant for them to acquire new knowledge in the subject. Two participants lowered their results after the implementation of the methodology. However, this change cannot be considered as significant, because they still managed to be under the passing score. It is also worth mentioning that all the participants of this action research passed the course.

Table 2.   Comparison chart before and after the self-assessment methodology.

Participants	Before intervention oral interview		After oral intervention interview	
	Points obtained (Out of 25)	Percentage of achievement (Out of 100%)	Points obtained (Out of 25)	Percentage of achievement (Out of 100%)
Participant 1	17	68%	21	84%
Participant 2	16	64%	16	64%
Participant 3	23	92%	21	84%
Participant 4	14	56%	18	72%
Participant 5	18	72%	18	72%
Participant 6	19	76%	21	84%
Participant 7	19	76%	19	76%
Participant 8	18	72%	19	76%
Participant 9	21	84%	22	88%
Participant 10	19	76%	21	84%
Participant 11	21	84%	19	76%
Participant 12	15	60%	18	72%
Participant 13	13	52%	18	72%
Participant 14	18	72%	20	84%
Participant 15	19	76%	21	84%
Participant 16	16	64%	14	56%
Participant 17	14	56%	15	60%
Participant 18	19	76%	19	76%
Participant 19	15	60%	18	72%
Participant 20	13	52%	16	64%
Participant 21	10	40%	18	72%
Participant 22	11	44%	14	56%

In order to measure the normality of the data, to analyse this objective statistically, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was applied. Since the oral interview and analytic rubric were given before and after the intervention, Table 3 shows its p-value.

Table 3.   Normality test before and after intervention

Instrument	P-value before the intervention	P-value after the intervention
Oral interview and Analytic rubric	.6376	.33837

Twenty-two students participated in this study (N=22). The p-value represents the statistical significance of the data obtained. The coefficient is measured between 0 and 1. The point here is to find out whether this data behaves normally or if it does not. The p-value indicated that there is evidence for the Null Hypothesis. The p-values were more than 0.05, which proves the normality of the data in this study. Once the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of nor-

mality was applied, the mean scores of the oral analytic rubric were analysed before and after the intervention as shown in Figure 3.
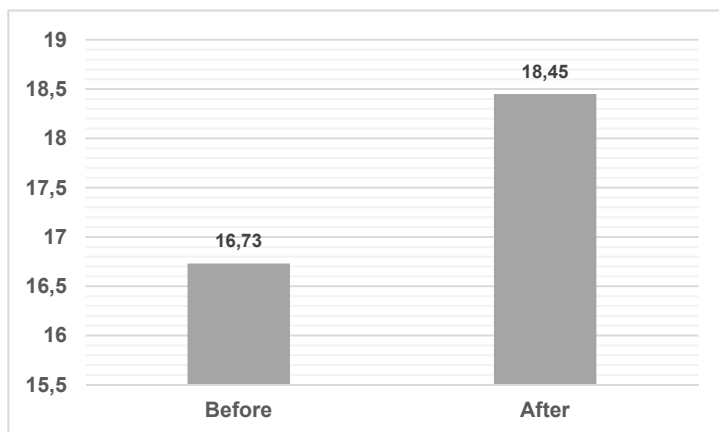

Figure 3.   Mean scores before and after the intervention

Figure 3 represents both mean scores before and after the intervention. Before the intervention, the mean score corresponded to 16,73 and after the intervention the mean score was 18,45. The T-test was applied to see if there was statistical difference before and after the application of the oral analityc rubric. There are two types: paired and unpaired. Paired means that both samples consist of the same test subjects. A paired t-test is equivalent to a one-sample t-test. Regarding p-value and statistical significance, the two-tailed p-value equals 0.0530. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not quite statistically significant. The *before* mean score minus the *after* mean score equals -1.73, which means there is a 95% confidence interval of this difference (from -3.48 to 0.02). A review of the data employed for this research is expressed in Table 4, which shows there was no significant improvement after the implementation of this methodology.

Table 4.   T-test results before and after the intervention

Criteria	Before intervention	After intervention
Mean Scores (MS)	16.73	18.45
Standard deviations (SD)	3.34	2.32
Standard error of the mean (SEM)	0.71	0.50

It is important to mention that the implementation of the self-assessment methodology was a formative process. To improve learning and indeed teaching, assessment must be formative in both function and purpose and must put the student at the centre (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002). In this study, students were the centre of the process, since the entire purpose of the study was to help them improve their results through self-assessment. Grading was not part of the study itself, since the implementation of all the self-assessment tools was new to them. It can also be inferred that after the implementation of this methodology, the vast majority of

participants improved their speaking results after taking their oral interview. None of them lowered their scores, and only few of them were able to keep them constant.

Self-assessment provides learners with personalised feedback on the effectiveness of their learning strategies, specific learning methods and learning materials (Gardner, 2000; Tsagari & Csépes, 2011). By including self-assessment, it is expected that learners can monitor their learning process individually. By monitoring their progress, learners can effectively know how and what they are learning. If learners reach that goal, then the implementation of self-assessment as a tool to improve their speaking skills is complete.

Specific Objective 2: To Explore the Participants' Perceptions on the Use of Self-Assessment as a Strategy to Improve their English Speaking Skills

Students were exposed to the self-assessment methodology at the end of each intervention session. In each session, students were reminded of how to complete each instrument. In all sessions students were asked to self-assess using a self-assessment scale per topic covered.

Findings about the Learning Journal

The third instrument applied was a learning journal. Students were asked to reflect upon each topic on certain questions. The topics they were asked to reflect upon were the following: *Household chores, Directions* (locations), *Directions (ask and give)*, and *Shopping*. Frequency was determined depending on how many times the subcategory was repeated in participants' responses. Table 5 below shows how the data was categorised after conducting content analysis.

Table 5.   Transcription of learning journal

Categories	Subcategories	Frequency	Sample answers
Participants' most important learning goals	Using vocabulary	71	*[I think it is important to learn new words to expand our vocabulary.] (Part. 1)*
	All language content was important	60	*[I think everything was important. I did not know much of this particular content.] (Part. 9)*
	Giving directions	41	*[To apply the content to give directions was meaningful for me because you use that vocabulary every day.] (Part. 7)*
	Using prepositions	23	*[I know how to use prepositions to give and ask for directions because they might appear in an everyday conversation.] (Part. 8)*
	Using adverbs	17	*[I know how to use frequency adverbs in sentences; to know where to put them in a sentence.] (Part. 1)*
	Interaction in class	12	*[I think that interacting in English with my classmates is meaningful. To be and keep in touch with them is useful.] (Part. 14)*
	Using grammar	4	*[I learned the difference between wearing and using.] (Part. 5)*

Categories	Subcategories	Frequency	Sample answers
Participants' questions along the lessons	Questions about vocabulary	33	*[I realized the vocabulary I knew was too basic.] (Part. 2)*
	No questions	25	*[I do not have any questions but I do think I need to practice more.] (Part.13)*
	Questions about directions	8	*[I do not know how to say some things about directions.] (Part. 11)*
	Questions about prepositions	4	*[I was not sure how to continue after giving instructions. How to use prepositions properly] (Part. 14)*
Participants' least important learning goal	Colors	13	*[I think color because I knew almost all before coming to class.] (Part. 6)*
	Location of places	2	*[I think it is not important to describe where places are in Concepción, exactly.] (Part. 3)*

Table 5 summarises participants' responses along the four sessions of the intervention. Below each category is represented in Figure 11.
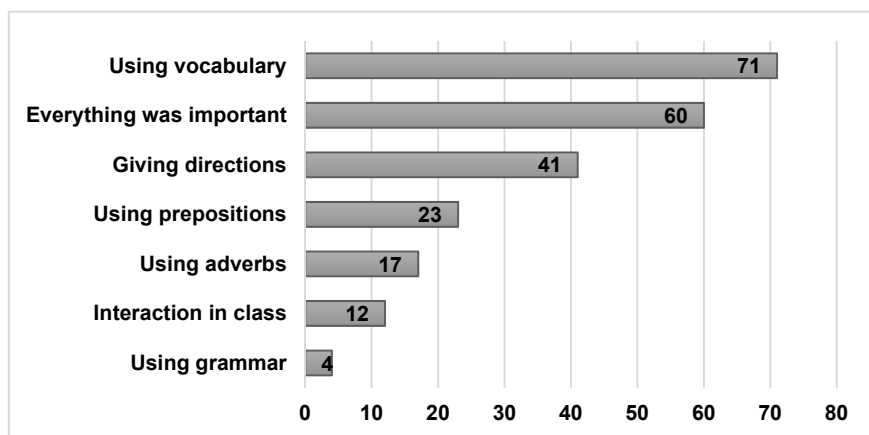

Figure 4.   Participants' most important learning goals

Figure 4 shows that, to the majority of the participants, the most important aspect of each lesson was to learn vocabulary. Even though in some lessons the objective was not to learn vocabulary, students considered it a must-learn objective for each session. The grammar section of the lesson seemed not to be as relevant as vocabulary. This can be due to the fact that grammar itself is not taught explicitly but in context. Another important factor that is relevant is interaction. Participants started giving value to the instances in which they had to speak and interact with their classmates, which is important because of the communicative nature of the course they were all part of.

In Figure 5 above it was revealed how participants appreciated the classroom instances that they had to interact with peers, and how they felt the class was an instance in which they had an enjoyable time, as well as an opportunity to learn the language content.
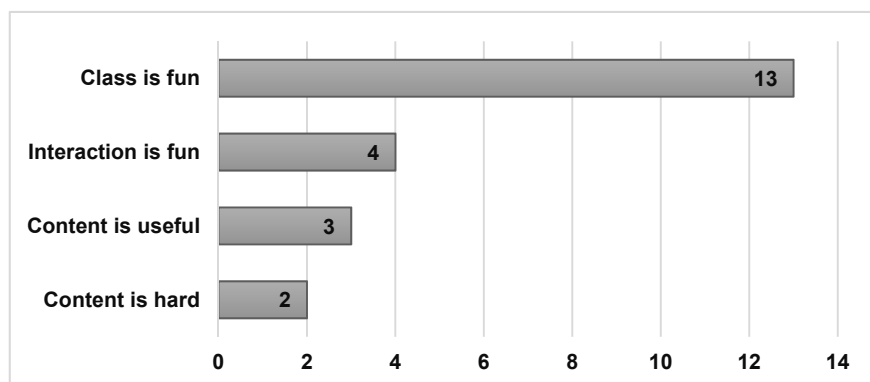
Figure 5.   Participants' impressions on lessons

After session four finished, a focus group was conducted. Out of the twenty-two partici-
pants of this study, seven high achieving students were asked to participate in the focus
group. Frequency was measured according to the number of participants who agreed with
each subcategory. Below categories and subcategories are listed based on participants' re-
sponses (See Table 6).

Table 6.   Focus group transcription

Categories	Subcategories	Frequency	Sample answers
Self-assessment usefulness	Useful for future students	9	*[I think all subjects should include self-assessment (…) in English class I realize what I actually learned. In some other subjects, I never know what (or if) I learned anything.] (Part. 3)*
	Becoming aware of what I learned	7	*[I realized I knew a lot about each topic because I had the chance of evaluating what I knew first… and also what I wanted to learn at the end of the lesson and see if I actually did.] (Part. 3)*
Peers' reaction towards self-assessment	Peers' laziness	2	*[Maybe they were lazy when using this methodology, because we had to write at the beginning and at the end of each class.] (Part. 3)*
	Peers' positive reaction	2	*[I think they took it in a good way because it was applied to improve our knowledge.] (Part. 9)*
Self-assessment inclusion	Formal inclusion of self-assessment	2	*[I think we have become more aware of what we are learning once this methodology began. (Part. 3 & 7)*
	Self-assessment is difficult for stu-dents	2	*[I think this methodology was very student-friendly. It was just a matter of answering the questions.] (Part. 6)*
Improvement of English-speaking abilities	Difference be-tween before and after self-assessment	3	*[I think that the difference is that before, I came to class, listened to you, did the activities and went home. Now, before anything I get to think about what I know and what I learned in class.] (Part. 6)*
	Better English-speaking activi-ties after self-assessment	2	*[I think my abilities did improve but not directly related to self-assessment. I think you also need to practice at home or using the plat-form.] (Part. 6)*

Categories	Subcategories	Frequency	Sample answers
	Practicing more to improve	2	*[I think I need to practice more. Not just here in class.] (Part. 3)*
	English-speaking abilities improved	2	*[I think it did but not in a direct way, because by self-assessing I could re-alize what I managed and focus only on the things I didn't.] (Part. 6)*
Struggling English-abilities	Pronunciation	5	*[(…) I think it is pronunciation because it is not the same as in Spanish. In this classes, you have to speak, not writing.] (Part. 9)*
	Fluency	4	*[In my case, fluency is mixed with pronunciation. I don't think I'm even that fluent in Spanish so it is more complicated in English.] (Part. 8)*
	Grammar	4	*[In my case it is grammar because all the rules come to my head and I can't remember how to conjugate (…)] (Part. 6)*

After analysing the focus group answers given by participants, it can be said that most participants had a positive reaction towards the self-assessment methodology implemented. Even though they admitted there were some difficulties at first, most of them agreed that this methodology helped them improve their English-speaking abilities indirectly. This is explained in the sense that self-assessment contributed to help them reflect upon what they had learned during the lesson, and what they needed to reinforce to become more proficient in the language. They also agreed that self-assessment made them become more aware of their learning. Therefore, they highly recommend for self-assessment to be formally included as part of the course, so that future students can also benefit from this learning experience.

As stated by Tan (2008), self-assessment has been defined as the involvement of students in making judgements of their learning. Based on the data gathered, many learners remarked that what they learned the most was vocabulary during the sessions. By doing this, learners could somehow show the teacher what the tendency was after each session ended. Self-assessment helps students take more responsibility for their own learning and facilitates collaborative relationships among teachers and students (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002; Shepard; 2000). The teacher could have access to more direct feedback on what should be covered or changed as each session went by. Teacher and students were able to collaboratively direct the way in which the further lessons went on.

Most students agreed that, in order to improve motivation and to feel involved with the subject, the self-assessment methodology worked for them. Self-assessment does not always demonstrate success but where it does, even on a small scale, learners' motivation will be enhanced (Gardner, 2000). By saying this, it can be proven that even though the purpose of the self-assessment methodology was not to grade and, therefore, not to intervene directly in students' grades, they felt involved with the subject and could see the importance of applying the different instruments in order to improve their own speaking performance.

By applying self-assessment, autonomy is what is being sought. Autonomous learners decide what to learn, when to learn and how to learn. Autonomous learners take full responsibility for their own learning process. In Chilean university classrooms, there is little evidence of the application of any sort of self-assessment. As stated by many students, initially they did not see this as something that could actually help them improve but as something that would improve their final grade only. The application of this methodology changed what they thought and had said about self-assessment.

Regarding the implications of this study, self-assessment indicates a change in the roles of learners and teachers (Gardner, 2000). This means that teachers would have to share the re-

sponsibility for assessment with learners. There might be a problem when there are few autonomous learners who might not fully understand the nature of self-assessment, confusing it with the possibility of improving their grades. By considering self-assessment as an opportunity for obtaining a better grade, then the whole purpose of implementing self-assessment is lost.

Self-assessment in foreign language classes can be seen as something of great advantage. By implementing a system of self-assessment, students can identify what are the areas in which they need the most help and the areas which do not need too much reinforcement. It is also helpful to have students reflect upon their own learning process and pacing. This helps students realise how they learn and in which way the learning process becomes more comfortable for them.

Conclusions

With respect to the first specific objective, which was to assess the effectiveness of self-assessment on students' speaking skills, it can be said that there was an improvement in students' results after the intervention. Out of the twenty-two participants of this action research study, fifteen students were able to improve their scores, compared to the ones from the oral interview conducted before the intervention. Four students maintained their initial scores, and only three of the participants lowered them. Regarding the first group of students, the ones who were able to improve their scores, it can be said that, as it was observed by the class teacher, there was a great deal of involvement with the self-assessment methodology.

The majority of the students who were able to improve their scores paid close attention to the implementation of this methodology, taking it seriously and consciously. They seemed involved with the new teaching practice, and showed commitment every time they were asked to participate in class to practice for their oral interview assessment. Although participation in this class was never a problem, since students showed great enthusiasm towards this English course since day one, the group who improved managed to stand out among the rest of the participants. Whenever asked to voluntarily participate in mock oral interviews in class, they had no problem with doing so. Participation was key during this action research, since all participants were being prepared to take a final oral interview. During this preparation process, they were taught how and what to answer during specific times of the interview. For example, they were taught to always answer in complete grammatically correct sentences, and to describe pictures properly, including all the vocabulary taught during the semester.

Regarding the second specific objective, to explore the participants' perceptions on the use of self-assessment to improve their English-speaking skills, it can be pointed out that the vast majority of the students felt comfortable once acquainted with self-assessment. As expressed through the focus group, many students felt at the beginning of the implementation that they did not know how to assess their own work. Some of the participants even mentioned that they had never been asked to think what they were expected to learn in a class, or even if they had learned anything. Some of them mentioned the only opportunity they had to reflect upon what they could have learned in a subject was when they studied on their own for a specific written test at the end of the semester. That is why the entire process of getting used to answering the questions in each of the self-assessment instruments applied took a while.

Once acquainted, they felt confident answering all the instruments applied for the implementation of this methodology. Some students even mentioned that they got used to the process and once the self-assessment intervention sessions finished, it felt strange for them to start and finish the class not having to reflect upon what they wanted to learn at the beginning of the class, and what it had been learned after the class ended. Most of the students agreed that this methodology should have been used since the beginning of the semester. They agreed that if they had done the process of reflecting before and after a lesson, their results would have been better. Motivation was also mentioned by many students during the focus group. The participants mentioned and agreed that knowing the purpose of the lesson and having to think about the content before and after the lesson helped them to be more motivated when learning English. By being motivated they also felt involved with the lesson, that is why, many students declared they enjoyed the class because they felt they were asked about their opinions about the lesson itself and that those opinions were taken into account.

When analyzing the findings of this research, it is worth mentioning how useful it was as a research practitioner to identify students' perceptions about the implementation of self-assessment. As an educator, we truly believe that students need to be given the opportunity of reflecting about their own learning process. As the intervention sessions went by, we realized more and more that students were rarely asked to do so in other subjects. Many of them mentioned this, once the intervention sessions finished. Some even commented that the only chance they had to see if they had learned anything was by the end of the semester when preparing for finals. By the end of this action research, we realised how valuable it was for students to think about the content they were going to learn at the beginning of the lesson, and the content they actually managed to cover and internalise once the class was over. We could realise how valuable it was for them to have the time to reflect upon their mistakes, and also learn that in some cases, there was previous knowledge about particular content. Some students commented that it was interesting for them to realise that in some cases they managed the content before it was covered.

It is also important to mention that the purpose of this action research was to show that by the implementation of self-assessment, students would be able to improve their speaking results when assessed at the end of the semester. By having the chance of assessing their own learning, students were able to become more aware of what they needed to learn, what they knew already, and what they wanted to learn. While self-assessing, students became more conscious about their own personal learning process, it called our attention that nobody asked if they had to grade themselves. Nobody asked if a grade was associated to this methodology. As in Chilean culture the process of self-assessment is associated with grading, it is often confused with the opportunity of receiving a passing grade '*for free*'. None of the participants of this action research study saw this as an opportunity to get a free passing grade. According to what was observed, most of them participated because they were interested in seeing that if by incorporating this methodology, they could actually improve their speaking results. In particular, this group of students were extremely interested in improving their results and to learn more English.

Regarding the instruments that were used in this action research study, the analytic rubric showed positive results. It was helpful in the sense that the results showed there was improvement comparing pre and post oral interview results. The learning journal allowed to gather a lot

of data regarding students' views and perceptions of the implementation of self-assessment by which the analysis of the results became richer. The focus group used gave positive insights about the implementation of self-assessment; students manifested the usefulness of this methodology, and how they found it meaningful, considering having it as something permanent. The participants of the focus group even suggested that all university teachers should include self-assessment as a regular teaching practice. Self-assessment allowed them to think about their own learning process, and become more aware of their English language needs.

As recommendations for further research, the implementation of self-assessment would be of great help if applied at the beginning of the semester rather than in the middle of it, as it was applied in this research. Results may be much better than the ones obtained in this study. By applying this methodology at the beginning, the process of learning awareness could be more beneficial if conducted through a longer period of time than just four sessions. However, the response of students in this study proved to be satisfactory and meaningful for most participants.

This methodology should be kept as a permanent practice in English courses. Students should be able to reflect upon their learning process on their own. Teachers can act and guide the process, but at the end, students should be able to get most of this experience on their own. Having this methodology as permanent should be given some weight of the overall grade for the subject. Even though this is not the real purpose of self-assessment, students should also be given part of the responsibility of assigning themselves a grade. Culturally, Chile is not a country in which students behave maturely enough to be critical of their work, yet, if not given the chance, the paradigm of believing that students will not be honest about their work, will continue to exist and will never change. If not given the chance, then a change will never occur.

For further research, it would be interesting to continue this research in time to have results to compare and contrast. Four weeks of action research were useful to understand and to realise how useful the implementation of this methodology was. Deeper research could be conducted on this topic to study the benefits of self-assessment thoroughly. Perhaps, conducting this research with different teachers could be interesting, to see if more students agree or not upon the usefulness of this practice. Having teachers' perceptions about this could also be a matter of further study. Maybe if self-assessment is conducted by different people, it could lead to different opinions about it.

Last but not least, we would like to refer to a suggestion made by one of the participants of this study. The student suggested a paper-free method through google forms, or another technological tool to gather data. By doing this, the results could be obtained easily and much faster.

In brief, self-assessment-based action research provoked a turning point among university students, they were able to examine their own learning and assessment experiences through dialogic inquiry, and unfold their difficulties, challenges, and also successes when they were learning a foreign language. They were able to develop their own participatory consciousness through constant reflection and questioning of their individual and collective learning practices, which, clearly, resulted in an expansion of their sense of self, much on the line of the work of Wilson, Walsh & Bush (2011).

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