



# REVISTA KRONOS

## The Influence of Peer-Assessment in Improving Speaking Skills in B1 learners

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**ABSTRACT** This action research explores how peer-assessment can enhance the speaking skills of B1 English learners. The participants of this study are university students, and they have previously studied English at a language school in Samborondon, Guayas. The project was carried out online within a time frame of 4 weeks, a four-hour lesson per week. This is a pre/posttest design study, which evaluates students' improvement of oral production skills by implementing the peer-assessment technique. The aim of this study is to answer the questions: 1. To what extent does the use of peer assessment improve speaking in B1 level students? For which quantitative data collection methods were applied. On the other hand, a survey was used to answer the qualitative question: What are students' perspectives regarding peer-assessment and their speaking? The research revealed that peer-assessment does have a significant influence on B1 learners' speaking skills, as their grades in the posttest raised and some factors such as grammar and pronunciation were enhanced. Therefore, the current study should be used as a guide for teachers whose aim is to get their students to be fluent in English.

**KEYWORDS** Peer-assessment, Speaking Skills, Fluency, English as a Foreign Language..

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### La influencia de la evaluación por pares en la mejora de las habilidades orales en estudiantes B1

**RESUMEN** Este estudio de investigación explora cómo la evaluación de pares mejora las habilidades orales de estudiantes de inglés de nivel B1. Los participantes de este estudio son estudiantes universitarios quienes previamente estudiaron en una academia de Idiomas en Samborondón. El presente proyecto fue llevado a cabo en modalidad en línea, en un periodo de cuatro semanas, teniendo una clase de cuatro horas cada semana. Este estudio está diseñado por el análisis de la mejora de las habilidades orales de estudiantes a través del uso de la técnica de evaluación de pares, mediante la implementación de un pre y post test. El propósito de este estudio es responder a las preguntas: 1. ¿En qué medida mejora el uso de la evaluación de pares las habilidades orales de estudiantes de nivel B1? 2. ¿Cuáles son las perspectivas de los estudiantes acerca de la evaluación de pares y sus habilidades orales? La investigación reveló que la evaluación de pares sí influye significativamente en las destrezas orales de estudiantes de nivel B1, ya que sus puntajes en el post test se elevaron y mejoraron algunos factores como el uso de gramática y la pronunciación. Por lo tanto, este estudio debería servir como guía a docentes cuyo objetivo sea que sus estudiantes alcancen fluidez en inglés.

**PALABRAS CLAVE** Evaluación de pares, Habilidades orales, Fluidez, inglés como idioma extranjero.

## INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of speaking skills in a second language is necessary for students to communicate in today's globalized society. However, students whose L1 is not English have most of the time struggled with the development of oral production skills. For instance, Prastika (2020) conducted an action research with 25 students from Mataram, Indonesia, who had problems such as lack of confidence, and mispronunciation of words, which held them back from speaking in English in a more fluent way. Thanks to the use of the peer-assessment technique, students saw a notable improvement in their overall speaking skills.

In addition, Caicedo (2016) carried out a study with 22 students in Chia, Colombia, who struggled to maintain an outgoing speech, mainly because of their poor English level, and little participation in class due to their fear of making mistakes in front of their teachers. As a way to tackle this problem, peer-assessment was a very useful tool that could help those students improve their oral production skills.

It is noticeable that the development of speaking skills is a struggle for most EFL learners. Ecuadorian students are not the exception. Recent observations carried out in a language school in Samborondon, Guayas Province, have revealed a concerning issue among a group of learners. They show notable lack of confidence when it comes to speaking in English, paired up with other challenges such as tense confusion, word mispronunciation, and direct translation from their first language (L1). As a result, these students have been struggling to get a desired level of fluency in English, which motivated this study.

According to MINEDUC (2019), students who finished high school should have a B1 level of English, which would mean that they are able to communicate in basic daily life situations. Still, these students cannot even construct full sentences. In light of this challenge, this research aims to explore an approach to address these linguistic problems: the integration of peer- assessment methods.

## PEER- ASSESSMENT

As a way to tackle the problem of the lack of innovative techniques being used to teach English in Ecuador, peer assessment could be a tool in the classrooms. "Peer assessment is a pedagogical strategy that requires students to evaluate their peers' efforts within an educational context" (Power & Tanner, 2023, p. 629). It can be stated then that this technique fosters a dynamic and participatory learning environment. This approach implies changing the traditional teacher-centered model of assessment, placing the responsibility of evaluation and feedback in the hands of learners themselves (Seifert & Feliks, 2019).

This process encourages students to assess their peers' work, which, in turn, cultivates essential skills such as critical thinking, communication, and self-reflection. The use of peer-assessment would assure that all of the students have an active role in the learning process (Musfirah, 2019). It seems that this shift of roles makes students feel more motivated, engaged, and cultivates their desire of acquiring new knowledge, developing new skills and mastering the ones they already possess in order to review their peer's work (Samouni, 2023).

However, the peer assessment technique has disadvantages as well. Most of them are related to the fact that some students may not be objective when it comes to giving feedback to their close friends, and not all of them possess the necessary skills for effective assessment (Divjak & Maretic, 2017). There is also the possibility that students may feel

overwhelmed or reluctant because of their fear of not being competent enough to grade their partners, so they would not want to take that responsibility (Stancic, 2021).

Despite these possible limitations, Ndoye (2017) considered that it is possible to use the peer assessment technique successfully if teachers set objectives, criteria, and even share a rubric with students before starting the process. This way, they can have a deeper and more meaningful insight of the strategy that is being used, and how it can help them consolidate their knowledge and learn from their partners' mistakes. If this process is not done correctly, some problems such as confusion when grading their peers.

In addition, Brown (2015) claimed that in order to get all of the benefits that the use of peer-assessment can provide, students' confidence on themselves and on their classmates should be built. This way, they would understand that the grade they got is an objective reflection of the work they did.

The implementation of peer-assessment can be also useful for learners to get new strategies, set new goals, and learn to use the resources they already have. This way, they can improve their language skills by learning from their assigned peer's work (Meletiadou, 2021). As students are able to identify others' weaknesses and strenghts, they start comparing themselves to their peers, resulting in them getting to a self-regulation status, which will eventually end up in the improvement of their previously not-so-well developed skills (Yan et al., 2022).

## SPEAKING

Through the speaking skill, individuals are allowed to articulate their ideas and thoughts (Fauzan, 2014). Moreover, the ability to speak proficiently serves as a clear indicator of one's mastery of the language. According to Rao (2019), among the four key skills needed for acquiring a foreign or second language, speaking is deemed the most critical one to master. There are some factors that can affect the development of speaking skill, such as students' lack of confidence, lack of knowledge or simple unwillingness to leave their mother tongue behind, that makes it the hardest skill to be enhanced to the highest level (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

When trying to get students to reach speaking competence, it is paramount to take into account the role that some factors such as grammar, the use of vocabulary, pronunciation, and coherence play in this journey. To begin with, if students know grammar structures, they will be able to communicate diverse ideas, to express themselves in several scenarios, and to make sure they will not be misinterpreted (Tarigan & Stevani, 2022).

However, those grammar structure should be practiced in real-life scenarios, and for this matter, students also need to have enough and appropriate vocabulary. Mastering a second language does not only mean to understand and process information, but also to produce it; and for both aspects, knowing the meaning of words is mandatory (Jambari et al., 2021).

Even though grammar and vocabulary knowledge are fundamental factors to develop speaking skills, they could be overshadowed by students' pronunciation problems. A wrong pronunciation of words could lead to misunderstandings in real-life contexts. This is why, activities that allow students to practice the right way of saying words should be included in the classroom. (Alfonso, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the factors mentioned above are of greatest importance when striving to enhance oral production skills, however, as isolated components they will not be enough for students to sound fluent and proficient. It is the ability of students to express their ideas in a cohesive and coherent way which will determine whether they succeed in oral profi-

ciency or not, because those factors are the ones who will make the message sound clearer, more concise, and therefore, easier to be understood (Zhussupova & Shadiev, 2023).

## PEER-ASSESSMENT OF SPEAKING

It is important to take into account that, in order to grade other students, the one who assesses the other should have enough speaking proficiency to be able to identify mistakes and provide adequate feedback (Hyoung, 2016). Nevertheless, peer-assessment does serve as a valuable tool when it comes to enhancing students' speaking skills because it helps to understand their language goals. (White, 2009). As they are conscious that they are following some criteria, and that a person other than their teacher is going to evaluate their work, they really make an effort to do it the best they can.

In addition, Li et al. (2022) claimed that peer-assessment has positive effects on learners' speaking skill development mainly because they can learn from their classmates once they are able to use the rubric and identify their mistakes. When applying peer-assessment technique, both students enhance their skills while giving and receiving feedback, and as a result, they will stop making the same mistakes over and over again.

On the other hand, Hasnani and Mubarak (2020) argued that peer-assessment is a functional tool to improve speaking due to the fact that it allows students who speak less or do not speak at all to gain the confidence they need to start trying to practice the language. It provides learners the opportunity to interact and give mutual help to progress. Besides, it also makes students develop some soft skills. For instance, they can enhance their teamwork skills since they need to constantly be in touch with their assigned peer, and they create their new knowledge together. They can also gain patience, as sometimes, their partners would continue making the same mistakes they had previously corrected.

Despite the fact that Prastika (2020) and Caicedo (2016) recognized peer-assessment's effectiveness in improving speaking skills, Quimi (2024) considered that peer-assessment should be used as a formative tool, rather than in a summative way. The main reason is that it may have the contrary effect on students, as they will be afraid of making mistakes and getting a bad final grade.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is action research, which was defined as "a process involving researchers and practitioners acting together on a particular cycle of activities, including problem diagnosis, action intervention, and reflective learning." (Avison et al. 1999, p. 96) Action research is known by its problem-solving orientation in educational and professional settings. In this context, the present research aims to identify the problems regarding students' speaking skills development and suggest a possible solution. This study answers these research questions: To what extent does the use of peer-assessment improve speaking in B1 level students? What are students' perspectives regarding peer-assessment and their speaking?

## PARTICIPANTS

The group that participated in the study was made up of twenty-five students, from 18 to 20 years old, who took a placement test in an English Academy. The results indicated they

all have a B1 level. Most of the group are first-year university students, meaning that they just finished high school. There are twelve female students and thirteen male students. All the students are Ecuadorian and have similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

They were in the same classroom at the English Academy, until the eighth level. Each level lasted 2 months, where B1 level contents were covered. All of the students completed the activities of the Action Research.

## INSTRUMENTS

Within this investigation, the independent variable is peer assessment, and the dependent variable is speaking. To address the first question, a pretest and posttest were applied. In the pretest, students had to talk for 1 minute about their plans for the weekend, using future simple (will) and first conditional tense. In contrast, the posttest required students to talk for one minute, about their goals, dreams, and plans for the five upcoming years, using future simple, first conditional, connectors and transition words and time expressions for the future. To evaluate these pretest and posttest, a rubric was used including criteria like pronunciation, fluency, coherence, and accuracy.

**Pronunciation:** This criterion assessed the accuracy and clarity of students' pronunciation of individual sounds, stress patterns, and intonation in spoken English.

**Fluency:** Fluency evaluated the smoothness and how natural students' spoken English sounded, considering factors such as rate of speech, pausing, and hesitation.

**Coherence:** This criterion assessed the logical organization in the students' spoken responses, as well as the use of connectors and transition words to put their ideas together.

**Accuracy:** Accuracy focused on how students used grammar when speaking, including aspects such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and article usage.

To address the second research question concerning the students' perspective about peer assessment, a survey was administered to the participants. This survey consisted of a google form with 5 questions using the Likert scale, in order to know students' insights about this technique, and an open-ended question at the end, to know their individual comments or perceptions about the study they took part in.

Since the aim of this project was to evaluate the impact of peer-assessment in speaking improvement, a rubric was used as a way to help students assess their assigned peers. Having the criteria that needs to be evaluated, students found the process of peer-assessing easier and more objective. Students' training to use the rubric in an accurate way took 2 of the 4 hours of the first lesson.

The criterion included in the rubric were grammar, which focused on how students use the simple future and first conditional structures to talk about their future goals and dreams. Vocabulary, focusing on the time expressions students incorporate to their speech. Pronunciation, which revises how well students sound, since they were used to read the words as they were written, just like they do in L1 (Spanish), and Organization, which is oriented to how fluent they sound by using connectors and transition words to express their ideas.

## RESULTS

### QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

To answer the first research question: "To what extent does the use of peer-assessment improve speaking in B1 level students?" a pretest and posttest were applied to the participants, and the results are indicated below:

*Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Descriptive and Inferential Statistics*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</i>
<i>Pretest</i>	25	10	17	14.24	1.85	p < 0.001
<i>Posttest</i>	25	14	20	17.00	1.63	

The results shown in Table 1 demonstrate how the grades that the 25 volunteers obtained in the pretest improved in the posttest. To get to this improvement, students needed to practice a lot, and assess their partners. Students learned from their partner's mistakes, so they did not repeat them.

*Table 2: Descriptive and Inferential Statistics per category*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Pretest</i>				<i>Posttest</i>			
		<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Grammar	25	2.5	5	3.64	0.654	3	5	4.46	0.660
Vocabulary	25	2.5	4	3.6	0.520	3	5	4.3	0.595
Pronunciation	25	2.5	4	3.52	0.586	3.5	5	4.18	0.430
Organization	25	2.5	4	3.48	0.586	3	5	4.06	0.441

Table 2 shows the statistics per category. These criteria were taken from the rubric that students used to evaluate their peers. In the pretest, the average grade on the 'organization' criteria was 3.48 being students' weakest skill, meaning that they were not able to express their ideas in a coherent and cohesive way through the use of connectors and transition words. In the posttest, it went up to 4.06 but continued being the lowest grade that students got in their rubric. This is mainly because they were only focusing on getting the right structure of the tenses while expressing their ideas, however, they did not try to make them sound connected. They expressed everything sentence by sentence. On the other hand, 'Grammar' was the criteria with the highest average grade on both the pretest (3.64) and posttest (4.46). These results lead to the inference that students may know the structures for future simple and first conditional, since they may have memorized them, however, they are not able to apply them to talk about real-life situations. In addition, they do not possess the required amount of vocabulary to express what they want in a fluent way.

The results of the *t*-test (0.00) and the *p*-value (0.00) for two tails is lower than 0.001. It is therefore, demonstrated that the right implementation of the peer-assessment technique improved the oral performance of B1 students.

### QUALITATIVE RESULTS

A survey was run to answer the second research question: “What are students’ perspectives regarding peer-assessment and their speaking?” The survey consisted of a google form with 5 questions, which aimed to know students’ perspectives about the influence of the peer-assessment technique on their speaking skills. A Likert scale and an open-ended question were used to know students’ points of view about the intervention.

*Table 3: Questions 1-5: Students’ perspectives about the use of peer-assessment and speaking*

QUESTIONS	M	SD
The activities done in class and as homework were completely oriented to develop oral production skills.	4.90	0,31
Assessing my partner allowed me to develop and improve my oral production skills.	4.83	0,38
The feedback I received from my classmate allowed me to improve my oral production skills.	4.93	0,26
Using the rubric allowed me to evaluate my peer’s performance in an objective way.	4.83	0,47
I think my oral production skills highly improved thanks to the use of peer-feedback technique.	4,90	0,31

The answers to questions 1 to 5 were codified as the following: Totally agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), Totally disagree (1). For all the questions, the mean was close to 5, which proves that students agree that peer-assessment was a useful tool to enhance their speaking skills.

For the last question, which was open-ended, the collected data revealed that regarding peer-assessment, students’ attitude was reluctant at first, as they did not want their partners to watch their recordings “*At first I was embarrassed to record myself, I felt even worse when I knew my partners and not my teacher would see it...*” (Participant 8) However, once they started having their lessons, their perception changed in a good way and at the end, they recognized it had helped them to improve their oral production abilities and learn from their mistakes: “*I think that peer-feedback really helped me learn from my partner’s mistakes and my own.*” (Participant 17) as well as gain confidence: “*Now I feel more confident because I could understand things I didn’t before, and I can speak in a better way.*” (Participant 12)

On the other hand, when it came to speaking, one of the biggest struggles students faced during this intervention was that they could not use L1 to communicate. The instruction given was to always use English, even when giving feedback to their partners, and they were being constantly monitored to see if they were actually using L2. They admitted it was hard at first, but they had no other option, so they ended up getting used to it “*Having to speak*

*English all the time was something I was afraid of, and I almost back up, but I got used to it sooner than I expected.”* (Participant 23), and at the end of the intervention, they recognized how much their oral production skills had improved: *“Now I am able to have small conversations with my friends completely in English, I know I still need to practice, but it is definitely an improvement”* (Participant 5)

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained in the present research highlight the use of peer-assessment in improving the speaking skills of B1 English learners, aligning with the findings shown by (Li et al. 2022), who reported peer-assessment was effective because students could learn from each other's mistakes. The enhancement observed from pretest to posttest grades indicates a positive impact of peer-assessment on various aspects of speaking, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and organization.

The findings demonstrating that peer-assessment can create a more dynamic and participatory learning environment (Power & Tanner, 2023). The enhancement in the students' speaking skills, as evidenced by the pretest and posttest scores, supports the idea that peer-assessment can reduce the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The positive outcomes observed in this study are consistent with previous research. For instance, Ndoye (2017) claimed that peer-assessment, when structured with clear objectives and criteria, can be successfully implemented to enhance learning outcomes. This study supports those findings, as the use of a rubric and defined criteria facilitated a meaningful peer-assessment process, leading to improvements in students' speaking skills. The improved grades in grammar and vocabulary, as well as reduced performance variability, reflect the effectiveness of the structured approach. An insightful aspect of this research is the emotional and motivational impact of peer-assessment on students. The qualitative feedback from the participants reveals an initial reluctance, which transformed into positive engagement and motivation as the sessions progressed.

This transformation highlights an affective dimension of peer-assessment. This research agrees with Hasnani and Mubarak (2020), as it suggests that peer-assessment boosts learners' confidence and cooperative work, opening new avenues for further exploration into the emotional and psychological benefits of peer-assessment in language learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research was carried out as a way to tackle B1 level students' problems regarding speaking skills outlined in the introduction, such as: lack of confidence, confusion between tenses, mispronunciation, or high reliance on their L1 or native language. Through the application of the peer-assessment technique, these problems were reduced in a significant way.

The main goal of this study was to evaluate how peer-assessment could improve speaking skills and to get an insight of students' perspectives on this method. The quantitative data showed a meaningful improvement in pretest and posttest scores regarding criteria, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and organization.

The average of the grades obtained were 14.24 in the pretest and it rose to 17.00 in the posttest, and the standard deviation decreased, which is an indicator that there was a reduction in the knowledge gap between the participants. In addition, qualitative feedback demonstrated that even though students were reluctant at the beginning, by the end of



the study conducted, they felt more motivated and confident, positively impacting their engagement, and learning outcomes.

This study encountered some limitations such as collecting all of the data required, since it demanded a lot of time for the researcher, due to the fact that it was necessary to make sure all of the students participated. In addition, the participants are university students, they rarely had free periods at the same time, therefore, it was hard to coordinate a session in which all of them could be present. Moreover, the researcher had to deal with students' reluctance at the beginning, since most of them were ashamed of their pronunciation, so they were not willing to have their recordings watched by their assigned peer. Therefore, new researchers on this subject should make sure students feel comfortable from the beginning, letting them know that they are in a safe environment where making mistakes is totally accepted and an important part of the learning process.

At the end of the action research, there were also technical difficulties like unstable internet connection, which made it difficult to have online sessions and this problem was worsened by the blackouts. For future research, it is recommended to find a period of time in which all of the students are available to have face-to-face classes as way to not get the study stopped due to connectivity or electrical problems.

Another recommendation is to plan some time (an entire lesson, if possible) only for students to practice how to use the checklist, and for them to get familiarized with the peer-assessment technique. Furthermore, better results will come off if students know when they have to record themselves at least with one week of anticipation so that they will be able to find some time to do it.

To sum up, the aim of this study was to prove peer-assessment's impact on improving B1 students' speaking skills. In order to get even better insights, teachers should constantly remind students to participate in the peer-assessment intervention on the required time, so that they can all be part of the examined sample, and they can find out on their own how the use of this technique not only helps them improve oral production skills, but also boosts their confidence and allows them to learn from others, and take the lead of their learning process.

### CONTRIBUCIONES DE LOS AUTORES

Dayana Rosa Torres Castro: Implementación de la innovación, aplicación de la metodología de investigación, recolección y análisis de datos, redacción del documento.

María Rossana Ramírez Ávila: Diseño de la metodología de la investigación, Revisión y edición.

### IMPLICACIONES ÉTICAS

Los autores declaran que no existen implicaciones éticas. Los participantes de la encuesta dieron su consentimiento y participaron voluntariamente en la misma.

### CONFLICTO DE INTERÉS

Los autores declaran que no existen conflictos de interés financieros o no financieros que podrían haber influido en el trabajo presentado en este artículo.

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