

Improving speaking skills by implementing self-assessment and self-regulation facilitated by whatsapp in 8th year students

Diana Maritza Vera Sánchez

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3695-9339>

marver1294@gmail.com

María Juliana Pinargote Sánchez

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5026-6964>

julypina1589@gmail.com

Dolores Katherine Lara Alcívar

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4880-6690>

katelara_2000@hotmail.com

Dirección de Posgrado, Cooperación y Relaciones Internacionales.

Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí.

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to improve the Speaking skills of a group of young learners by implementing Self-regulation and Self-assessment facilitated by WhatsApp. Students could upload five audios and self-assess their learning. The sample involved twenty-eight 8th-grade learners with an A1 English level from a public school in Pedernales, Manabí. The facilitator provided meaningful activities designed in a lesson plan, where learners, through effective practice, uploaded and self-assessed their work contrasting them against a rubric, obtaining a significant and positive effect size of 2.42 as the global speaking skill improvement at the final part of the innovation. Findings also showed a significant improvement in teacher and students' average scores on the audio, with a slight difference between both means. The instruments included a pre & post-test, a rubric, a checklist, and an interview. Since self-regulation was beneficial, EFL teachers may find the results and discussion of this research valuable for its implementation in classes.

Keywords: *Self-regulation; self-assessment; speaking skills; audio recording; WhatsApp.*

Correspondencia: ciro. marver1294@gmail.com

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Mejora de las habilidades orales mediante la implementación de la autoevaluación y la autorregulación facilitada por whatsapp en estudiantes de 8º año

RESUMEN

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral de un grupo de jóvenes estudiantes mediante la implementación de la autorregulación y la autoevaluación facilitadas por WhatsApp. Los estudiantes podían subir cinco audios y autoevaluar su aprendizaje. La muestra involucró a veintiocho estudiantes de 8vo grado con un nivel de inglés A1 de una escuela pública en Pedernales, Manabí. El facilitador proporcionó actividades significativas diseñadas en un plan de lección, donde los alumnos, a través de la práctica efectiva, cargaron y autoevaluaron su trabajo comparándolo con una rúbrica, obteniendo un tamaño de efecto significativo y positivo de 2.42 como la mejora de la habilidad de hablar global en la parte final de la innovación. Los resultados también mostraron una mejora significativa en las puntuaciones medias de profesores y alumnos en el audio, con una ligera diferencia entre ambas medias. Los instrumentos incluyeron una prueba previa y posterior, una rúbrica, una lista de verificación y una entrevista. Dado que la autorregulación fue beneficiosa, los profesores de EFL pueden encontrar valiosos los resultados y la discusión de esta investigación para su implementación en las clases.

Palabras clave: autorregulación; autoevaluación; habilidad para hablar; grabación de audio; whatsapp.

INTRODUCTION

The English language is the keyword to communicate with people worldwide for business, tourism, or education purposes. This research study examines how a group of EFL learners had more opportunities to develop their speaking skills through self-assessment and self-regulation facilitated by WhatsApp. According to experiences told by some educators who currently teach in Ecuador, it has been complexed to apply new strategies to guide students through virtual sessions these two last years, especially in rural schools. It is required to develop an efficient strategy to involve students in a project where they could self-assess their work to improve significantly.

The Ecuadorian government has implemented different programs to improve education in English; however, something did not result as expected. It is required for students to obtain the B1 level before finishing high school, but most of them do not meet the standards. Education First (2021) mentioned that some countries in Latin America have the lowest level of English proficiency. Ecuador's findings demonstrated that it was placed in # 90 of 112 countries last year. Every learning process takes a considerable time to be acquired, especially in educative centers. These plans sometimes forget the most visual and outgoing skills: Speaking. Speaking is considered the most complex skill than reading, listening, or writing.

The speakers use their knowledge to convey ideas, negotiate to mean, and explore thought. Kashou (2016) talked about his investigation where 604 students from the university worked with a Student Mobile Technology Experience (SMTE) Survey. Significant correlations were found across several variables. Results provided some factors about the use of mobile technology and online engagement. Additionally, it also provided relationships between students' technology use and regulation tendencies in how and universities' efforts to improve metacognitive awareness, self-regulation, and student success in a mobile digital era.

In Ecuador, some studies use mobile devices to improve oral skills. Davila (2020) conducted research at a university in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The sample was 27 A2 learners who implemented qualitative and quantitative instruments. Results reported a significant impact on speaking skills. After the innovation, 79% of the students demonstrated progress in speaking. Mendoza (2020), on his part, confirmed the improvement of the oral interaction in twenty-two A1 participants from Junín, Manabí, who self-regulated

their learning through the implementation of self-assessment by using mobile phones, showing positive and significant results.

Could the use of self-assessment improve speaking skills? The researcher demonstrated that it was required to implement an innovative project in the institution with this group of students. The pandemic lived in the entire world changed students' priorities, and it was important to engage learners with meaningful strategies that allow learners to improve by training in a practical but effective way where learners were able to assess their own work. The use of self-assessment permitted learners to self-regulate their own knowledge by a conscious training to improve their English competencies.

The main objective is to improve speaking skills by applying self-regulation in students. The specific objectives are: Implement valuable strategies as speaking activities to enhance students' fluency. Involve learners in using authentic language in a meaningful context, identify the evidence related to speaking self-assessment and self-regulation in learners' results, and apply interviews to understand students' perspectives. The research questions are: Will Self-assessment and Self-regulation improve Speaking Skills? In what extent the speaking rubric can demonstrate the students' fluency improvement? Moreover, how reliable was the interview about students' implementation of self-regulation?

LITERATURE REVIEW.

This innovation applies primary studies about the main topic detailed in this section. Topics included are speaking skills, self-regulation, self-assessment, and WhatsApp used to improve oral skills in learners.

Speaking is essential to effective communication worldwide (Al-Eiadeh et al., 2016). Since communication is the primary objective proposed in the Ecuadorian English Curriculum (Ministerio de Educación, 2016), the speaking skill must be mastered by English as a second language learner (ESL). Additionally, Hossain (2015) expressed that speaking is essential when learners need to ask for something, look for indistinct interaction or ask and give different directions, or scaffolding and share meanings through verbal and non-verbal symbols in other contexts. Unfortunately, some English teachers continue teaching speaking just as a drill for dialogues of memorization (Ramadan, 2016).

The speaking skill is associated with various technological tools that enhance users to prepare a more qualified work of supporting verbal expression, increasing knowledge,

autonomy, and independence to be a competitive inhabitant of the society (Ministerio de Educación, 2016). In this way, students can feel motivated to evaluate their learning. Richards (2006) mentioned that meaningful practice is an activity where students must practice exercises that connect their learning to real-life situations. Learners also need interaction to increase participation and motivation to learn more, evaluate, and reflect on their same work (Martin & Bollinger, 2018).

Self-regulation is a self-directive process through which students transform their mental and cognitive abilities into task-related skills to improve their knowledge (Zimmerman, 2001). The author said that students learn to manage and organize their thoughts and transform them into skills to improve their understanding. Self-regulation is a learning process that needs continuous monitoring toward a learning achievement, checking outcomes, and redirecting unsuccessful efforts to improve every time (Berk, 2003). Students must be aware of their thought processes and be enhanced to actively participate in their learning path (Zimmerman, 2001).

Understanding self-regulation in school activities is necessary to provide learners with all the tools to guide them to focus on the road and regulate themselves while strengthening their well-being (Etkin, 2018). It is required to support the self-regulation process development effectively; monitoring and encouraging students' will help them with their individual needs and recognize self-regulation. Peeters et al. (2014) stated that it is pivotal for students to internalize essential self-regulation skills to guide learners toward a successful and substantial work that will provide classroom educators and special education teachers more resounding support to improve challenges in English.

The classroom environment is vital for optimal student self-regulation development. Learners spend a significant part of their daily routine in the classroom, and the quality of the learning environment is an important part in the learner's success (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). Involving students and encouraging them to participate in the decision-making process inspire ownership of their learning while developing intrinsic motivation and competence (Katz, 2012). When learners feel involved in making decisions regarding their knowledge and well-being, they are more likely to control themselves to become their improvement more meaningful.

Self-assessment is a group of different mechanisms and techniques through which students describe (i.e., assets) and possibly assign merit or evaluate the qualities of their

learning processes and products (Panadero et al., 2016). The authors mentioned that self-assessment is about learners assessing and evaluating their work; it is not about pointing out their understanding of the facilitator's words through specific instructions but getting satisfaction with the instruction achievement. Boud (1995) mentioned that self-assessment is considered one option for motivating students to reflect on their learning and learn how to learn by evaluating their knowledge.

There are different forms to work with self-assessment in the classroom. For instance, a simple form of self-assessment is to award a grade/mark for one's work. It is sometimes called "self-evaluation." A more complex way of self-assessment can involve rigorous analysis of strengths and weaknesses and the formulation of formative feedback regarding explicit criteria (Andrade, 2010). On her part, Andrade (2019) stated that each of the self-assessing activities involves a proper assessment of one's functioning. Self-assessment aims to allow learners to interpret what has been produced by observing student learning and performance results (Andrade, 2019).

WhatsApp is currently implemented in educational settings, including language learning and numerous studies portrayed the positive impact of WhatsApp on language learning. Andujar (2016) expressed that WhatsApp represents a powerful educational tool to encourage second-language interaction among participants. WhatsApp can also boost students' active participation (Baffour-Awuah, 2015) and inspire learners to engage in purposeful activities.

METHODS.

This proposal implemented some technical terms that help readers and learners to understand specific aspects that can hinder the learning and understanding of researchers involved in different studies. One of these terms is the variables. According to McLeod (2019a), variables are specific approaches that receive this unique name that only applies to experimental research. The first is the dependent variable, and the other is the independent variable. The dependent variable is speaking skills, and the independent variable is self-regulation. Speaking skills improved with self-regulation help and support.

The investigation implemented valuable and tested methods. The project implemented mixed-method two-phase action research. Shorten and Smith (2017) mentioned that in a project is allowed that researchers can work with quantitative and qualitative data

included in the same document. The mixed-methods approach to research is an extension rather than a replacement for the quantitative and qualitative methods to study. The latter two research approaches remain valuable and essential in adapting different instruments such as rubrics and quantitative and interviews or focus groups in the qualitative (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Lucas-Alfieri (2015) mentioned that a quantitative result is a method that displays results after comparing the variables by using a numerical system to measure and analyze measurements applying a specific model. In this study, the results were collected twice: at the beginning and the end; the instruments to collect the information were the pre and post-test, a speaking rubric, a checklist, and an interview with a random group of students. The rubric has specific components that help graders and students to find the results in every task. More than this, it has a component to designing a plan to improve mistakes or failures that could hinder students' understanding.

McLeod (2019b) said that qualitative research is the approach that explores and understands the meaning of individuals or groups that look for the answer to a social or human problem. The research involved emerging questions and procedures collected in the participant's setting, from particulars to general themes, and the researcher was able to develop interpretations of the meaning of the data. One qualitative instrument is the interview. The investigator asked participants a series of predetermined open-ended questions to find results concerning their perspectives about challenges, complex situations, and the benefits of speaking skills.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed through the instruments implemented along the innovation to give the best reliability to the results. The pre and post-test were specific instruments to measure students' English proficiency. The speaking rubric was the instrument implemented to check and calibrate students' development in every task. In this stage, the teacher and students graded the same assignments to get the most accurate results in every job. Another instrument is the checklist which considers every aspect of learners' tasks. Finally, the instrument to analyze students' perspectives was the interview. This instrument was primarily designed to understand students' points of view concerning their challenges, difficulties, opportunities, and improvement in their knowledge.

PARTICIPANTS

Students involved in this study were 28 learners in the 8th year of primary education. Their socioeconomic situation positions them in a medium-low social class. Some do not have their own mobile devices to record the audio. Many of their tasks were recorded from their parents' devices, or even the teacher helped them record audio from her cell phone. There are two English teachers who are currently working in the institution where the innovation took place. It is essential to mention that students were free to leave the study when they wanted. Their participation was free and voluntary. Finally, their names and personal information were kept and replaced by specific codes that maintained their privacy.

RESULTS.

It is necessary to answer every research question created to improve speaking competencies in learners. The pre-test and post-test results were compared and analyzed. Table number one shows that the effect size for the global speaking skill improvement was 2.42, which is a significant and positive effect size (ES). Furthermore, the *p-value* with an alpha of 5% was less than 0.005, which means there is a piece of definitive evidence that showed the innovation caused the improvement. The findings mentioned are detailed in table number one and Figure one that follows.

Table 1

Descriptive statistic of speaking skill pre-test and post-test

	N Sample	M Mean	SD Std. Devt.	p value < 0.005	Effect Size <i>D</i>
Pre-test	28	13.	3.31	0.00	
Post-test	28	20.82	3.16	0.00	2.42

Table N° 1 reflects the pre-test and post-test' results demonstrating the effect size which shows a large and positive improvement in the oral interactions.

Figure 1

Pre-test and Post-test Comparison

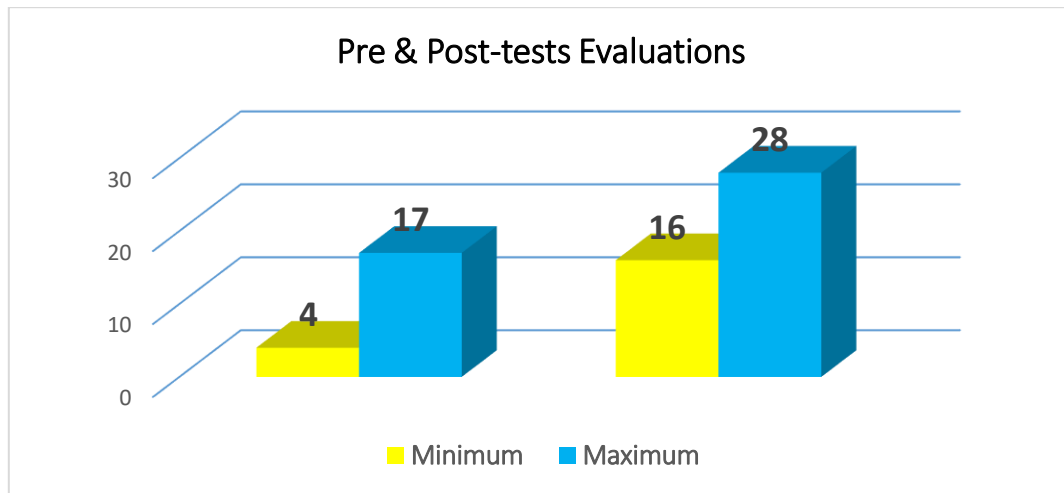


Figure Nº 1 reflects the Pre and Post-test results demonstrating a clear improvement.

To answer the second research question: In what extent the speaking rubric can demonstrate the students' fluency improvement? Understanding the self-assessment applied in every task is necessary. The figures show how the students and the teacher's grades were becoming closer according to their self-assessment and learning acquired through effective training. The results of self-assessment improvement at the beginning and the end are shown in Figure 2 and figure 3 that follow below:

Figure Nº 2

Students and teacher grades results during week 1.

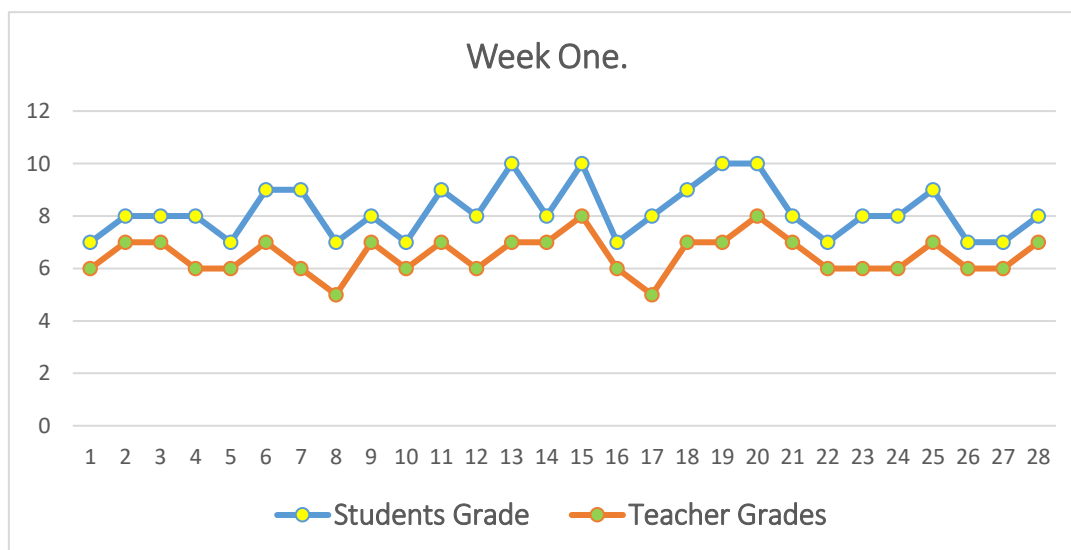


Figure Nº 2 reflects the students and teacher grades results during week 1.

In the figure 2, it is demonstrated the remarkable difference between the students and the teacher's grades. The objective was gradually closing and calibrating both grades.

Figure Nº 3

Students and teacher grades results during week 5.

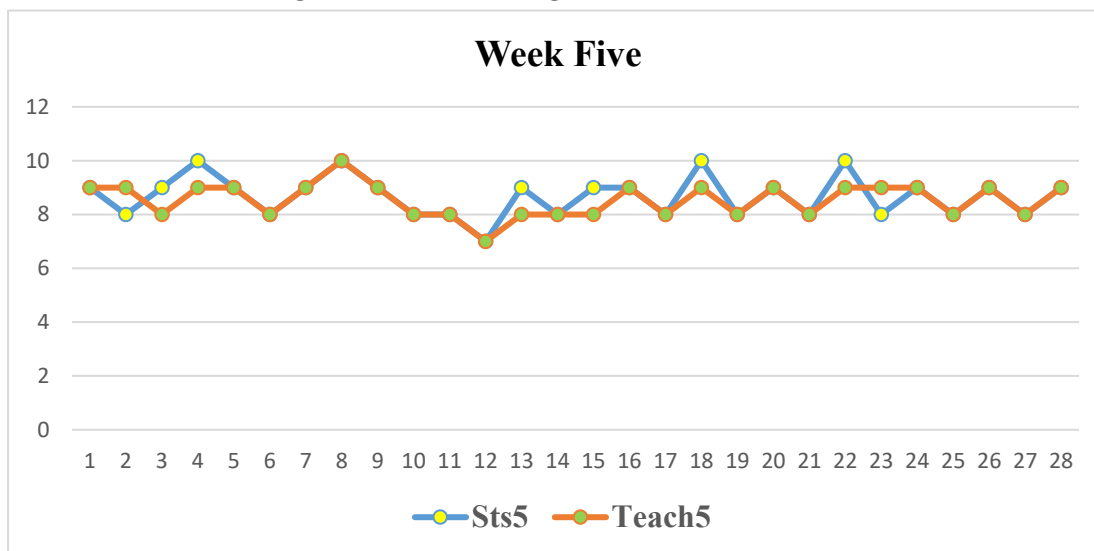


Figure Nº 3 reflects the students and teacher grades results during week 5.

In the figure 3, it is noticeable how in week 5, the slight difference between the students' and the teacher's grades has been almost closed. The grades are almost similar in all the work.

To answer the research question number three that asked how reliable could be the interview about students' improvement after the implementation of self-regulation? There was a space where a random group of eight students were interviewed after taking the post-test evaluation. These students were indifferently chosen to talk about their learning opportunities, advantages, challenges, and difficulties. Learners answered five questions, and in first person mentioned in a clear form their points of view and diverse perspectives about this special time training with an innovative form to learn.

The interview was done in Spanish to avoid misunderstanding and confusing in any specific part. The questions and some of their answers were:

1.- What did you do to learn English? ¿Qué hizo usted para aprender inglés?

All the students mentioned that they had to practice a lot. Some students said he needed to drill the words repeatedly to improve their pronunciation. Another student noted that her English level improved more during these six weeks of innovation than in the rest of her life studying in school. Other learners mentioned that they recorded audio and **listened** to them many times. It was practical and valuable for the learners. One

student said: *"I created my exercises using my family information, then the work was easier."*

2.- What did you learn from listening to your audios? ¿Qué aprendió de escuchar sus audios?

Learners expressed that listening to the audio was essential for their improvement. They were surprised when they gradually understood a larger quantity of words through continued listening practice. Students mentioned that every time they developed the activities in class, these were easier after hearing them during their learning process. The practices through WhatsApp increase the listening part in a positive form. One student mentioned that she never imagined that WhatsApp could be an integrator to help people to learn English. They could comprehend the audio a little more, and as a student mentioned: *"Practicing is the key to success."*

3.- What were the challenges during the innovation? ¿Cuáles fueron los retos durante la innovación?

Students were immersed in a complex training process where the daily practices were not accessible, especially at the beginning. There were some challenges that students were required to overcome. The interviewees mentioned that the lack of knowledge was the main problem in learning innovation. Many students had a hard time during the pandemic, and the quantity of knowledge decreased. A component that hindered learning during that time; was the poor connection at students' homes. One student expressed that he could not connect at any time during the two years of the pandemic. Nevertheless, he passed the following levels of education. The lack of exposition to listening to the English language was a significant component almost forgotten to feed in these learners.

4.- Do you think your English level is adequate to have a conversation by yourself? ¿Piensa usted que su nivel inglés es adecuado para tener una conversación por usted mismo?

Students stated that their English level is inadequate to create conversations by themselves. Their English level decreased when students were not in their regular classes. Learners did not correctly learn by themselves. In most cases, learners did not internalize the context taught in class, but when the innovation began, they considered returning to their learning routines. Students mentioned that they could see the activities as didactical resources that allowed them to reach their objectives to adapt them to real lives

situations. One student said: *"My English was very limited, but believe me, it has positively increased through my constant practice."*

5.- Would like to use this strategy of self-regulation for the next school year? ¿Le gustaría utilizar esta estrategia de autorregulación para el próximo año escolar?

All of the students mentioned yes, in the affirmative and effusive form to implement Self-regulation in their new school year. Their attitude is positive, and their learning motivation to improve their English has increased through the days of working on this project and activities. All the learners said that studying and practicing the English language with reflections on their actions and learning new concepts of their language acquisition was a new sensation and experience in their learning. In the beginning, the participants were afraid to self-assess their work, but the training and proper development were the encouragement that learners needed to improve in their actions. One of their answers was: *"If I could have the opportunity to use the self-reflection approach in my other subjects, I would surely learn more effectively."*

DISCUSSION

At the beginning of the innovation, results could be questioned due to the short time implemented in the action research. It is required to support findings with specific literature that positively illustrates the study. In the first days of the innovation, learners were mostly silent. Their lack of knowledge was a barrier that hindered Al-Eiadeh et al. (2016) principle, which mentioned that speaking is essential to effective worldwide communication. Notably, students came from a virtual system where the teaching was traditional and non-communicative. Some English teachers continue teaching speaking just as a drill for dialogues of memorization (Ramadan, 2016).

The innovation began with a pre-test to know students' English proficiency. After this, learners received specific training to learn about self-assess their work. Additionally, students learned how to apply technological resources such as WhatsApp to record their voices and gain better confidence in their work. Ministerio de Educación (2016) stated that speaking skill is associated with various technological tools that enhance users' preparation for a more qualified job of supporting verbal expression, increasing knowledge, autonomy, and independence to be competent learners.

Outcomes showed that learners improved their self-regulation abilities. During the innovation training, students-maintained interaction with partners and the teacher to

increase their communicative components. Learners need interaction to increase participation and motivation to learn more, evaluate, and reflect on their same work (Martin & Bollinger, 2018). Besides this, results also showed that students learned and acquired the self-regulation strategies supported by the teacher. Students could use their learning in different contexts of their life. The author said that students learn to manage and organize their thoughts and transform them into skills to improve their understanding (Zimmerman, 2001).

In the beginning, students needed the teacher's support all the time. However, gradually they became independent every week. It is required to support the self-regulation process development effectively; monitoring and encouraging students' will help them with their individual needs and recognize self-regulation. Peeters et al. (2014). Learners were always considered to give examples, opinions, and above all, for being listened to in all moments. Involving students and encouraging them to participate in the decision-making process inspire ownership of their learning while developing intrinsic motivation and competence (Katz, 2012).

Finally, students, through results, demonstrated that the innovation was positively valuable but also a substantial challenge that needed to be overcome. All the learners showed their acceptance of the technological resource and using this platform made the work more adaptable to students. Andujar (2016) expressed that WhatsApp represents a powerful educational tool to encourage second-language interaction among participants. Many learners that applied to WhatsApp at the beginning mentioned that it was easier for them to use it because of their shyness (Baffour-Awuah, 2015) mentioned that WhatsApp actively participates and inspires them to engage in purposeful activities. Students were engaged for these subsequent innovations.

CONCLUSIONS

The action research implemented in Yasmina Justina Zamora Goye High school marked a before and an after in twenty-eight 8th-year students who participated in the study. The learning was not in the required standard to be adapted for adequate levels of education. The innovation started with a teaching and learning process where students understood self-regulation, self-assessment, and how they could manage these crucial concepts early and with limited English knowledge. These inputs made them comprehend the implementation of new speaking strategies better. At the beginning of classes, they were

timid for different reasons such as lack of knowledge and self-confidence, essential factors that hindered their participation for the first time.

Implementing WhatsApp into the educative context initially made learners nervous because they had never used this resource to learn from themselves. The study broke down the traditional teaching and learning paradigms, involving communicative aspects in every activity created by facilitators, and developed by students. Some days, the activities worked better than others. In those cases where the result was great, students were focused on connecting their prior knowledge with the new one. In other sections where the learning was unclear initially, the facilitator needed to re-design and adapt some of the activities with valuable strategies to obtain the required knowledge.

In conclusion, the present innovation has highlighted the importance of current methodologies in teaching English in this group of young learners. The results have shown that implementing new resources for students facilitated by mobile devices developed a special connection with their learning environment, which made students improve their speaking skills. Original contents and the materials provided in the innovation promoted learners' communicative competence in English. It is a good idea to work on plans where learners could reflect on their learning and implement communicative activities through their self-assessment improvements.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations in this action research began with a short time to implement the study. It was noticeable when students were most engaged in the learning, the time of the innovation finished. Another limitation was the sample of the study. It was a reduced number of participants. The learners were twenty-eight students whose English level was minimal. However, it helped them to learn in an innovative form. The lack of mobile devices became a limitation during the study. Additionally, to this, the internet connection was a constraint in some houses. Their families cannot help them, especially in English. Finally, the most substantial limitation was the two last years without a natural English language education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One recommendation is that internet access and technology could be available to teachers and students. Another suggestion is to allow a larger sample size and time for a similar study. Additionally, as a student comment, she recommended the innovative

practices of this research study, saying that it would be great to experiment with this action research study with all the learners at all levels of education, and apply it to different subjects. Learners could even receive self-regulation training by developing reflective and innovative thinking in their first years of schooling.

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