Implementation of Self-Assessment Techniques in a Preschool Classroom of

EFL Learners

Karla María Toral Torres

Guide: María Rossana Ramírez Ávila

Modality: Research Report

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Learning English nowadays has become an essential part of every academic curriculum. From a young age, students are more likely to be bilingual by being part of an environment where they experience new engaging activities to learn English naturally.

Implementing a new technique in the English class represented not only a challenge because of the age of the students but also an opportunity for them to enter a new view of their own learning. The group of students who participated in this project is at the age when spoken language is developing, including their mother tongue. Therefore, English is introduced as a natural way of learning through fun daily experiences at school.

The standard way of thinking about self-assessment concerns the multiple benefits for the students to be involved and aware of their own objectives in any subject. In this case, the intention of applying an innovation is to help students to recognize their own ability to self-reflect on their progress in their English performance. Self-assessment is expected to improve student Language Arts grades between the pretest and the post-test in 2-3-year-old children from a preschool.

In this class and at this level of education in the institution where the study took place, self-assessment techniques were never used or introduced to assess any subject. Besides, when the study was run out, unexpected changes had to be adapted due to the pandemic which disrupted the expected attendance at the school.

The study was developed online, a completely new experience for the students. This is why, a research question arises to analyze deeply: Does self-assessment impact the speaking grades among 2-3-year-old- first-time English learners in preschool

compared to students' performance in the English class before applying self-assessment techniques?

Literature Review

When introducing children to a bilingual environment, it has been observed that they acquire vocabulary, language structures, and different sounds with ease and spontaneity through play-like activities. For the purpose of this study, it was relevant to cover the concepts of self-assessment in a bilingual environment for children and the effectiveness of practicing self–assessment strategies for the improvement of English performance.

The variable in this research study is self-assessment for the improvement of speaking skills. Alek et al. (2020) explored that self-assessment stimulates students to be aware of how capable they are in their speaking performance. Richards and Rodgers (1986) mentioned in their book, "Awareness is educable. As one learns "in awareness," one's powers of awareness and one's capacity to learn become greater" (p.103). According to Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2014), "Self-regulation is the control that students have over their cognition, behavior, emotions, and motivation through the use of personal strategies to achieve the goals they have established" (p. 450). Panadero et al. (2017) added that self-assessment involves the learner assessing their own work. As Andrade and Valtcheva (2009) suggested, students who set goals, make feasible plans to meet them, and check their progress, tend to learn more and have better academic results than learners who do not. The authors demonstrated that self-regulation and achievement are closely related.

Andrade (2019) analyzed that self-assessment produces feedback for modifying and improving performance and needs to be formative. Alfianti (2022) found that students' video recordings positively impacted speaking performance. In a recent study,

Sintayani and Adnyayanti (2022) reported the three main effects of self-assessment strategies on EFL students' speaking performance: "They are (1) identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, (2) increasing students' self-efficacy, and (3) improving their speaking performance" (p. 87). Bandura (1986) mentioned four factors that help to increase an individual's self-efficacy such as experiences of successful performance, watching others succeed, encouragement, and physiological factors (Bandura, 1986, as cited in Panadero, 2017, p. 7). Birjandi (2010) attributed that self-assessment impacted students' motivation in the EFL class. According to Baleghizadeh and Masoun (2014), "Applying regular self-assessment as a formative assessment technique heightens the learners' level of self-efficacy in an EFL context" (p.53).

Schunk (2003) suggested that for students who are not confident in making self-evaluations, teachers may need to give them hints for assessing performance and measuring goal progress. When students self-monitor their performance and assess their skills or achievements in learning it is clear that they have become more capable, and this insight strengthens self-efficacy and promotes self-regulated learning attempts. (Schunk, 2012, p.413).

As defined by Jin (2021), self-assessment is a facilitator of the improvement of students' learning skills. In this study, the researcher concluded that recording students' dialogues, oral presentations, and oral interactions could help students reflect on their own abilities and promote motivation. However, this study is limited because it focused on the correlation between self-assessment and L2 speaking ability with participants from different settings.

Moreover, Khonamri et al. (2021) tested the impact of the self-assessment technique with a group of 5 students using recordings of their speaking performance in EFL classes in order to collect data. The findings showed that self-assessment

techniques positively influenced the post-test compared to the pretest scores. Besides, the qualitative analysis revealed the student's perceptions of the helpfulness of monitoring their own performance and reflecting on it. Even though the benefits of applying self-assessment techniques, the authors highlighted that the sample of the study was small and the results cannot be generalized. They suggested that teachers who lack time to give feedback to students about their performance should incorporate these techniques to help students self-monitor their own progress. Zimmerman and Schunk (2001) categorized the self-regulatory competence of an individual into four levels: 1) observation level, 2) emulative level, 3) self-control level, and 4) self-regulation level.

In addition, Azatova (2021) tested the impact of using recordings for self-assessment on reading, writing, speaking, and listening with a sample of six 4th-grade participants. Students co-created a rubric with the teacher's help using student-friendly descriptors (emojis). The researcher concluded, "Once students can be metacognitively aware of their needs as language learners, they can employ more strategically cognitive and socio-affective strategies to become more self-regulated learners" (p.186). Again, the participant size and the lack of a comparison group are limitations mentioned by the researchers in this study.

Besides, Jacob et al. (2019) conducted a pilot study of a measurement tool that tested self-assessment ability at an early age in 183 German kindergartens. Researchers narrated to children a story where the main characters were animals facing "real-based" situations. Students were invited to rate the decisions of the Lion using a happy or a sad face. The measurement tool was based on Zimmerman's (Zimmerman, 2000, as described in Jacob et al., 2019) model of Self-regulated learning: "planning, using prior knowledge, dealing with deflectors, self-efficacy, monitoring, breaks and self-motivation, reflection and causal attribution" (p. 118). The researchers concluded that

"the results demonstrate that it is both plausible and possible to assess SRL in preschoolers directly at child level" (p. 115). However, preschoolers may need exceptional support. According to a study, young learners can use self-assessment techniques to evaluate their progress but older students show more effectiveness in the process (McDonald, 2004, as cited in Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2014, p.14).

Innovation

During the lesson design, the Understanding by Design Framework was applied in order to plan the unit. Guilott et al. (2020) mentioned, "To consider transfer in the design process, teachers must remove themselves from the expert position and consider what it will take for a novice learner to grasp the ideas and concepts" (p. 24). According to the Council of Europe (2018), a Pre-A1 student: "Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places" (p. 29). Indeed, both the transfer goal and the level descriptor were linked.

Students were learning English as part of a bilingual program at the preschool. Every subject was in English: Language Arts, Math, Fine Motor Skills, Gross motor skills, and sensory activities, along with others. Given their young age and little use of the English language away from the classes, students tended to participate using their mother tongue.

To enhance students' participation and increase motivation in the English class, "My Goal tracker" was created as an adaptation of the self-assessment checklist. The pretest was considered to reinforce what had been practiced during the Language Arts class. Students participated in the morning greetings interacting with the teacher using simple words in English about the weather, the day of the week, their feelings, and so on.

Pupils were invited to use their goal tracker worksheet to record their weekly progress through the "emoji code". Students had to color the emoji that represented their "grades" (beginning [Initial]), not yet (process), and yes (acquired)) according to the skill practiced that week. As students were starting a new unit about vacation, the activities' vocabulary and content were focused on that topic. For the post-test, candidates were asked to show their own sensory bins pretending they had sand, water, toys, and accessories they would love to bring to the beach. They were asked to interact, answering simple questions about the experience of "being at the beach". Pupils did their final self-assessment, with their goal tracker worksheet with the aid of their parents. There was a time frame of 3.5 weeks between the pretest and the posttest.

Research Methodology

The methodology applied for this innovation was action research. Ravid (2019) defined action research as a cycle of steps. Besides, Lufungulo et al. (2021) pointed out that action research in education takes place in a school setting and involves the engagement of the educational members (students, parents, teachers) for the improvement of matters that may need interventions. In action research, the objective is to reflect and evaluate the research outcomes to benefit the students and improve teaching practices.

In their book about Research in Education, Privitera and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2018) described the scientific or research method as a set of techniques used to acquire, modify, and integrate knowledge concerning observable and measurable phenomena. The authors mentioned the steps for conducting an adequate research process in Education:

Identify the problem,

Develop a research plan,

Conduct the study,

Analyze and evaluate data,

Communicate the results,

Generate more ideas.

As Zeni (2006) claimed, "Action research involves practitioners studying their own professional practice and framing their own questions. Their research has the immediate goal to assess, develop or improve their practice" (p. 13).

Therefore, the research question of this study is, does self-assessment impact the speaking grades among 2-3-year-old- first-time English learners in preschool compared to students' performance in the English class before applying self-assessment techniques? Another interesting sub-question was: Which area of the checklist was the most impacted by using the "my goal tracker" chart as a strategy for self-assessment?

Participants

Participants were recruited from an Initial 1 (2 years old) class at a private preschool in Samborondón. The school is in an urban area near Guayaquil, Ecuador. Students were between the ages of 2.5-3 years old. The class had 14 students who were invited to participate in the study. However, due to their absence from the online classes, 9 candidates did not complete the pretest or posttest, and were excluded from the analysis. The final sample size for the project was 5 pupils who completed both the pretest and the posttest and participated in the self-assessment intervention. Two (2) students were male, and three (3) were female.

Instruments

-To answer RQ 1: Does self-assessment impact the speaking grades among 2-3-year-old- first-time English learners in preschool compared to student's performance in

the English class before applying self-assessment techniques? A pre-posttest was applied using a checklist using a student-friendly code: emojis.

"My goal tracker" was given to the students as the self-assessment worksheet at the end of the week. Students were asked to assess their progress by coloring the emojis that meant Beginning, not yet, and yes. This activity was accepted with joy by the children and their parents, who were helping them behind the cameras to know how well they did in the English class.

Performing the final activity was a challenge but a valuable experience for the students when they had to describe with one or a few words what they had in their sensory bins, pretending they were at the beach. It is essential to mention that preschool students do not get grades in numbers. The data collected was qualitative and then transformed into numbers for quantitative analysis during the application of a rubric at the end of the intervention.

Self-assessment checklist adapted into a goal tracker worksheet

Students self-assessed themselves by reflecting on their understanding of their prior knowledge before introducing the new unit. Four (4) aspects of the English language were assessed: vocabulary, grammar, interaction, and pronunciation for both pretest and posttest. In the pretest, they were asked to interact individually with the teacher by answering three simple questions in English: What day is today? How is the weather? How do you feel? The scale used in the self-assessment checklist did not use numbers, only qualitative grades. "Beginning" means (I) for learning that is in an initial stage. "Not yet" means that the student's understanding is in the process (P). "Yes" means that the students have acquired (A) the skills needed for this level. The design of the self-assessment checklist was vetted by two experts in the field at Universidad Casa Grande during the study of Instructional Design.

Grading rubric based on the Common European Framework of Reference

The grading rubric was designed to transform qualitative grades used at the school into scores. It was on a 3-5 scale, with three being the lowest score and five being the highest. In the rubric, a 3 corresponded to "Beginning, the student is in an initial phase". A four corresponded to "Not yet!", the student is in the process of acquiring new knowledge about the unit". A 5 corresponded to "Yes!", meaning that the student has acquired the knowledge of this unit". The complete rubric can be seen in Appendix A. The rubric was designed to follow the principles of backward design. It was vetted by an expert in the field at Universidad Casa Grande.

Data Analysis

To test the impact of self-assessment on Language Arts grades, a paired-sample *t*-test was completed. The paired-sample *t*-test allows for a comparison of pretest and posttest between a single student's scores to be completed. The analysis was done in Microsoft Excel using the Analytics Tools Pack.

As the sample size is small, a single-subject design was followed to understand students' behavior during the intervention process.

Ethical Considerations

As part of the principles of research in any field, ethical considerations were taken into account for conducting the study. As Ravid (2019) proposed, the necessary steps for conducting a study were followed in order to respect the participants' integrity and rights. Previously, the participants and the school were informed about the intervention in the classroom. Thus, as the sample was a group of children, parents had to give consent, and the researcher committed to keeping their personal information confidential and only for research purposes.

Results

Although students' self-assessments were not graded for points, the scores are reported here to explore the effectiveness of the technique. The single-subject design was the key to evidence that not all the areas of Language Arts improved significantly for all the students. Some of them improved in areas such as interaction and pronunciation, although some students remained stable during the intervention in grammar and vocabulary.

As mentioned before, 4 aspects of the English language were assessed: vocabulary, grammar, interaction, and pronunciation for both pretest and posttest. In the pretest, on average, students rated their knowledge of vocabulary at 4.6. This score is positioned between the two rubric categories of 4 = "Not yet!" and 5 = "Acquired". The average in grammar is 4.4, which is set between the categories of 4 = "Not yet!" and 5 = "Acquired", according to the rubric. Students also rated their interaction score on average at 4.8. This is situated in the category placed between the two rubric categories of 4 = "Not yet!" and 5 = "Acquired". For the pronunciation, students rated their average score at 4.8, which is taking the position between the two rubric categories of 4 = "Not yet!" and 5 = "Acquired".

Students' self-assessment scores were correlated with their pretest and post-test scores in the total Language Arts scores, which included grammar, pronunciation, interaction, and vocabulary. The correlation showed a strong relationship between the variables (r=.9).

As the sample was small, the analysis is based on the changes of the scores in the trajectory of time. A detailed analysis is given of the assessed skills and another complete analysis of the total grade.

As observed in Figure 1, the scores follow two tendencies in the vocabulary scores. Students 2, 3, and 4 remain the same score during the intervention. Another

tendency is the one followed by students 1 and 5 when their scores increase during the intervention.

It is possible that the students that are visibly stable were affected by the online classes because it limited the student's opportunities to feel free through playtime using new vocabulary. Due to the age of the participants, their attention to the screen was brief, and they needed activities that involved movement and games.

Figure 1

*Vocabulary pretest and posttest scores using the rubric*
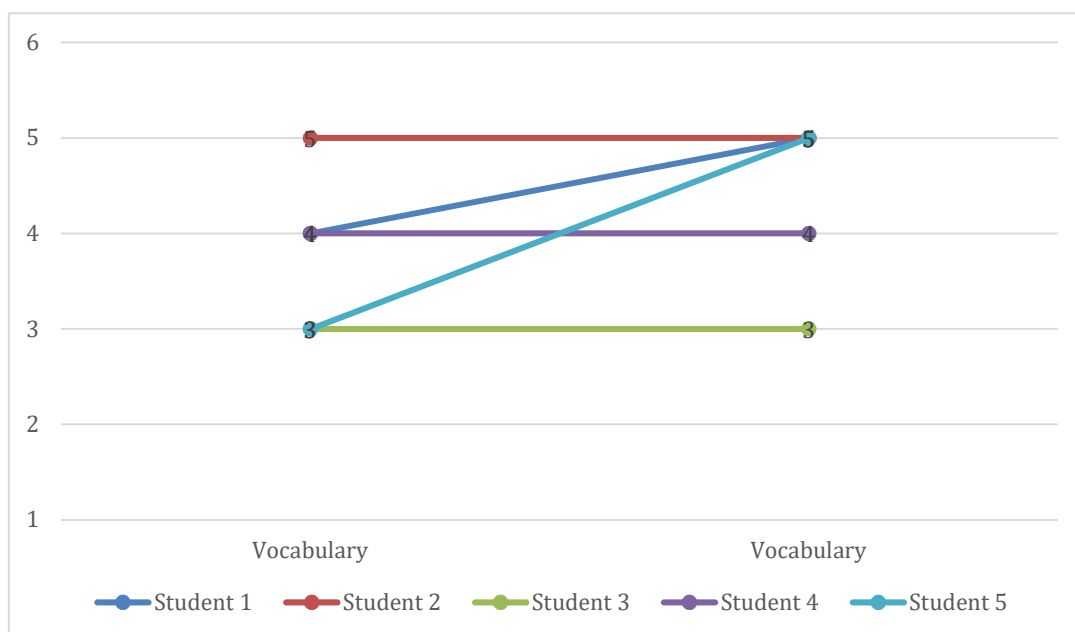
In grammar, there are 3 visible tendencies. Students 3 and 5 remain in score 3 according to the rubric. Student 4 shows the same stable tendency. However, the score is 4 during the intervention. Student 4 decreases when the score changes from 4 to 3. However, student 1 shows an increasing tendency in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Grammar pretest and posttest scores using the rubric

In interaction, again, three tendencies are visible. Student 3 remains stable in
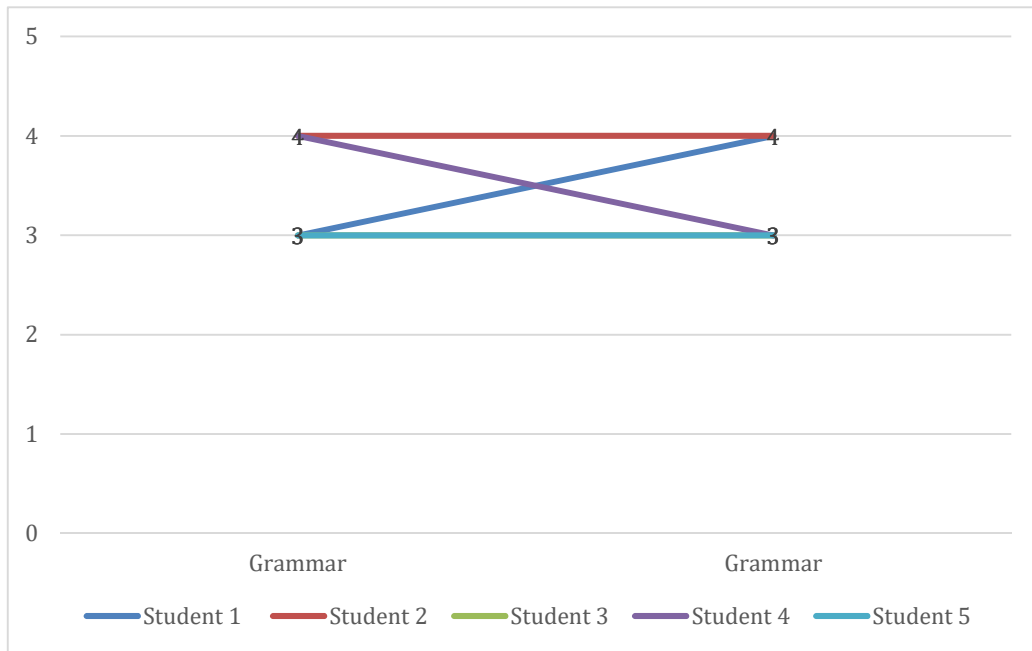
score 4 during the intervention. Students 1 and 4 follow an increasing tendency, one

of them going from 3 to 4, and the other going from 4 to 5. However, student 5

shows a decreasing tendency going from a score of 5 to 4 as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Interaction pretest and post-test scores using the rubric
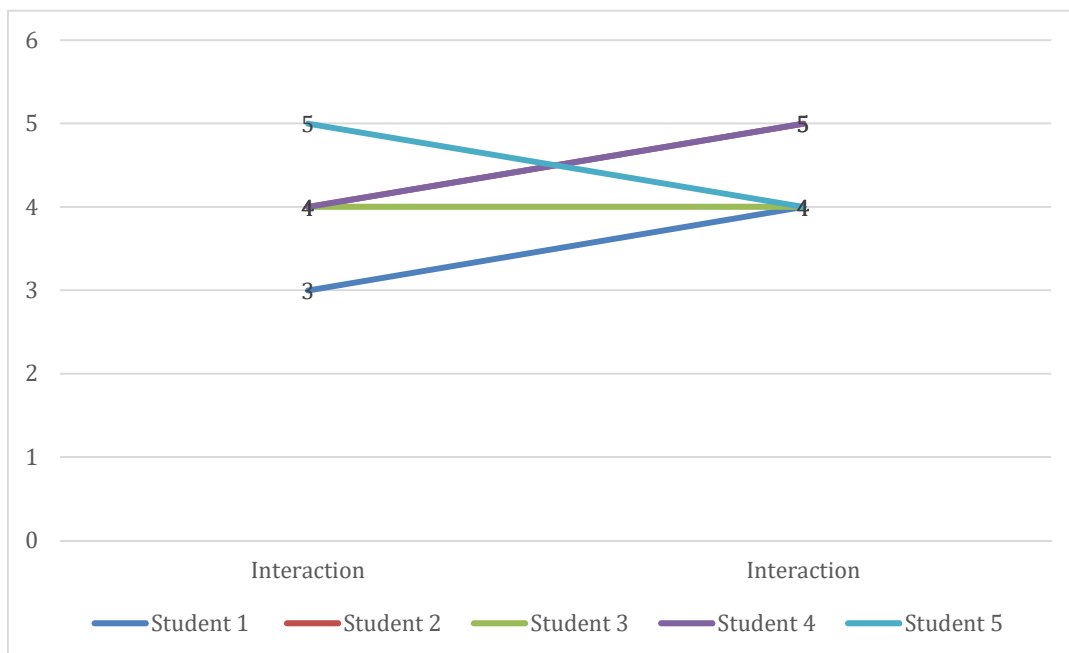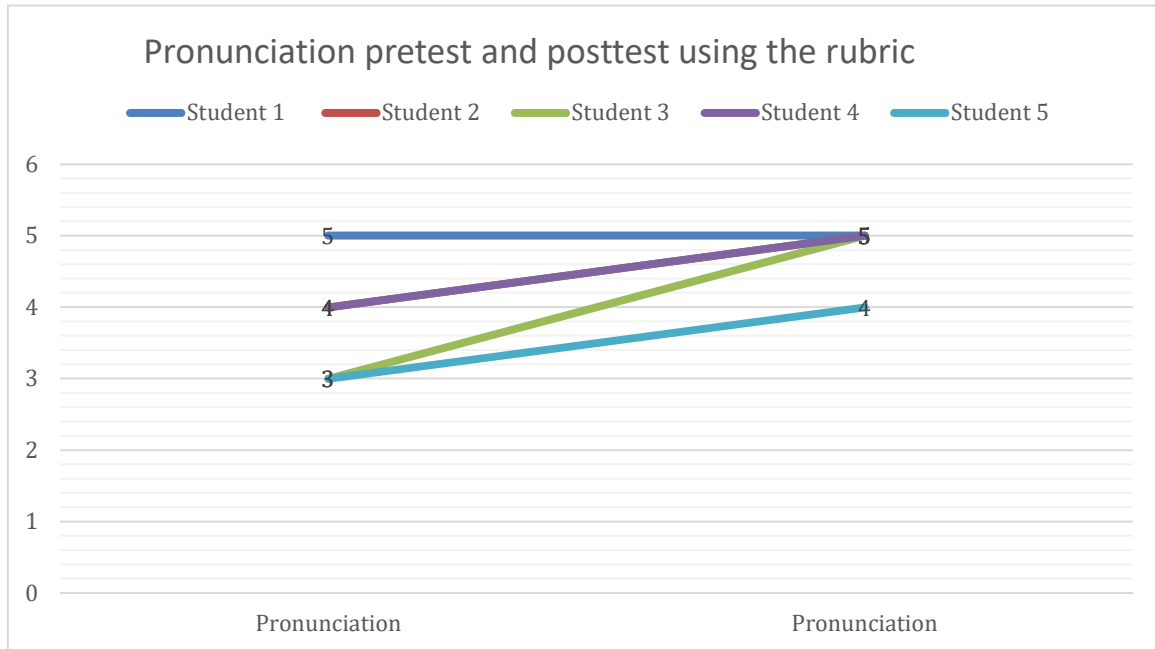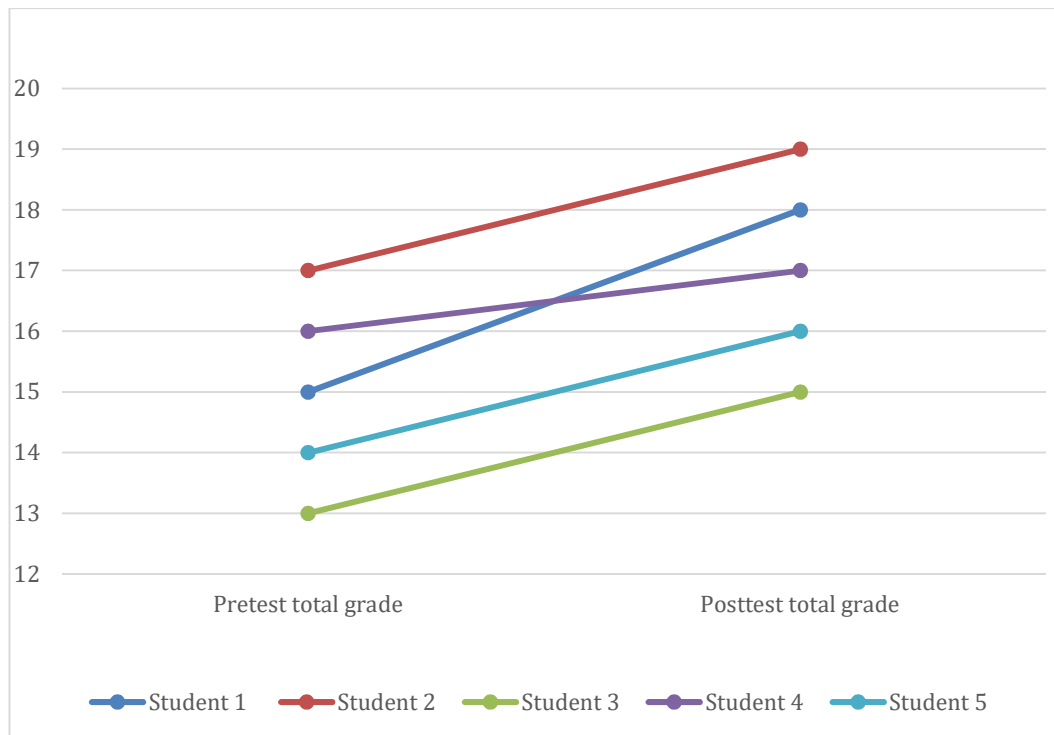
Figure 4

Pronunciation pretest and post-test scores using the rubric

It is clear that pronunciation was the skill that showed more improvements because all students obtained better results. This is possible because of the English language learning throughout the school year. At the moment of the intervention, students felt more adapted to some sounds and utterances in English. Students could produce some clear and understandable words which was expected according to the CEFR standard and their ages.

Figure 5

Language Arts pretest and posttest scores using the rubric

The tendency observed in Figure 5 is visibly rising for all students. However, not all of them have significant changes. Student 3, for example, goes from a 13 to a 15 score. Student 5 goes from a 14 to a 16 score. Student 1 goes from a 15 to an 18 score attempting a very high grade. And student 2 goes from 17 to 19, with the highest score of the five participants.

The trajectory of the scores in the graphics supports the hypothesis. Implementing new assessment techniques in the classroom helped students to feel confident in their progress in English. Their scores increased during the intervention, meaning they felt motivated to be better English learners.

A paired-sample test was used to explore the research question, "Does self-assessment impact the speaking skills grades among 2-3 year-old-children studying English for their first time in a preschool compared to student's performance in the English class before applying self-assessment techniques?" In a paired-sample t-test, the null hypothesis is that there is no difference between dependent groups.

The paired-sample *t*-test identified a statistically significant difference between pretest and post-test scores in Language arts for the analysis (t = 6.32, p = .003). The test indicated support for the alternative hypothesis.

Discussion

Conducting an implementation of a new technique in the English class represented a challenge but also an opportunity for the learners. This study's results align with Azatova (2021) because student-friendly descriptors were used in the self-assessment so that students at this age could understand the process better. Students felt engaged with self-assessing their progress in the English class. They felt motivated to learn, which relates to Birjandi (2010) when he highlights that using self-assessment impacts motivation. At the same time, their enthusiasm was growing, also their awareness and capacity to be part of their own goals as related to Richard and Rodgers (1986). Through this project, it is demonstrated that practicing self-assessment techniques in a preschool classroom is, as highlighted by Jacob et al. (2019), "plausible and possible".

It is essential to mention that students did not feel confident at the beginning of the intervention. Still, as suggested by Shunck (2003), the teacher invited the children to imagine that they would become teachers and they would assess their performance in the English class. The constant guidance and support due to the students' age in this project aligned with the literature of studies that mention that older students perform the self-assessment process better (McDonald, 2004, as cited in Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki, 2014).

Conclusions

The paired-sample *t*-test provided evidence that self-assessment significantly improved pronunciation grades. This aligns with the theories of self-assessment and

backward design. As self-assessment focuses on ongoing reflection, self-judgment, and self-monitoring, implementing self-assessment provides the students with the necessary tools for awareness of their own progress in English class.

Interesting, the correlations between self-assessment and rubric scores for the pretest and posttest were not strongly correlated. It is possible that their self-assessment was affected by the presence of their parents during the online classes. Some students possibly struggled with the process of assessing themselves.

Limitations

This experience was precious and had numerous positive effects on the students, especially regarding their motivation to learn English. Their parents felt proud that their little students were learning to assess themselves and encouraged them to participate more in English classes. However, the current study could have been applied during face-to-face courses. Courses would have shown a greater sample due to the age of the participants. The results would have been more applicable in other contexts regarding preschool students. Given the different limitations in this single classroom, it would be beneficial to apply self-assessment and backward design to other modules with students of the same age or older.

In the future, it would be relevant to survey or interview students about their self-assessment process and sentiments. Probably, students felt more engaged in being part of the learning process but their awareness was limited due to their age.

Recommendations

For future professionals looking for a simple self-assessment tool, The "My Goal Tracker" chart is highly recommended. Yet, it would be valuable for the children to practice more self-assessment techniques. Children can quickly get used to them but they need constant practice, motivation, and support.

For a deeper study of the impact of self-assessment strategies, a greater sample of students would have shown more precise results for general considerations regarding improving preschoolers' performance in oral skills.

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Appendix 1

Lesson Plan

Available upon request.

Appendix 2

Rubric

Available upon request.

Appendix 3

Checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix 4

Consent

Available upon request.

Appendix 6

Karla Toral's Portfolio

Available upon request.

Appendix 7

Grades

Available upon request.