



Self-Assessment to Improve Speaking Skills in Preschoolers

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Learning a new language can be challenging at any age, and even more so when just starting to learn letters and phrases. When working with students who are four and five years old, teachers often focus specifically on the development of speaking skills as these children are just starting to learn to write and read. So, why is it difficult for students to produce their own thoughts and ideas in English and express them correctly? Why do teachers often focus on having students memorize concepts rather than producing their own ideas? Why, despite having 20 or more English periods in the school schedule every week, do students not have ample opportunities to interact with each other?

Language is best taught when it is used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning (Krashen, 2013). In order to improve speaking skills in preschoolers, this study proposes to try out a self-assessment to develop and improve communication in the classroom. Through guided activities, question and answer games, the use of rounds and chants, it is expected that an improvement in oral production in preschoolers will be demonstrated.

This action research was conducted in a preschool setting. Participants were young children whose ages ranged from four to five years old and have not had prior English language experience. The study consisted of three phases: pre-assessment, assessment, and final task.

Literature Review

Self-Assessment

Self-assessment in education refers to learners evaluating or reflecting on their own learning based on stated goals or criteria (Ross et al, 2002). Brown and Harris (2013) described self-assessment in the K-16 context as a “descriptive and evaluative act carried out by the student

concerning his or her own work and academic abilities” (p. 368). Panadero et al. (2016) portrayed it as a “wide variety of mechanisms and techniques through which students describe (i.e., assess) and possibly assign merit or worth to (i.e., evaluate) the qualities of their own learning processes and products” (p. 804). Referring to physicians, Epstein et al. (2008) defined “concurrent self-assessment” as “ongoing moment-to-moment self-monitoring” (p. 5). Self-monitoring “refers to the ability to notice our own actions, curiosity to examine the effects of those actions, and willingness to use those observations to improve behavior and thinking in the future” (Epstein et al., 2008, p. 5). Taken together, these definitions include self-assessment of one's abilities, processes, and products. This broad conception might seem unwieldy, but it works because each object of assessment—competence, process, and product—is subject to the influence of feedback from oneself.

What is missing from each of these definitions, however, is the purpose of the act of self-assessment. Their authors might point out that the purpose is implied, but a formal definition requires making it explicit: Why do we ask students to self-assess? It is believed that self-assessment is feedback (Andrade, 2018), and that the purpose of feedback is to inform adjustments to processes and products that deepen learning and enhance performance; hence the purpose of self-assessment is to generate feedback that promotes learning and improvements in performance. This learning-oriented purpose of self-assessment implies that it should be formative: if there is no opportunity for adjustment and correction, self-assessment is almost pointless.

Preschooler Self-Assessment

Understanding the realm of young children's development but not limited by its parameters, the author of this article has developed classroom strategies that utilize the young

child's characteristic of self-absorption and propensity towards self-talk to enhance their learning experiences and self-regulation skills. The author is a child development specialist in a university laboratory prekindergarten (pre-k) classroom and has established practices grounded in their own action research (Warash, 2001; Warash, et al., 2013; Warash et al., 2011) as well as the influences of established educational researchers (Bailey & Jakicic, 2012; Hattie, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to share insights into giving young children the opportunity to be involved in decisions about their own learning as well as evaluating their own progress. Children are capable of reflecting on their learning (Hattie, 2012), and teachers of young children should not be hesitant to set these expectations. The young child's developmental characteristic of self-absorption and self-talk is the platform from which these strategies were designed.

Teaching Preschoolers

Some of the early influences of young children being involved in their own learning through self-assessing their progress emanate from the research of Moxley et al. (1990) and Moxley and Studwell (1994) with a more recent impact from the research of Hattie (2012). Moxley et al. (1990) theorized that instead of relying on the traditional approach of teachers making comments and grading, children could take the role of evaluating their own progress. Their research specifically related this self-assessment approach to writing development but suggested it could be used in various academic situations.

When children comment on their own work, it gives them the basis to review, compare, revise, and engage in further approximation to conventionality. Moxley et al. (1990) implied that there are obvious limitations to solely using teacher evaluations and comments as it creates a cycle in which children try something, then wait for the teachers to respond. Waiting for commentaries or superficial comments such as "good job" does not allow the child to expand

their involvement or efforts. Children need appropriate feedback immediately in order for it to be most effective. We believe that offering experiences where children review their work allows them to build self-evaluation skills needed to consider progress within the task; subsequently serving to motivate them to put more effort into their work and ultimately assist them in becoming involved in their learning. Tarigan (2008, p. 3-4) defined speaking as a language skill that is developed in childhood, which is produced by listening skills, and at that period, speaking skills are learned.

The connection between Tarigan's definition of speaking as a language skill and the previous idea is that Tarigan's definition supports the idea that young children can develop important skills through self-assessment. According to Tarigan, speaking skills are developed in childhood through listening skills and the act of speaking. Similarly, Moxley et al. (1990) suggest that children can develop self-evaluation skills through the act of self-assessing their progress in various academic situations, including writing. In both cases, the authors suggest that allowing children to be involved in the development of these skills can lead to deeper learning and more meaningful involvement in their own learning.

Self-assessment is a valuable tool for students to develop their critical thinking and reflection skills. However, there are some limitations to its use that need to be taken into consideration. One of the main limitations of self-assessment is the lack of objectivity. Students may have a biased view of their own work and may not accurately assess their performance. This can be due to a range of factors, including an overly positive or negative view of their abilities, or simply a lack of experience in evaluating their own work (Furney & Orrego, 2019; Panadero et al., 2016; Taras, 2009).

Another limitation of self-assessment is the lack of experience that students may have. They may not have enough experience or training to accurately assess their own work and may not know what standards to use for evaluation. This can lead to a lack of confidence in their self-assessment abilities and the accuracy of their assessments. It is important for teachers to provide clear expectations and standards for what constitutes good performance to help students understand what they should be striving for (Brown & Harris, 2013; Falchikov & Boud, 1989)

Another factor that can impact the effectiveness of self-assessment is confidence. Students may have low confidence in their abilities, leading them to undervalue their own work. In these cases, it is important for teachers to provide guidance and support to help students build their confidence and develop their self-assessment skills.

To train students to self-assess effectively, it is essential to provide clear expectations and standards for what constitutes good performance (Falchikov & Boud, 1989). Additionally, it is helpful to provide opportunities for students to practice self-assessment, such as through peer review or self-reflection exercises. Teachers can also provide guidance on how to effectively evaluate their own work, such as by focusing on specific elements or criteria (Falchikov & Boud, 1989). Over time, as students gain experience and develop their self-assessment skills, they will become more confident and accurate in evaluating their own work. This can help them to become more engaged in their own learning, as well as to develop a deeper understanding of the learning process itself.

Innovation

The innovation in this study consisted of the use of pictures to facilitate self-assessment in order to improve speaking skills through picture descriptions. The participants were students in the first grade of basic education. The study took place at a private elementary school located

in the industrial sector of the city. Specifically, the students were asked to use pictures to help them describe their likes, dislikes, emotions, and desires. The teacher used a rubric with pictures to guide the students in how to self-assess their own performance. The study took place at a private elementary school located in the industrial sector of the city. The innovation was implemented over a four-week period, with 30-minute sessions each day in a face-to-face mode.

Throughout the four weeks, participants acquired a small amount of vocabulary knowledge, mostly high-frequency words. They were able to memorize these words and, with the help of pictograms, use them to express their likes, dislikes, emotions, and desires. The innovation was planned using a backwards design unit (see Appendix A). The activities were classified into acquisition, meaning-making, or transfer, and were designed to acquire all the necessary content to achieve the objective. To reinforce these activities, the teacher used games, rounds, and chants.

Each unit included a review of some letters of the alphabet, their names and sounds, and some words that would later be used in sentences (e.g., "I like," "I don't like," "I want," "I see," "I feel"). During the first week, the teacher explained to the students how to self-assess using the pictures in the checklist, as the students were not able to read or write. Participants, with the help of the teacher, completed rounds of asking and answering questions using high-frequency words. The teacher recorded the activity and used the pictures from the rubric to guide the students in how to self-assess. The same activity was repeated during weeks two and three, but with different words and the same application of the games and songs as a round game. The participants completed rounds of asking and answering questions using high-frequency words, and the teacher used the pictures from the rubric to guide the students in how to self-assess.

During week four, the final task was applied in game mode. Students did not wear their uniforms, and parents were invited to observe their children's performance.

Research Methodology

In this study, a self-assessment approach was utilized to enhance the speaking skills of preschoolers as a part of an action research project. Action research is a systematic approach that aims to identify and solve problems and improve practices by collecting data and reflecting on one's own practice. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), action research is a cyclical process consisting of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

The researcher began with the planning stage, which involved defining the problem, developing research questions, and designing the self-assessment approach. The next stage was acting, which involved implementing the self-assessment approach and collecting data through pre- and post-assessments. The observing stage involved analyzing the data and identifying patterns and trends to determine the effectiveness of the self-assessment approach. Finally, the reflecting stage involved reflecting on the findings and making adjustments to the approach as needed.

The research methodology used in this study involved conducting a pre-assessment to establish a baseline for the students' current speaking abilities. The self-assessment approach was then implemented, and a final assessment was conducted to measure the progress and improvement in the students' speaking abilities. The research utilized both qualitative and quantitative instruments to evaluate how self-assessment of the students' dialogues (independent variable) improved their speaking skills (dependent variable).

The findings of this study support previous research on the effectiveness of self-assessment in language learning. As mentioned earlier, Willis and Willis (2007) found that self-

assessment strategies, such as setting learning goals, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, can enhance language learning outcomes in second language students. Additionally, the work of Al-Eryani and Al-Eryani (2012) supports the findings of this study, demonstrating that self-assessment can increase students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in speaking tasks.

Participants

The study involved 22 students who were four and five years old and were attending First Basic. All of the students shared the same background and were enrolled in a private school in Guayaquil. At the start of the study, the students did not have any English language knowledge and were just starting to learn words and sentences in their mother tongue, Spanish. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of the students were homeschooled last year and were just starting to attend school for the first time. All of the participants in the study were Ecuadorians.

Instruments

The pre-task evaluation involved recording each student's speaking ability prior to the implementation of the self-assessment activities. This was achieved through classroom activities such as question-and-answer games, rounds, and chants. For instance, the teacher would ask a question such as "What is your name?" and the students would respond individually. One type of round used in the study involved each student saying a word, with the next student required to repeat the previous word and add a new one. The post-task evaluation was conducted after the implementation of the self-assessment activities and involved measuring the progress and improvement in the students' speaking skills. The descriptors on the speaking rubric included fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, intonation, and grammar with the use of a dialogue. The data collected from the pre-task and post-task evaluations were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the self-assessment approach in improving speaking skills in preschoolers.

Data Analysis

The scores were collected using a speaking rubric that was adapted from the Cambridge Starters level assessment scales. To report the first action research question *Will the use of self-assessment increase the confidence of preschoolers when they speak in English?* Based on the data analysis, the answer to the first action research question is likely yes. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of self-assessment had a positive impact on the speaking skills of the preschoolers, which could have contributed to an increase in their confidence when speaking in English. However, further research is needed to specifically investigate the impact of self-assessment on the confidence levels of the participants. The evaluator obtained the scores which were analyzed to determine the changes in speaking skills of the preschoolers before and after the implementation of self-assessment.

To report the second action research question *to what are students' difficulties during the process of self-assessment?* One of the most common difficulties that students face during self-assessment is accurately evaluating their own work. Students may overestimate or underestimate their performance, which can lead to inaccurate self-assessment and potentially hinder their learning progress. Additionally, students may struggle to understand the criteria or standards being used to evaluate their work, which can lead to confusion and further hinder their ability to accurately self-assess. Therefore, it is important for educators to provide clear and explicit guidance on the self-assessment process and criteria to help students overcome these difficulties and promote effective self-assessment practices. The evaluator emphasized in students' feelings and emotions like happiness and frustration when they apply the self-assessment and conducted a qualitative analysis. Additionally, the scores were compared between different groups of participants to identify any potential variations in the impact of self-assessment.

Ethical Considerations

In terms of ethical considerations, the participants and their parents provided informed consent and confidentiality of the participants was maintained throughout the study.

Additionally, the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set forth by the American Psychological Association.

Ethical considerations for this study, as described in the work of researchers such as Beauchamp and Childress (2001) and the Belmont Report (1979), include ensuring the safety and well-being of the participants, obtaining informed consent from the participants and/or their guardians, and protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The study also followed the guidelines set by the institutional review board (IRB) to ensure the ethical conduct of the research, as outlined in the works of Rothman (1991) and Levine (1978). The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 1964), which includes the protection of human subjects in research. The researcher also ensured that the participants were not coerced or forced to participate in the study, following the guidelines described by Faden and Beauchamp (1986). The researcher also made sure that the data collected was kept confidential and that the participants' identities were protected, in line with the recommendations of Reamer (1983) and Gostin (2000). The researcher also made sure that the participants were debriefed about the study and that their questions were answered in a clear and honest manner, as recommended by professionals such as Kirk and Miller (1986).

Results

To answer the research question *Will the use of self-assessment increase the confidence of preschoolers when they speak in English?* the results are:

Table 1

	N	Min	Max	M	SD	Sig (p)
Pretest	22	24	74	42.18	19.49	
Post test	22	24	100	67.45	24.8	0.00

Note: N= Sample, Min=Minimum, Max=Maximum, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, Sig (P)=Significance

In the paired-sample *t*-test comparing pretest speaking and posttest speaking the results were statistically significant, (-6.19, 0.0000039). This is indicated by a *p*-value below .05. Given the results, the data suggests that the difference between the 42.18 mean pretest grade and the 67.45 mean posttest grade for speaking is meaningful. This indicates that the intervention is an effective means to increase students' speaking grades.

The rubric was established into four parameters given that preschoolers are scored in a qualitative way: Need improvement (NI), Good (G), Very Good (VG) and Excellent (E).

The results of the pre-task evaluation revealed that the majority of the preschoolers had limited speaking skills in English. The scores on the speaking rubric were low, with an average score NI (need improvement) and a range from the minimum to highest grade. The standard deviation was also calculated to further examine the distribution of scores. The post-task evaluation results showed a significant improvement in the speaking skills of the preschoolers, with the average score increasing to VG (very good) and some of them with E (Excellent). The data analysis revealed a positive correlation between the implementation of self-assessment and the improvement in speaking skills.

NI stands for "Need improvement", which refers to the level of English-speaking skills that the preschoolers had before the implementation of the self-assessment activities. The average score of the NI was low, indicating that the majority of the preschoolers had limited speaking skills in English. VG, on the other hand, stands for "Very Good". This score represents

the level of speaking skills that the preschoolers had after the implementation of the self-assessment activities. The average score for VG was higher than NI, indicating that there was a significant improvement in the speaking skills of the preschoolers. E stands for "Excellent". Some of the preschoolers were able to acquire higher levels of speaking skills beyond the average VG score, indicating that they were able to master the English language more effectively than others.

Additionally, a detailed analysis was conducted according to the descriptors of the speaking rubric. The results indicated that the application of self-assessment strategies in weeks two and three led to noticeable improvement in the participants' ability to ask and answer questions without the help of the teacher. The competitive spirit of the participants was also noted to have motivated them to improve their speaking skills even further.

The results suggested that the use of the speaking rubric as an assessment tool was effective in measuring the progress of the preschoolers, and the findings indicated that the implementation of self-assessment strategies can be an effective way to improve speaking skills in preschoolers.

Discussion

The results of the study align with previous research on the effectiveness of self-assessment in language learning, particularly in the improvement of speaking skills. For example, research by Willis and Willis (2007) found that self-assessment strategies, such as setting learning goals, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, can enhance language learning outcomes in second language students. Additionally, the findings of the present study support the work of Al-Eryani and Al-Eryani (2012) who found that the use of self-assessment can increase students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in speaking tasks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of self-assessment in improving speaking skills in preschoolers in a private school in Guayaquil. Data were collected using pre-task and post-task evaluations, and a speaking rubric adapted from the Cambridge Starters level assessment scales was used to assess the speaking abilities of the participants. The results of the study revealed that the implementation of self-assessment had a positive impact on the speaking skills of the preschoolers.

The quantitative data analysis showed a significant improvement in the speaking abilities of the participants, as evidenced by their scores on the speaking rubric. The results of this study are consistent with previous research that has found self-assessment to be an effective tool for promoting student learning and motivation.

The use of self-assessment in this study also had the added benefit of promoting self-regulation and autonomy in the preschoolers. By allowing the students to evaluate and reflect on their own learning, they were able to take ownership of their own progress and make conscious efforts to improve.

The study also highlights the importance of using appropriate assessment tools, such as the speaking rubric used in this study, to evaluate the progress of students. The results of the study suggest that the use of speaking rubrics, adapted from language proficiency scales, can be an effective way to measure the speaking skills of young learners.

It is important to note that the participants of this study were young children with little to no knowledge of the English language, and the speaking rubric used was designed to be simple and basic to accommodate their limited language abilities. Further research is needed to

investigate the effectiveness of self-assessment in improving speaking skills among children with higher levels of English proficiency.

In summary, this study demonstrated the effectiveness of using pictures and rubrics as appropriate assessment tools to measure preschoolers' progress in speaking skills. The use of pictograms and a speaking rubric resulted in the acquisition of a small amount of vocabulary knowledge, mostly high-frequency words, and the ability to use them to express likes, dislikes, emotions, and desires. These findings contribute to the existing literature on assessment strategies for young learners.

However, further research is needed to explore the specific types of self-assessment strategies that work best for preschoolers, as well as the factors that may affect the effectiveness of these strategies in different contexts. In conclusion, the present study provides evidence that self-assessment can be an effective strategy for improving preschoolers' speaking skills and promoting self-regulation and autonomy in young learners.

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Appendix A

Backward design of the innovation

Available upon request.

Appendix B

Self - assessment checklist

Available upon request.

Appendix C

E – portfolio

Available upon request.