
Primary School Class English Evaluation

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Abstract

English language learning has emphasized the importance of inquiry-based testing in the development of vocabulary research, thereby allowing learners to be measured in terms of their mastery and understanding of vocabulary. Due to regional differences and actual teaching objectives, it is difficult to align second language learning and assessment in practice. It is important for researchers in instructional design to devote a significant amount of time to vocabulary research and testing. As a result, the researchers evaluated the effectiveness of students' learning by observing them in a primary school in Beijing, China, and evaluating their performance using the principles of test evaluation and assessment. A variety of teaching references and flexible teaching methods are used. It begins with practicing common vocabulary words, learning the correct spelling, and putting them to use. Following this, formative assessment is an important component of promoting student learning progress, as well as teacher evaluations in the classroom in addition to peer evaluations that measure and enhance student interest and enthusiasm.

Keywords: *Assessment; Attitude; Motivation; Peer Evaluation*

1. Introduction and Context

A study on English testing and evaluations in a Chinese Primary School. This paper critically reflects on how primary school students in China undergo English assessment. In doing so, it builds a connection with the form of assessment and students' learning attitudes, motivation and interest in second-language learning, and makes suggestions for self-learning strategies and learning links with peers.

This paper builds on researcher observations as a developing teacher in a fifth grade English class at a primary school in Beijing. Language tests commonly feature in the students' classroom experience, by which teachers as researcher can evaluate the classroom performance and boost interactive participation. This paper aims to determine how effective current assessments strategies are. Structurally, this paper aims to determine the applicability of the findings of Olivier et al.(2019) in the Chinese primary school context. Oliver et al. (ad ibid) argued that teachers should observe students' levels of interest, self-efficacy and learning motivations to reflect on the effect of their teaching strategies and adjust them if required. Within the Chinese context, there has already been a push for more pedagogically constructivist teaching strategies while learning English (Luo et al., 2020). This paper evaluates the strength of assessment to achieve that goal and thereby further cultivate students' language proficiency.

2. The Importance of Testing and Evaluation

Teaching is the combination of theory and practice, and language learning evaluation is a fundamental part of pedagogy (Black & Wiliam, 2018). *Summative assessments* are a typical milestone experience for teachers' work to prepare their students for evaluation at the end of a study period or semester (Zydzianaite et al., 2020). The purposes of these assessments in language teaching are not only to assess the level of students' knowledge acquisition, but also the quality and success of teaching strategies. Students' experience as learners is discernible from these assessments, as language learning is optimized through dynamic intra-class interaction (Saka, 2021). Researchers have proven the value of summative assessments in curriculum development. Vasileiadou & Karadimitriou (2021) convincingly found that through evaluation, teachers are encouraged to review their teaching strategies, and understand the learning process and problem areas from students' perspectives. By this process, teachers can feedback to students how to improve their learning methods, thereby building an iterative relationship between assessments, teachers, and students. From assessments, students also receive a numerical score to represent their study performance, which can give them a sense of pride and accelerate their interest and self-confidence in learning English.

Language learning, though, is an individual process for each student (Cerda et al., 2019). Optimized assessments help individual students identify where they need to strengthen their learning. Yet when scores are published publicly, as is common practice in Chinese primary schools, students with low grades may feel demoralized. This has the potential to negatively impact the value of assessments. The ultimate purpose of assessments should be to encourage all students, regardless of their current level, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, so they can refine their learning accordingly.

3. Principles of Testing and Evaluation

Classroom teaching evaluation should be systematic, instructive and feasible (De Wilde et al., 2020). These are highly applicable to the structural teaching of English, which requires students to develop and synthesize listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Yet different learning requirements exist for primary school students at different ages and development stages. Therefore, Ali (2021) convincingly argued that teachers should combine characteristics of students' age groups and make an objective evaluation according to students' performance in class. The Researcher's view is that teachers would also benefit from a teaching evaluation form, which can be used to document students' ongoing performance. With it, teachers can track students' progress as it happens and generate a developmental view of students' learning and shortcomings. It can be used to chart the course of students' next steps.

For example, in the common practice of spelling words in fifth grade primary school English classes in Beijing, teachers can reach the feasibility recommended by De Wilde et al. (2020) by focusing only on the correct spelling. If students pronounce words

incorrectly, teachers can make a note and focus on that at another time. This systematizes learning objectives for students and provides a more structural framework for primary school teachers to have material rewards for good work to stimulate students' learning interest as well as verbal praise. This has already been recommended by Liao et al. (2018), who argues in favor of systematized, comprehensive evaluation criteria. Separate issues, for Liao et al. (ad ibid), should be dealt with separately and not holistically. Teachers should adopt multiple, dynamic evaluation methods to build a bridge between teaching and learning and give opportunities for students to peer-evaluate one another. Classroom teaching evaluation should be combined with the teaching content itself to create an efficient and iterative relationship between learning and assessing learning (Shepard et al., 2018).

If every class has a uniform evaluation methodology, such as teaching and giving stars or smiley faces as well as giving numerical scores, students may demotivate and lose their sense of individuality as learners. Therefore, each teacher should design student evaluation forms for each student, in order to facilitate combining their learning journeys with the class content (Saloviita, 2020).

4. Correct Formative Evaluation promotes student development

A vital component of effective assessment strategies is *formative assessment*. Building a viable formative assessment framework in a primary school English classroom is an effective method to evaluate and improve the effect of English teaching strategies (Lee et al., 2020, Mohamadi, 2018; Yan et al., 2021). Formative assessment is a form of flexible in-class assessment by which teachers can guide students to correct problems in the learning process, motivate students' learning enthusiasm and cultivate students' habits of proactive learning.

Formative assessment has such a high degree of potential for facilitating and extending learning because it not only represents a means of evaluation but also forms a major part of the teaching processes within the classroom (Lucchiari et al., 2019). Formative assessments provide opportunities for on-the-spot correction and encouragement to students, thereby helping students to correct learning problems and improve academic performance. Teachers should develop assessment literacy to conduct formative assessment proficiently, and carefully observe the performance of each student. By focusing on pedagogical encouragement through formative assessment, teachers can highlight the advantages of each students' progress and work towards diverting their weaknesses into these areas (Fauth et al., 2018).

Another benefit of formative assessment is that it provides the opportunity for teachers to monitor and scaffold individual students' current levels of potential (Colognesi et al., 2020). Within this paradigm of individuality, teachers should also make sure that the evaluations taking place are objective and fair for all. When it is fair and realistic, it can meet the criteria (De Wilde et al., 2020) recommended, namely that it is *instructive*.

When assessments are realistic, they are useful and instructive for all students. Such evaluation facilitates students' healthy growth and lets students objectively and genuinely understand the problems and accomplishments of their studies (Guo & Yan, 2019).

In the formative assessment process, teachers should avoid directing all aspects of evaluation themselves, and maintaining a teacher-directed system of assessment. This is not in line with developments in our pedagogical understanding in recent years. Instead, teachers should build and maintain a collaborative evaluation environment, in which students play a leading role in assessing their learning. Studies have proven that this raises students' potential for success from formative assessment to higher levels, and should be adopted in modern curriculums. Indeed, Allal (2021) convincingly argues that if teachers do not build this collaborative evaluation environment, children's progress will actually be decelerated, and teaching quality will consequently suffer. Identifying the correct strategies for carrying out these new teaching standards is an ongoing challenge for teachers worldwide, and in the Researcher's view and from the Researcher experience as a developing educator in Beijing, especially in China. This is due to the fact that China's rapid growth has led to massive demand for high quality English tuition, and that to some extent, China is still catching up pedagogically. The Researcher's view is that teachers should constantly explore new pedagogical techniques for assessments to find out what works for individual students. Oral tests are the most viable foundation for this, as spoken communication most closely resembles how fifth-graders learn (Shi, 2018). Teachers should continue to utilize this method and improve it, combining evaluation processes with the teaching content itself.

5. Methods of testing and evaluation

When building evaluation procedures in primary school classrooms in China, teachers should adopt multiple evaluation methods that prioritize objective and individualized assessment. Teachers should also pay more attention to students' comprehensive ability to *apply* their knowledge, and their performance in the learning processes (Zhang et al., 2019). Optimized evaluation processes should examine both the results of assessments and the processes used to achieve them simultaneously, thereby unifying the entire learning process.

In contemporary typical evaluation process, however, teachers typically lead their students in tests many times during the time, often as regularly as once a month. This is in addition to mid-terms and end-of-semester evaluations (Özdemir et al., 2020). This is not matched, yet, by regularly occurring peer evaluation. This discrepancy should be rectified to allow students more involvement in their own learning journeys. Most current researchers agree that contemporary evaluation practice is still dominated by teachers in a top-down fashion, which in the Researcher's view inhibits the development of students themselves in both form and content (Poulton, 2020). Another negative effect of this is that it leaves students disassociated from the requirements of

curriculum standards: assessment is something that typically happens *to* students, rather than with them and for them (Lu et al., 2019). In short, students and teachers alike suffer from improper understanding of the meaning and specific operations of evaluation. This limits potential for students' interest in learning, evaluations are limited in value, and students' communicative and self-reflection abilities are often ignored.

5.1 Teachers' Oral Examination of Students

Teachers are therefore constrained by their misunderstanding that evaluations exist *only* according to the goals and requirements of teaching policy. The one-dimensional perception that students' strong numerical grades act as evidence of strong teaching practice is limiting.

5.2 Group and Peer Evaluation

Optimized evaluation strategies include peer evaluation. This builds on the benefits of cooperative learning, which researchers have proven accelerates acquisition of knowledge (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). When students divide into groups and evaluate one another, it has been proven that this helps with their confidence and communication abilities (Sampsel, 2013). In the Researcher view, this practice also allows students to develop their interest much more.

In the Beijing fifth grade primary school English class where the Researcher is developing as an educator, students do participate in this style of *learning*, yet peer evaluation strategies are not yet commonplace or ingrained (Zhu, 2022). For example, students are often informally assessed by the teacher, performing in English in front of a podium, singing, communicating with teachers and classmates, and playing English games. The group leader sometimes makes records, but it can go further (Liu & Ren, 2021). The generation of a form for students to use and peer-assess one another should become more standardized as a way for students to have more understanding about how they will be assessed.

The Researcher should plan is to group students broadly by their different current levels, so they can collaborate with likeminded students. Simultaneously, however, a balance should be maintained between groups so that communication and friendly competition between groups can be generated. A group leader can be chosen for a set of activities, who can also have responsibility of helping currently less able children in their group (Hung, 2018). The collaborative benefits of this are obvious, as groups share ideas and work together based on the teaching content. Each group can also fairly assess the other groups in an objective and friendly way.

By incorporating this form and style of peer learning and assessment into common evaluation strategies in the classroom, we can diversify the form of assessment taking place (Trent, 2020). Self-evaluation, peer and group evaluations and teachers' comments can synthesize to create a much clearer picture of what has been learned and

what remains to be improved. This diversification makes the holistic assessment much more viable (Lin & Reinders, 2019). For long-term teaching practice, teachers can share ideas with their colleagues in groups about the success of such diversified evaluation strategies, and the teachers can similarly collaborate to improve the learning and assessment environment in each classroom.

5.3 Student Self-Assessment

To facilitate this form of diversified evaluation strategy, the Researcher printed a form listing the learning objectives of each class or module and distributed them to students. Students were asked to conduct self-assessment according to various modules of the English class. So far, the Researcher believe this involvement of students in their learning journeys and the meeting of assessment criteria has led to increased enjoyment of class, and increased interest levels in English.

6. Problem-Solving Strategies

English curriculum standards in China require teachers to start from the basics and advocate practical cooperation and collaborative learning methods (You, 2019). For young children, there is an emphasis on developing communication abilities. This framework is designed to facilitate an evaluation environment in which numerical scores are not the only barometer of children's progress, but that takes into account children's social and emotional development during class and assessment as well (Rao & Chen, 2020). There is partial success so far, but it can go further. Below are the Researcher's views about how to achieve this.

6.1 Positive Incentives

The new curriculum standards, as a result of the 'Double reduction' policy in Chinese education, introduced in 2021, requires that learning processes for students are relaxed and pleasant (Li & Wei, 2022). Teachers are actively encouraged to guide students to find their own unique personalities and voices. Teachers should be careful about their students' psychological stability and, accordingly, not demand too much from students academically. To help students find this joy and psychological stability in their learning journeys, positive encouragement is a strategy teachers should use (Lin & Nguyen, 2021).

This encouragement needs to fall within the parameters of frequent numerical grading that still takes place in Chinese primary school English class and coexist alongside it. Here, teachers need to develop pedagogical and assessment literacy to make sure that children are not harmed psychologically by the pressures of numerical grading (Waters et al., 2021). Teachers need to develop their communication strategies, which can be verbal and non-verbal. Touching the children's head in a professional manner, and patting them on the shoulder to encourage them, should be encouraged alongside oral feedback.

For example, in any competitive processes of peer-learning and peer-evaluation, teachers should always prioritize positive incentives and not punish ‘negative’ points. Punishing misunderstanding can be psychologically damaging for students as learners and facilitate a defeatist mentality and rebelliousness. Teachers should utilize various forms of positive encouragement that are designed to make students feel comfortable and safe during their learning journeys (Bielak & Wiertelak, 2020).

To achieve this, students should be active participants in the whole evaluation process. In order to guide students’ holistic development, teachers should emphasize their successful acquisition of knowledge (Zein et al., 2020). Highlighting their accomplishments will offset any risk that comes from pointing out where they need to correct their learning. Teachers should play an ongoing role as observers and scaffolders, and organically integrate evaluations into the whole teaching process through formative assessment. The evaluation atmosphere should be open, accessible and understood by students, so that students may participate within it and direct their own learning more (Sinha, 2021). In the whole process, students should fully understand themselves and experience joy and increased confidence.

7. Recommendations for Teaching and Evaluation

7.1 Combination of Diversity and Flexibility

During tests, students should be given multiple sets of oral questions. By giving various questions during oral tests, students have the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in various conversations, and not feel overwhelmed when they struggle with one-dimensional questioning (Niemi & Niu, 2021). Tests should also be available to be taken again by students whenever they like. It is not uncommon for students to have a negative experience during the test, feeling overwhelmed, and yet the next day they may feel more rested and confident. Teachers should allow students to repeat the oral test in those circumstances. This will help to develop students’ confidence.

7.2 Connecting Evaluations with Teaching

Evaluation procedures should not be dissimilar from the conventional teaching practice. By aligning assessment procedures with teaching and learning activities, students will feel more comfortable and are less likely to be flustered during the test. This would inevitably affect their results (Yao et al., 2019).

5.3 Scores should not be shared publicly in ‘descending’ order

Recent policy changes due to the ‘Double Reduction’ policy advocate that students’ scores should not be used in school selection functions when children apply for further education. This is a step in the right direction but can go further: publishing lists of students’ scores has a negative effect on students’ motivations and can greatly harm children’s self-esteem during their learning journeys (Ying et al., 2018). Primary school teachers should avoid this practice completely while conducting English assessments.

8. Summary

Testing and evaluation practices are regular school activities. They take the form of unit tests, mid-term tests, and final /annual tests. The most valued form of assessment for fifth graders should be the oral component, because this supports their social and collaborative development the most.

To conclude, teachers in Chinese primary school English classes should diversify their evaluation strategies and involve children as much as possible in their evaluations. This can be achieved through collaborative group work, positive encouragement, self-assessment strategies and aligning the evaluation content to the teaching activities in class more. This will provide a comprehensive evaluation experience from which students can develop and take more control of their learning journeys. Simultaneously, the quality of both teaching and learning procedures taking place will improve. The positive effects of this style of teaching and learning indicate that the findings of Olivier et al. (2019), which emphasized teachers involving students much more in evaluation processes, are applicable to the field of English language learning in Chinese primary schools and form the future trend of English language learning in China.

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