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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the impact of simulation-based instruction (SBI) on the emerging English-speaking skills of kindergarten students in a government school in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This study explores how real-life scenarios simulated through games and role plays affect vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and fluency in children who are English as a second language in UAE early childhood classrooms. By utilizing Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Dewey's experiential learning theory, the study employs reflective debriefing and teacher-guided scaffolding to maximize language acquisition. Classroom observations, interviews, student artifacts, reflection journals from both students and researchers were the data collected. Results indicate that simulation-based learning enhances young learners' confidence, increased active participation, and communicative competence. SBI students were more willing to speak, pronunciation improved and there was greater fluency. These findings support previous literature which expresses that experiential learning environments are successful particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts such as the UAE. This study recommends extending the application of SBI to early childhood education and continues to call for the ongoing teacher training for SBI activities so that it can have maximum impact. Finally, research proves that the use of simulation as a core strategy on early English instruction creates well motivated students and who speak better.

Introduction

Simulation based instruction (SBI) has proven to be a very effective pedagogy, especially in multilingual and multicultural context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). SBI is an engaging and appropriate approach for the teaching of ECE where foundational communication skills are developing. The fact that the language of English is not the language used in the home for many young learners in the UAE, makes English language development of oral language particularly challenging (Alnaqbi & Yassin, 2021). Traditional, textbook driven methods of teaching usually fail to engage learners both in using the language spontaneously (Rehman & Mahmud, 2020).

Simulation based learning tends to be language instruction to immersive and experiential strategies. Children learn vocabulary, grammar, and fluency in such contexts by using them in role play, storytelling, and real-life scenarios. As Dewey's theory of experiential learning (1975) and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978) stipulate, SBI provides a foundation to students for meaning construction through social interaction and reflection (Tutticci et al., 2018). Such instructional methods, according to Angelini and García Carbonell (2019), improve

speaking performance, boost the learners' confidence and lift their motivation.

This study investigates how SBI, particularly through role play and thematic activities, helps to develop speaking skills in UAE kindergarten students. By examining classroom interaction and learner experiences, the study addresses the research questions: 1) How does simulation-based instruction support the development of English-speaking skills in early childhood learners in the UAE?, 2) What are the challenges in implementing simulation-based instruction?, and 3) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding simulation-based learning?

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundation of Simulation-Based Instructions

The general theoretical framework of Simulation Based Instruction (SBI) stems from socio-constructivist and experiential learning theories highlighting the vital role of active participation, social interaction, and contextualized setting for cognitive and linguistic development. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) approach whereby effective learning occurs only through activities that are beyond the current abilities of a learner but are conducted in collusion with a more capable peer or teacher. In simulation-based environments teachers and peers are necessary to scaffold language production by students providing students with the opportunity to perform communicative tasks that they may not be able to accomplish on their own.

Additionally, Dewey (1938) asserts that experiential learning is meaningful when a student experiences something similar to the real-world context. With SBI, children take in language input and output in imaginative and relevant contexts with their peers and teachers. This helps young learners learn linguistic structures via using them rather than mere memorization. Reflective debriefing is another key component in allowing learners to process their experiences, to use that experience as a basis for learning, and to reflect on what can be learned in order to improve, all the while receiving feedback from others. The reflective cycle is crucial in integrating knowledge and matching it with future communicative goals (Garden et al., 2015; Tutticci et al., 2018). In the case of English language learning, it increases metacognitive awareness and gives learners the chance to evaluate and improve their oral language strategies.

Simulation-Based Instruction in the UAE Early Childhood English Classrooms

Early childhood English classrooms use simulation by making familiar, everyday experiences like seeing the doctor, going to the grocery store, or participating in a family event, and then having children take a role within those structured play environments. In addition to these simulations being engaging, they serve as a perfect scaffold for incidental vocabulary acquisition, for development of syntax, and for pragmatic use of language.

Angelini and García-Carbonell (2019) indicated that students exposed to simulated d improved oral fluency, improved lexical retention, and better pronunciation because students are able to repetitively and purposefully use the language. This is particularly evident in SBI classrooms where students practice and engage in spontaneous

cycles of rehearsed and spontaneous dialogue. In role play, when students play the role of 'customer' or 'nurse', they are instructed to build sentences, ask the questions that need asking, and react as they would in real life communication.

Additionally, Arung et al. (2020) stated that the non-threatening and play based nature of simulation makes even the most reluctant speakers participate. In these settings, language anxiety is minimized, which is a common inhibitor for language production, and among young ELLs. Moreover, they cited increased learner motivation and classroom enthusiasm, which are necessary to maintain long term language development.

Students also attain communicative competence in the simulation through grammatical accuracy, sociolinguistic appropriateness, and discourse management. The competencies develop as children act out roles and context appropriate responses to the environment and begin to transfer classroom language to more that include everyday use. The implementation of simulation-based instruction in the UAE's multicultural and multilingual educational landscape is unique. English is usually the second or the third language that is being taught and the learners ordinarily belong to different linguistic backgrounds. Regarding this, simulation-based instruction is a practical solution to the language barriers problem, provide equal opportunity of language learning, and also consider different learning styles.

According to Alnaqbi and Yassin (2021), SBI promotes emergent early oral literacy development and develops communicative confidence among emergent bilinguals. The children expressed themselves fluently because of simulation and it motivated them to come out more and participate more in their classrooms. In addition, students were prompted to engage in higher order thinking skills such as prediction, negotiation of meaning, and reasoning through verbal interaction in problem solving situations.

Moreover, pedagogical innovation is a part of UAE education policies; with the Ministry of Education promoting 21st-century skills, bilingual education and inclusive learning environment. These goals are supported by SBI by integrating language learning with creativity, critical thinking, and social collaboration (Al-Qatawneh, 2021). SBI strategies have been adopted by teachers across various Emirates from dramatic play corners to structured communication games. There is promise in these practices in bridging gaps between the home language and school language environments.

Nonetheless, implementation challenges persist. Teachers, as reported by Al-Riyami & Dayananda (2022), know that SBI is of value, but few have been trained, do not have the time, or do not have the relevant resources to apply it. The flexibility of food labeling is further constrained by established curriculum constraints and standardized assessment models. The systemic issues underlying these problems demand not merely admission to professional development but systemic professional development programs and supportive policy to embed simulation in much more meaningful and effective ways in every day instruction. However, despite these limitations, classroom-based action research like the current study shows that SBI has the potential to change English language instruction in UAE ECE settings. When the learning of language is embedded in scenarios that are child-friendly and culturally appropriate, simulation fosters the authentic communication of learners and helps in the gradual transition to

English fluency.

Role of Teachers in Facilitating Simulated-Based Learning

In early childhood classrooms where students depend on guided interaction and emotional encouragement, teachers are central and multifaceted in the success of simulation-based instruction. When the teacher functions in a simulation, he is not just a supplier of knowledge, but a facilitator, and model, and a reflective guide. The simulation is effective because they can plan authentic scenarios, scaffold dialogue, and respond dynamically to learners' needs (Angelini & García Carbonell, 2019; Rehman & Mahmud, 2020).

Thoughtful orchestration of materials, space, and time is needed to make simulation activities effective. For example, prior to the simulation, they prepare thematic play areas (e.g., mini hospital or grocery shop), give vocabulary ideas, and provide them with the appropriate sentence structures. While engaged in the activity they take notice of the language being used and able to assess language, gently intervene to support correct usage and to encourage more verbal interaction.

Teachers, in addition, added to the capacity of co-actors of simulations, acting themselves into roles to maintain conversation, increase vocabulary exposure, and model fluency of speech (Bozdoğan, 2018). One, this method makes sure that there is rhythm to interaction and, two, that it helps to train the memory of young learners with such like proper phrasing and turn taking conventions.

In addition, the teacher's reflective practice is also important. After each session, educators should debrief with students about what they did, what language they used, and possibilities for improvement or extension in students' responses. It is consonant with the reflective cycle (Dewey, 1938) which generates metacognitive development and learning.

A common issue is, however, teacher confidence and readiness. According to Al-Riyami and Dayananda (2022), some educators are reluctant to use simulation because they have not been trained or are not familiar with how to manage unstructured play-based tasks. Therefore, teachers need to continue to develop professionally in simulation pedagogy, classroom management, and second language acquisition strategies in order to be able to integrate this approach. If they are trained and supported, teachers are crucial to turning simulations from mere play to language learning events which complement curricula and address the needs of the different student populations.

Methods

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative action research design to investigate how simulation-based instruction affects the development of English-speaking skills of kindergarten learners in a UAE government school. Research qualitative lets us explore lived sacrifice, room dynamics and contextual influences that cannot be fully

investigated by numeric data (Creswell, 2012). In this framework, action research was chosen because it is participatory and reflective, and the teacher-researcher designs, implements, and adapts instructional strategies in real time to meet observed needs (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The purpose of this research was not to test hypotheses but rather to produce rich insights at the context level regarding how young children respond to simulation-based instruction. The study aimed to capture how language behaviors, engagement, and speaking confidence can change over time through observation, reflection, and refinement of a lesson (or series of lessons).

Participants

Six Emirati kindergarten students aged 4 to 6 and two English language teachers at a government school in Sharjah were the participants of this study. The student participants were all enrolled in the same KG2 classroom, and all had Arabic as their mother tongue. All of the students were classified as not having special educational needs or diagnosed with language delays.

Purposive sampling was made of participants, utilizing linguistic diversity between participants in that class. To increase the validity of the data, the researcher included in the study students who have diverse levels of students' oral proficiency—ranging from students who are fluent in speaking English to those who hesitate or possess low vocabulary in speaking English. The identity of the children was protected by using pseudonyms (e.g., Sara, Mohammed, Hind). Furthermore, one assistant teacher and the researcher herself (also the classroom teacher) were involved in the implementation and documentation of simulation-based activities. Parents were also indirectly involved by providing informal feedback on changes they observed in children's speaking behaviors at home.

Data Collection Tools

The study used five qualitative data collection tools to document the process and outcomes of using simulation-based instruction.

Classroom Observations

Carried out at each locality of simulation session, oral English participation, Vocabulary usage, pronunciation and student interaction. Behavioral observation templates were used to note behaviors that correspond to speaking development (e.g., initiating speech, speaking in longer sentences, spontaneous English).

Student Artifacts

Audio recordings of students during simulation tasks, vocabulary word banks, labelled pictures, and dialogue sheets were student artifacts that gave visual and auditory evidence of oral language use.

Reflection Journals

The teacher-researcher maintained weekly journal reflections that consisted of their insights related to instructional decisions, progression of student learning, and challenges experienced during SBI implementation. This later helped inform the instruction plans.

Parent Feedback Form

Distributed half way and at the end of the study to parents of participating children, to inquire if they had noticed improvements in their child's English-speaking behavior at home.

Research Procedures

The experiment was conducted in the spring semester of 2024 over a six-week period. It was structured as a cycle of action research: planning, implementation, observation, reflection, and adaptation. In Week 1 (Baseline Assessment), each child was observed in a free-speaking activity using classroom materials. They were documented on their vocabulary range, pronunciation, sentence structure and their level of participation.

Four simulation themes were implemented in weeks 2 to 5 (Simulation-Based Lessons): visiting the doctor, shopping at the store, birthday party, and going to the zoo. The material for this was chosen to represent familiar and familiar experiences. Pre-teaching of key vocabulary, students led simulation tasks using props and debrief of the activity were conducted in each session. Abstract: Ongoing Assessment: After each session, observations notes, recordings, and student responses were collected. Reflection journals were written at the end of each week to determine what helped and what had to change.

For Weeks 6 to 8, students gathered for a culminating simulation in which they chose their roles and scenarios. This was an assessment and celebration of their speaking progress. All data were analyzed by the researcher for recurring patterns such as increased fluency, risk-taking, peer scaffolding, and vocabulary application, by using thematic analysis. Length, clarity and contextual use of verbal utterances were analyzed. Ethical standards were maintained through the study. Parents gave informed consent, and students were assured that participation was voluntary and non-evaluative. Language exploration remained safe and supportive for them in the classroom.

Results

Simulation-Based Instruction and the Development of English-Speaking Skills

The kindergarten participants developed English speaking skills significantly with the help of Simulation Based Instruction (SBI). The SCPL's role plays, conversation tasks and storytelling exercises gave students the chance to interact in real language situations, reinforcing their vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. Observations and speaking checklists showed that students had a hard time speaking at first because they had little exposure and were not confident. The problems identified in Shumin's (2002) pre-intervention diagnostic

assessments which reflected that second language learners must surpass knowledge of grammar to attain contextual communication skills, were all observed in the subject of the investigation.

Students improved gradually over the 6-week intervention. Two of them in particular did wonderfully, performing more fluently and finding simulation tasks more interesting. Based on their progress they realized that while play based and experiential simulations could alleviate anxiety, one of the biggest barriers to public speaking (Pradeep et al.,2020). Furthermore, in line Angelini and García-Carbonell's (2019) findings that simulations permit the use of total active and authentic language use, these learners gradually gained the ability to expand phrases more fluently and engage in peer conversations. This is in accordance with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development framework (Vygotsky, 1978), as participants, even those who at first had trouble, started to enjoy speaking tasks as they were supported by teacher modeling and scaffolding.

Challenges in Implementing Simulation-Based Instruction

In general, simulation was successful, however, teachers encountered some practical and pedagogical barriers to the full implementation. The most prominent challenge of time constraints was found from interviews with two teachers. Designing, preparing, and facilitating simulation activities are very consuming and need a lot of planning and resources as reiterated by Alnaqbi and Yassin (2021) on the weight of applying advanced strategies into tightened curricular structures.

The second is the absence of the technological tools and teacher training. According to Al-Qatawneh (2021), most UAE early years educators lack tools to facilitate immersive simulations especially in underprivileged schools. The teachers in the study also mentioned the difficulties in consistently engaging children through simulation and managing different ability levels in the same classroom. If not sufficient support, however, such simulations can lead to processes that are uneven to the point that only confident speakers profit from these simulations.

In addition, cultural and linguistic diversity was a unique challenge. Many of the students were multilingual, this at times rendered them unable to participate enthusiastically during English only activities. This is in line with the concerns raised by Al-Riyami and Dayananda (2022) regarding the need to adjust instructional strategies to the various linguistic contexts of UAE classrooms.

Teacher Perceptions of Simulation-Based Learning

Overall, teachers had favorable perceptions about SBI realizing that it could contribute to the increase of learners' participation, language application, and motivation. As evidenced through structured observations and checklists, teachers conceptualized simulation as a tool that makes abstract foreign language concepts tangible. In Danish et al. (2020), they also echoed similar stance; they stated that simulation is grounded in sociocultural theories of embodied cognition, with the core underpinning of learning from authentic interaction.

The reflective debriefing phase of each simulation was valued by the teachers. This enabled students to critically

think about their performance and gave them the chance to receive immediate feedback and set goals. According to Garden et al (2015) and Tutticci et al (2018) this process enhances metacognition and self-efficacy of learners through reflection.

While these benefits are present, the teachers stressed that they require additional professional development devoted to simulation pedagogy. Ghousseini (2017) and Snoek et al. (2010) stress, as it does, the importance of teacher preparation in establishing the effectiveness of experiential learning approaches. The educators in the study were enthusiastic about SBI, but they indicated that ongoing support in designing simulations and using reflective tools would help them to deliver it more effectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the effect of simulation-based instruction (SBI) on the English-speaking development of kindergarten learners in a UAE public school. The study found that the utilization of SBI improves children's speaking skills in early childhood, but its use is not problem free and needs focused attention. It was clear through classroom observations, teacher reflections, as well as student artifacts that SBI not only promotes vocabulary acquisition and oral fluency but also encourages learner motivation and participation in the classroom. Lastly, the views of the teachers incorporated showed the positive and the negatives aspects of this instructional approach. These findings are further discussed critically in this chapter, supported by previous research, and are close with recommendations for future practice and study.

A significant insight from the findings is the revolutionary use of simulation in the enhancement of learners' oral language production. In simulated, real-life contexts, e.g. a doctor's clinic, a grocery store, a zoo visit, students used English more spontaneously and confidently. Role-play experiences reminded them of the vocabulary, and they formed the sentences and used the most common conversational structures. This is in line with Angelini and García-Carbonell's (2019) claim that simulation-based learning enables children to go beyond passive acquisition and actively participate in communication. The internalization language forms is better when learners can practice functional English in low anxiety environments as opposed to rote memorization of language forms.

Students who were previously reluctant to speak were particularly increased in participation and risk taking. The imaginative context of the simulation provoked these learners to feel comfortable in learning rather than focusing on the linguistic accuracy of their speech since they were able to role play comfortably. According to Pradeep et al. (2020), it is important to develop a safe and engaging learning space in order to decrease the language anxiety and motivate the students to participate with the fear of failure. This claim is supported by the study, as students started speaking more often and more freely after repeated exposure to structured simulation tasks. In addition, this behavior change is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development, which states that children can perform language tasks just beyond their independent ability with teacher scaffolding.

The reflections of teachers during the intervention also support the argument that simulation provides authentic and meaningful opportunities for students to speak. Teachers observed that children engaging in simulations were

more likely to ask and answer questions in English and supposedly developed stronger listening and turn-taking skills. This aligns with Dewey's (1938) findings that learning that is real world and experience based allows for a greater cognitive engagement and longer retention of skills. Within the classroom, these simulations served as language catalysts that gave students a context for using English with purpose to explain and discuss their experiences in living situations, they themselves could relate to and envision.

Yet, as well as these benefits, the study also demonstrated both the advantages and disadvantages of implementing SBI within the early years setting. Regarding the applicability of simulations, teachers identified that learning impediment is time consuming in planning and preparing simulations. However, since the creation of props, visual materials, and a vocabulary scaffold were needed for each scenario, teachers felt stretched to include these items in an already full kindergarten schedule. Considering these concerns strongly resonates with the work by Alnaqbi and Yassin (2021), who note that although simulation is highly engaging, its success depends on having enough time, being able to allocate resources, and having the teachers ready.

Another issue that arose during the study was teacher confidence. Finally, although most teachers recognized the usefulness of SBI, several seemed hesitant to develop simulation tasks that were appropriate in terms of developmental expectations yet aligned with curriculum content expectations. According to Al-Riyami and Dayananda (2022), many early childhood educators in the UAE need targeted training and mentoring to implement experiential strategies such as simulation. This need was borne out by the teachers in this study who, when asked, needed to learn how to plan simulations, use reflective debriefing tools, and assess outcomes of oral language more effectively.

Furthermore, the linguistic diversity in UAE classrooms was a complexity that required more differentiated scaffolding. While some of these behaviors are naturally occurring as part of the language learning process, some students relied on such gestures or home language to retrieve English words when they stopped retrieving the English words with ease such that they ended up unevenly participating in simulation tasks. This is in line with the argument by Al-Hassaani and Qaid (2021) for culturally responsive language instruction that considers and accommodates learners' diverse language backgrounds.

While the listed challenges do remain, the teachers in the study upheld overwhelmingly positive views of SBI. Writing of its ability to create excitement in the classroom, to foster a sense of community, and cajole the most hesitant students to speak out, they praised it. However, role-play served not only as a means for developing linguistic competence, but also as an additional factor that promoted collaboration amongst peers and empathy. If the findings we have vindicated the approach put forward by these authors, it is consistent with Danish et al. (2020) description of simulation as a combination of cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of learning, which appears to be a particularly good fit for early childhood contexts.

The most powerful part of the reflective debriefing process after each simulation was in consolidating learning. The teachers pointed them to think about what they were doing and what they could say that may be different next time. This critical reflection increased students' metacognitive awareness of their use of language and prompted

them to self-monitor their language use. Tutticci et al. (2018) state that debriefing is critical in simulation-based learning as it links experience to insight and readies learners for future applications. This study showed how debriefing triggers effective recall of vocabulary and facilitates fluency in the following sessions.

Finally, this study shows that simulation-based instruction is a very effective pedagogical approach to develop English speaking skills in UAE kindergarten classrooms. It not only enhances language learning but also encourages interaction with others, critical thinking and motivation to learn. Yet, deploying this strategy entails systemic commitment, which means time, resources, and training of teachers. To obtain the full SBI potential to be used in K12 curriculum, the integration of simulation has to be formally embedded in early years curricula upon realistic guidelines and frameworks. Additionally, institutions should bolster professional development for ongoing teacher expertise in education with simulation and reflective teaching.

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