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"I'm Afraid to Ask the Teacher a Question": Young Learners' Voices in the Primary Classroom

Achu Charles Tante[1]

* Correspondence:
ctante2@yahoo.com
[1] Department of Curriculum Studies and Teaching, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon

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Abstract

This study sets as its purpose to explore Young Learners' (YLs) channels to voice their perspectives on English language classroom-based assessment, schooling, and school experiences. Qualitative research design was used to collect data through focus group interview from 42 participants drawn from English-medium primary schools. Their selection was by purposive sampling from 7 schools. Field notes were also employed to highlight salient points and corroborate participants' opinions. Findings indicate that pupils are afraid of answering a question in class wrongly; their peers give them this fear of being laughed and mocked. There is lack of solidarity amongst the pupils. They wish for a variety of assessment methods and techniques but parents seem to maintain a strong position in the children's lives so that they would not want to disappoint parents by not doing well in their assessments. Teachers' feedback does not seem to be transparent, even though pupils did not mention this in the group interviews. Pupils have many beliefs when attributing success and failure and some of these beliefs are superstitious, and they go to school for instrumental as well as for reasons of knowledge acquisition.

Keywords: classroom-based assessment, epistemological voice, ontological voice, pupil perceptions, pupil voice, practical voice, school and schooling

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1. Introduction

The continuous search for better, effective, and efficient developments in schooling plus education over the decades, has led to various constructions of the teaching, learning, and assessment process. Education is now considered more than just schooling, involving the school curriculum but also the hidden curriculum (Fielding, 2001; Tong & Adamson, 2015). In like manner too, 'space' is being created to engage learners unlike before when they for the most part, had no avenue to 'voice' their views, opinions, and perspectives (Fielding, 2001; Fine et al., 2007). Different modes of pupil or student voice could be considered and Batchelor (2006) asserts that these may be viewed as three constituent elements: an epistemological voice, or a voice for knowing; a practical voice, or a voice for doing; and an ontological voice, or a voice for being and moving forward (Batchelor, 2006).

Flutter (2007) argues that it has been difficult to trace the origin of the 'pupil voice' (henceforth, 'pupil' or 'student' voice). However, in recent times it is used widely in education literature to mean strategies in which pupils are invited to discuss their views on school matters. Arnot, et al. (2004) are cited in Flutter (2007), that pupil voice can be seen as embedded within the broader principle of pupil participation, a term which involves strategies that enable pupils engage in decision-making within their schools. Listening and responding to what pupils say about their experiences as learners can be a useful tool in aiding teachers in investigating and improving their own practice. Pupil voice, then, may be a key catalyst for encouraging change by inspiring teachers explore and think about what happens in the classroom. What is important is being able to be prepared to see the familiar differently and to contemplate alternative approaches, roles, and practices which is the first step towards fundamental change in classrooms and schools (Rudduck & Flutter, 2003).

A catalyst in pupil or student voice movement has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989; Hargreaves, et al., 2016). The Convention states that children and young people should be given the right to express their opinions on matters affecting their lives. Looking at education, elements of pupil consultation, and pupil participation have been woven into official policy and guidance in some countries (Kerr et al., 2002).

Woodword et al. (2017, 151) cites Cook-Sather (2014) who argues that descriptors used for student voice in research and policy documentation, are often used interchangeably in research literature and policy documents to capture student voice such as, 'participation of students', 'involvement of students', 'listening to students', 'consulting with students', 'dialogue with students', 'researching with students', 'students' perceptions', 'students' perspectives', 'evaluation by students' and 'empowering of students.' Underlying all the descriptors is the picture of student engagement with peers, teachers, and school authorities on matters and issues that affect them in their school experiences (Fleming, 2015, p. 223- 224). The reason for the gradual shift from researching 'on' students to researching 'with' them (Fielding, 2001; Fine, et al., 2007; Fleming, 2015); therefore, is that each person's perspective on student or pupil voice is greatly influenced by the angle from which they are looking as exemplified in the section below.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pupil or Student Voice on School and Schooling

Yi (2014) carried an inquiry into students' perceptions of education, schooling, and qualities of effective teachers. The interviews showed a clear understanding on the part of students between school quality/teacher effectiveness and economic variables. When former students of 11th Grade class were interviewed how they would describe effective teachers, their responses indicated that they could collaborate and participate in policy making. In their own study, Woodwood, et al., (2017) examined the role of student voice in the evaluation of textbook quality. Among many things, the findings showed that textbooks can be rigorously and meaningfully evaluated by students.

Coleyshaw, et al. (2010), in a strand of longitudinal study of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) attempted to find out how Early Years Professionals (EYPs) used and respond to children's perspectives to inform their practice and improve the quality of their provision. It was found out that Early Year Professionals had integrated children's perspectives into their overall way of working with children and this was seen as part of their approach to co-constructing the learning environment and activities. Similar conclusions were made by McIntyre, et al., (2005) in a study involving six teachers (two each in English, Maths, and Science and their Year 8 classes at three secondary schools.

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Hargraves, et al. (2016) study drew on the active voices of 398 10-year-old Egyptian pupils about how they experienced learning and teaching during English lessons at school. Highlighted findings were that pupils had a rich capacity for critical reflection on learning and teaching; pupils advised teachers how to improve English learning during lesson as well as described the teacher who helps children learn best; pupils made suggestions and recommendations to teachers' pedagogy; pupils described their attitudes to the English language; and pupils described barriers to their learning (Hargraves, et al., 2016). Even in schooling, different perceptual frames may be adopted through which to investigate student or pupil voice.

2.2 Pupil or Student Voice on Assessment

Pupil voice has been covered in many aspects (Robinson & Fielding, 2007), but very little has been regarding classroom-based assessment in English as a second language (ESL) in a primary school context. However, the researcher is convinced that literature from other subject areas or levels could throw light on primary pupils' perceptions of how assessment impacts on their experiences of schooling more generally.

Pollard and Triggs (2000) reported the Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience project (PACE) in England and Wales. Their perspectives were sought on assessment of class work. It was found that in Key Stage 1 (Grade/Class 1), most children felt positive about their teachers looking at their work for they felt their work would be positively received and that this would please their teacher and earn teachers' approval. However, the eagerness with which children welcomed teachers' looking at their work in years 3 and 4 declined and this trend was continuous strongly in years 5 and 6. Over 40 % year 4 children still felt positive with the situation but it fell to 20% in year 5, and 13% in year 6. Pupils in some cases used descriptors to capture their concern about the teacher looking at their work: 'worried', 'nervous', 'scared', 'upset', 'guilty', ashamed', 'embarrassed', shaky' and 'doubtful' (p.134). These findings are similar to those of Bearne (2002), Doddington et al. (2001), and Silcock and Wyness (2000), Doddington and Flutter (2002), and Reay and William (1999).

Robinson (2014) reports the findings of Welcome Trust (2010) and Murphy and Kerr (2011) study that involved nearly 1000 pupils aged 10-12 in England and Wales and focused on pupils' perceptions of assessment in school science. It was found that children understood the purpose of science assessments but did not really enjoy doing the assessments or preparing for them. The children also liked the emphasis that was placed on the marks they received (Wellcome Trust, 2010).

In his study, Obeid (2017) sought the voices of both EFL teachers and learners regarding writing assessment. Findings showed several concerns which EFL teachers and students have with regards to the writing assessment in general, and to the obstacles EFL teachers face when teaching and assessing writing. Further, there was an indication of general resentments and strong feelings amongst the EFL students where the majority stressed that they are sometimes graded unfairly and writing assessment should take another, more holistic approach rather a narrow one.

The foregoing review carves an insight into the complexity of pupil voice or perspectives. The literature and empirical studies come with a variety of vicissitudes depending on one's focus. Pupil voice may be constructed as 'participation of students', 'involvement of students', 'listening to students', 'consulting with students', 'dialogue with students', 'researching with students', 'students' perceptions', 'students' perspectives', 'evaluation by students' and 'empowering of students.'

Two research questions guided the study:

1. What is the nature of Young learners' perspectives regarding assessment of English language?
2. What are Young learners' experiences of school and schooling?

3. Theoretical Frames

This study is delimited to classroom-based English language assessment and schooling experiences generally. Fleming (2015) explains that student voice is theorised within three frames. The first is student voice in the classroom, social constructionist theoretical frame, and the post structural theoretical frame. This study builds its framework on student voice in the classroom. This is within a sociocultural theoretical frame and it assumes learning as a social interaction and pedagogy as social constructivism. Social constructivism holds that student voice is the engaged and agentive voices of students in school settings. The sociocultural frame guides this study. For assessment, the study is framed from Bain (2010) who charts the development of a conceptual model for student involvement in assessment practice.

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It seeks to locate pedagogy that supports partnerships in assessment which leads to empowering learners in the process of autonomy and secondly, provide opportunities for student voice that engages the students' growing ability thinking critically. The model of critical pedagogy moves away from erstwhile dominant discourse of assessment that shows students as passive recipients.

4. Methodology

This study set for its purpose to provide a channel through which Young Learners may voice their perspectives with regard to English language classroom-based assessment, school, and schooling experiences.

4.1 Research Design

Qualitative design was used for this study, comprising focus group interviews, children's English language exercise books, and field notes.

4.2 Participants

Participants were selected from both government (5) and privately-owned (2) schools (Table 1). Participants were from Class 4 to Class 6 and formed seven groups for the focus group interview. Except for Group 2 where there was no gender balance (2 boys and four girls), the rest of the groups were three girls and three boys. There are 42 children, comprising 22 girls and 20 boys. Each interview group consisted of 6 children, which is within the limit that Dockrell, Lewis, and Lindsay (2000) suggest.

Table 1. Background information on the pupil-interviewees

Group	Class	Type of school	District	Composition of class	Ages
Group 1 [3 boys and 3 girls]	Class 4	State school	Buea	40 Girls and 25 Boys	Average age 4
Group 2 [2 boys and 4 girls]	Class 4	State school	Buea	51 Girls and 10 Boys	Average age 4
Group 3 [3boys and 3 girls]	Class 5	Private school	Buea	18 Girls and 13 Boys	Average age 5
Group 4 [3 boys and 3 girls]	Class 5	State school	Douala	54 Girls 15 Boys	Average age 5
Group 5 [3 boys and 3 girls]	Class 5	State school	Douala	47 Girls and 35 Boys	Average age 5
Group 6 [3 boys and 3 girls]	Class 6	Mission school	Douala	45 Girls and 22 Boys	Average age 8
Group 7 [3 boys and 3 girls]	Class 6	State school	Bamenda	42 Girls and 14 Boys	Average age 8

4.3 Sampling

In all, there were 42 children in the sample from 3 towns (Buea, Bamenda, and Douala) all English-medium schools. Average ages of pupils were from 4 to 8. Selection of the children was done purposively by the class teacher following what the researcher had requested; two high achieving children, two average children, and two children at the lower end of attainment in class.

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4.4 Procedure

The researcher was the interviewer at all the schools, using an interview guide. An interview guide according to Patton (2002) lists the questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. The guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each focus group. The focus group interviews took place during lunch break in pupils' classroom and the teachers provided me with extra time to carry on until the end. In the classroom, participants were asked to sit around a table in the centre of which stood the recorder. The seating arrangement was also to encourage the participants to bring up new and different ideas. It also helped in probing particularly "risky" questions which for example had to do with their teachers. The seating arrangement was to give a sense of oneness and togetherness to the children, to take away any fear that was still creeping within them.

4.5 Administration

The participants were promised confidentiality not only as to their identity but also to their responses. They were assured that neither their teachers nor the school authorities be aware of their opinions. During the interview, no teacher or school authority ventured around the classroom. This boosted the confidence of some of the children who at first were afraid or shy of speaking. The interviewer did not begin the session by going straight to the questions but preferred something which would involve everybody by talking and usually that was a soap opera on television. Thereafter, they would be asked if they were ready to talk about their schooling. Further, permission was sought from them to use the recorder. The questions were semi-structured. Participants' English language exercise books were used to illustrate the idea of assessment methods. Probes took place with questions that were not included in the guide or that needed further explanation in order to pick up on things said by interviewees. The questions were phrased as similarly as possible (Holmes, 1992) and the questions followed the same order except when probing was useful. In brief, the interview guide sought to find answers to the following:

- Pupils' views about school and schooling,
- what they liked and disliked about school,
- preferred school subjects,
- their attitude to questions in the classroom,
- preferred mode of assessment,
- attribution of success/failure, and
- feedback from teacher.

4.6 Data Analysis

The data **was** analyzed using inductive approach (Hargreaves, et al., 2016) in which the interview was content analyzed, trying not to impose categories, and descriptors for participants' responses but instead attempted to interpret and indicate the emerging themes. On the whole, dominant trends are high-lighted.

5. Findings and Discussion

Participants' opinions were embedded in their comments. Data were analysed qualitatively and some direct quotes were also used to substantiate the findings. Some of the quotes, though understandable, are not in Standard English; however, it was decided to leave quotes which do not obstruct meaning in the original form. I have put explanations or glosses have been put on some of the children's words in brackets, using italics.

Research question 1: What is the nature of Young Learners' perspectives regarding assessment of English language?

To provide an answer, a number of questions were asked participants in order to elicit responses.

1. How pupils feel when they answer the teacher's question in class correctly.

The pupil-interviewees had many things to say about this question. Some of the pupils were just happy for happiness' sake but others had a reason for being happy.

- Yes, I am very happy when I answer a question in class correctly (Group 1)

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- Yes, because it means I stand a chance of passing *[succeeding]* in the exams (Group 1)
- Very happy, feel proud of myself (Group 2)
- I feel very happy, I feel proud of myself (Group 2)
- I'm happy because I can say I understood what they asked (Group 3)
- Happy, good (Group 4)
- I feel fine (Group 4)

Pupils are excited when they answer the teacher's question in class correctly for many reasons. But as seen in question 6 below, the bond with their peers is shaky when it comes to showing solidarity when a pupil needs it.

- Very happy because I've shown the teacher that I've caught something of what he's teaching (Group 5)
- I am happy because I read and I understood what I've read (Group 6)
- I'm happy because I've tried and answered the question correctly (Group 7)

Of course, not all questions are assessment questions and success in answering a single question cannot validly make up an assessment but the question was posed it was interesting to get the children's perspective on answering a question correctly in class.

2. How pupils feel when they answer a question in class wrongly.

They are afraid of their peers more than anybody else apparently. Some of the responses follow:

- I'm very sad because the class will laugh at me (Group2).
- I feel angry (Group 3)
- Because my friends are going to laugh at me (Group 4).
- I feel bad when I answer a question wrongly, I feel ashamed (Group 5).
- Sadly, sadly and angry, annoyed and very badly (Group 5).
- Sad, sad because I'll be ashamed (Group 6).
- I feel very bad, I'm not happy, I'm very sad (Group 7).

Then, some of the pupils were probed why they felt angry/terrible when they did not answer a question correctly in class. Some of them said:

- Because when I was reading I was not taking note of the points (Group 1)
- I feel terrible because what I have learnt did not actually come up (Group 4)
- Because when the teacher was teaching I was not attentive (Group 5)
- Because my friends always laugh at me (Group 6)

3. Reasons pupils don't like to fail in exams or tests.

The next line of questioning concerned the issue of failing and trying to give a reason. All those in Group 3 (private school) said they would not want to fail but gave no reason. In other groups, there were different responses. One reason the other pupils did not wish to fail was because of their parents. This shows that parents too are very influential as long as assessment is concerned.

- I will not like to fail because my parents will be annoyed (Group 1)
- I don't like failing because my friends will be sad; nobody likes to fail because everybody wants to be promoted to the next class; I would not want to fail because my father would have wasted his money so I would not want to repeat the same class (Group 2)

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- I don't like to fail because I want to go to secondary school, I don't want to fail because it's not good for me, I don't want to fail because my parents will be angry and will not let me to go to school again (Group 4)
- No because I will not want my parents to be sad and his friends to mock me, because my parents will be so angry (Group 5)
- I will not like to fail because I will not like to disgrace my parents, I don't want to waste my father's money (Group 6 mission school)

Since nobody had indicated a willingness to fail, the children were probed on why they wanted to be successful in assessment. Below are the answers:

- Because I want to make my mother happy (Group 2)
- Because I want to earn a good living tomorrow *[in future]*. (Group 3)
- Because I want to go to the next class (Group 4)
- Because I can be a big man (Group 5)
- Because I want to be a student *[go to secondary school]* (Group 6)
- Because I want to go to the next class (Group 7)

4. Ways pupils would like to be tested by their teachers (E.g. by writing, by drawing, by speaking).

This question was asked to see if the pupils knew the different methods of assessment, but more to find out methods used by teachers.

Below are some of their responses:

- Mine is by writing (Group 1)
- By writing, by reading (Group 1)
- By writing, by drawing, by reading (Group 2)
- Writing and speaking (Group 2)
- Filling in the blanks will not waste time (Group 3)
- Speaking and listening (Group 4)
- Writing for me is not hard (Group 5)
- For me writing is not too hard (Group 6)
- Filling the blanks is easy that is why I like it (Group 7)

The trend was for writing to be mentioned first before any other assessment method. It is possible that pupils are exposed to so few instances of oral assessment so that it does not readily feature in the children's schema on assessment.

A probing question was elicited which assessment format they preferred. In all, the pupils were shown examples of: multiple choice questions (MCQ), filling in blanks, composition writing, and completion. Multiple choice questions and gap filling were the most preferred formats amongst all of the pupil-interviewees. These may be due to the fact that these are the formats that they are most used to. Thus, the children are likely to be more proficient in accuracy but little fluency. From lesson observation, this seems to be a problem with the Young Learners' English language. Children are calling for more speaking and writing than what is going on. The children are not exposed to the two skills of listening and speaking especially, and some teachers themselves are poor models to the children as seen in class observation.

As part of the interview, the concept of teacher assessment feedback was explained using samples from their exercise books. For example,

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Interviewer: Now let's look at this (*shows them one sample of feedback the teacher has made*). When your teacher returns your books (*shows them what kind of feedback the teacher has made*) this is somebody's book and the teacher has marked and has written "Complete and correct your homework" and the person has 2/13.

They were asked if they would know the reason for such a score if the book was theirs. A few agreed, but when asked for explanation they merely mumbled. The same thing happened when the pupils were probed if they scored 2/13 whether they would know what to do in order to score 13/13. Except for one pupil-interviewee who tried to say something "You have to reason out before doing what they gave you to do" the rest did not have anything to say.

5. Why some pupils succeed and others fail.

It was important for this study to find out why according to the pupils some people succeed and others fail in classroom assessment. All the groups contributed diverse opinions and some were very interesting indeed. Because the reasons given by the pupils were very numerous, a list was created under various descriptive headings.

Success because of ability as a fixed attribute

- Because they lack concentration (Group 5)
- Because there are two things, the intelligent people and the dull people (Group 6)
- Some people pass because they usually understand and they know what they are writing (Group 7)

Those in the first category carry the belief that ability is a fixed attribute and little can be done about it. A pupil must fall on one side of the fence they hold.

Success or failure because of own efforts

The second category are those who succeed because of their own effort. The pupils who fail are those who do not put in enough effort for that purpose.

- Some people fail because they don't study very well (Group 1)
- Some people fail because their parents have made them angry, that is why they like to fail (Group 2)
- Because they did not do their assignment and even when the teacher tells them to do correction they don't like to do it (Group 4)
- People fail sometimes because when they go home, they go and give their assignments to people to do for them (Group 5)
- The ones who fail have trouble understanding, some people fail because they don't want to learn those who pass are those who understand the teacher (Group 6)
- Because they play a lot in school, they are very dull, they don't study at home, they don't obey the teacher (Group 7)

Holding both opinions

Another category of pupils holds both sides of the reasons given for passing or failing.

- Because they are clever, some don't pass because they are not clever, some pass because they study at home some don't pass because they don't study at home, some pass because they are attentive in class some don't pass because they are not attentive in class (Group 5)
- Some are playing in class and some are not understanding what the teacher is teaching, those who pass are intelligent and those who fail are dull, those who fail is because when they are teaching they are playing, because they don't study well those who don't study well fail (Group 7)

Others

- Because they cannot spell (Group 1)
- Because of their bad writing (Group 2)

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- Because of all the money that their mother has paid, so they don't want to fail *[private school]* (Group 3)
- Some people pass because they make "cartouche" *[cartouche is a Cameroonian slang term for a sort of aide-memoire smuggled into an exam/ during a test]* (Group 3)
- Some pass because they give bribe to the teacher (Group 3)
- Because they have been cursed (Group 6)

The last list categorised as 'Others' has reasons which cannot easily fit in with the rest. For example, some pupils believe that passing or failing depends on witchcraft. Children who see the world of assessment in this light believe that no good or bad occurrence may take place without the power of external forces. Reasons given by the children for pupils passing or failing are varied from the natural to the supernatural. Those who raised the point of supernatural powers were Class 6 pupils who were going to sit the end of course examination. It is possible that in their minds they are already preparing a reason if they do no succeed. This could be exacerbated by the fact that the teacher is seen as the sole judge of what is good or bad and the children themselves have no conception about themselves as able to judge their own work. Pupil labelling by the teacher makes the children lose face and there is no need for any effort, the children believe. Such children do not really bother with doing their utter most because they are already defeated.

6. Reasons for laughing at peers who get things wrong

While reason of shame from peers is the cause pupils dread failure, the researcher was interested also in finding out why children laughed at their classmates who had things wrong.

Below are some of the reasons:

- They are not attentive when the teacher is teaching (Group 1)
- I laugh at them because they don't want to learn; they are playing in class that's why I laugh at them (Group 1)
- Because they are not serious, I don't laugh at them but I correct them (Group 2)
- We laugh at them so they will go and check the work and do it well so that we'll not laugh at them (Group 3)

No pupil would want to fail in an assessment because that would mean exposing himself/herself to ridicule by peers.

- Because they don't study well and they are stubborn in class (Group 4)
- Because the time the teacher is teaching they are playing, when the teacher is teaching they are not attentive, they are not steady (Group 5)
- Because when we fail they will also laugh at us (Group 5)
- We laugh at them because they were not learning (Group 6)
- We laugh at them so they can try to do well and also laugh at us too (Group 7)

Two reasons come up why the children are laughing at those who get things wrong. The first reason is because these pupils do not take schooling seriously and are easily distracted from their study. The second reason is because they do not want to learn and thirdly it is a tit-for-tat affair that is laughing at peers because they will do the same thing to one. In other words, a kind of vengeance having one's own back on the pupils who laughed at her/him. Competition is seen as a good thing for motivation, but also it causes lack of solidarity, loss of self-esteem. Only a pupil in Group 2 shows signs of solidarity by opting to correct a peer.

7. Using "cartouche" to succeed or try to learn again

"Cartouche" is a Cameroonian slang term for aide-memoire smuggled into a room where closed book assessment is taking place. Except for one pupil-interviewee in Group 4, the rest talked of trying to learn again rather than attempting something wrong like copying to pass:

- Try to learn again than to copy (Group 2)

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- It is better I should fail and try again (Group 3)
- Copy and pass (Group 4)
- Try to learn again because it's good to learn on your own, it's better for you to try and learn and go and pass (Group 5)

It could be drawn from these responses that even though they abhor failing, these are pupils who would try again rather than copying. Moral rectitude and inspiration of school ethos marks their perspectives.

8. English language assessment: filling in the blanks and answering multiple-choice questions or trying to speak and write?

The children prefer speaking and writing English language rather than merely filling-in the blanks and multiple-choice questions in an assessment. Only one pupil-interviewee in Group 6 opted for filling-in the blanks as her first choice:

- To be filling in the blanks; to try and write so that you can learn faster (Group 6)

The others expressed different views.

- Speak and write on my own, I prefer writing on my own because it helps me to write better (Group 2)
- Try to speak on my own, to try to speak and write on my own (Group 4)
- Better we speak it on our own and write it on our own (Group 6).

The majority of pupils prefer assessment that enables them to do something with the language rather than selecting words only. However, there appears to be a contradiction in response number 4 above and number 8. This may suggest the pull towards speaking and the real practice in the classroom.

Research question 2: ***What are Young Learners' experiences of school and schooling?***

Same like the first research question, to provide answers participants' opinions were elicited through a number of statements and questions as presented below.

9. Tell me how you feel about school.

This question was meant to gather the general perspectives of pupils vis-à-vis school. All the pupils in all the school types had positive things to say about their feelings of school. In one private school in Buea, the interviewees all chorused that they liked school. In general, all the interviewees described their feelings about school as positive, as the quotations below illustrate:

- I feel very well in my school they teach very well (Group 1)
- I feel well (Group 2)
- I feel to come to school so that I can be with my friends (Group 3)
- I am happy because if I was in school I will not know all the things that I've learnt in school (Group 3)

Going to primary school is fun to these pupils.

- Fine (Group 4)
- Good, kind (Group 5)
- I feel good (Group 6)
- I feel happier at school than when I'm at home (Group 6)
- I feel very happy because my teacher teaches very well (Group 7)

In all the school types, there was a general welcoming attitude to school. The children know that school is a normal part of their lives. Also, they form new acquaintances and friendship grows from there.

10. Things that make you come to school.

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After expressing such a positive attitude with their feelings towards school, pupils were then asked to say things that make them attend school. Reasons have been categorised under two headings which they generally fall within:

Knowledge acquisition reasons

- I come to school to acquire knowledge (Group 1)
- To have knowledge and education (Group 2)
- To learn, to have knowledge, to have wisdom (Group 4)
- I come to school to learn and read (Group 6)
- I come to school to pass my exam (Group 6)

Pupils do not only come to school to meet friends perhaps but they know that they have to acquire knowledge.

Instrumental reasons

- I come to school so that tomorrow I'll become a big person (Group 3)
- I come to school so that tomorrow I'll be earning a living (Group 3)
- I come to school so that I'll not be an illiterate (Group 3)
- I want to be educated, I want to learn to read my books, I want to learn and become somebody tomorrow (Group 5)
- To learn, to have a better future, to be educated (Group 7)
- To learn and improve my future (Group 7)

11. One thing that you don't like about school.

The system in Cameroon is such that children are to be seen not heard so it was felt there was going to be a lot that these children were afraid of but had no way of making them known. They were asked to name one thing they did not like about school. The responses follow:

- I don't like it in school in the morning because they tell us to clear the school when places are dirty (Group 1)
- Sometimes when I come to school they used to beat me and I don't like the meal that they give us in school *(in private schools in Anglophone Cameroon children are provided with lunch at school)* (Group 3)
- I don't like coming to school because sometimes when I come to school I do things wrong but they used to beat me (Group 4)
- Sometimes when .... I used to come late to school they used to always beat me (Group 5)
- Sometimes I come to school the teacher beat me when I've done something correct but that they mark it wrong. (Group 6)

Most of the pupil-interviewees' strongest hatred for school was against corporal punishment, especially beating. It seems that the form of discipline in schools is by beating most of the time.

12. Tell me the subjects that you like most.

The researcher decided to ask the pupils their most preferred subjects in order to try and find out the place of English language. Out of the sample of 42, 21 had English language for their preferred subject, 18 took Mathematics, 1 chose Moral Education, 1 preferred History, and 1 chose French. In one private school (Group 3), all the pupil-interviewees gave English language as their preferred subject. The majority of the interviewees liked English language which means that if they are doing poorly in the subject then other reasons have to be the cause.

13. Tell me the subjects that you don't like.

For subjects that the pupils do not like, Mathematics comes with the highest number of 21, Nature Study 1, Civics 1, French 1, History 1, and Geography 1. 15 pupils did not give an answer to the question. The comment made by the

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pupils is that Mathematic is too difficult. Only 1 pupil (from Group 3) amongst all the interviewees said she disliked English. Upon probing she said:

- Because I find difficult words but then if I ask the word from my teacher he says he doesn't know and I go to the dictionary I look for the word I don't see, so that's why I hate English [*Every time I come across a difficult word I ask my teacher but he sends me to the dictionary. I look but do not find the word. That is the reason why I hate English]*.

Even though only one interviewee said she disliked English language, it is realised that the cause is the teacher not the pupil. This shows the influence that teachers could have over pupils' interest in a subject (see discussion of number 11 above).

5. Discussion

This research investigated the perspectives or voices of primary pupils regarding English language classroom-based assessment, school, and schooling experiences. The first research question was interested in finding out the nature of Young Learners' perspective of assessment in English language. A number of questions were asked participants in order to solicit responses to the research question.

The first question asked to know how pupils feel when they answered the teacher's question in class correctly. The overwhelming degree of elation upon answering the teacher's question in class correctly by the Young Learners is requisite information which the teacher must be aware of since such voices of learners may be used to motivate them or engage them in a positive way as shown in the study by Coleyshaw, et al. (2010), and Hargraves, et al. (2016) who conclude that encouraging students to voice their perspective could greatly improve learning of skills and a number or implications may be drawn for better practice. In the same way, the suggestion from this study is that if teachers listen to children's voices they would likely be aware of learners' readiness to learn. The opposite of the preceding question brings us to another perspective of the YLs. They are devastated when they do not answer a question in class correctly; they fell 'sad.' This is mostly to do with how their peers would treat them for answering a question wrongly in class. They are afraid of their peers more than anybody else. Apparently, lack of solidarity amongst the peers could be extrapolated here. Instead of trying to help a fellow pupil, peers are dying to have a good laugh over his/her inability to answer a question. The spirit of competitiveness seems to dominate amongst the pupils. From field notes, another thing that seems to encourage this kind of behaviour is the subtle treatment meted out on such pupils at times by the teacher because he/she is usually the first to ask the whole class to cast shame at the pupil.

The pupils display a lack of solidarity because of the way they are treated by peers when they fail in assessment activity. An imperceptible competition in the form of rivalry is a tit-for-a-tat. The fear of assessment outcome seems to be a universal phenomenon amongst learners; the older they become, they stronger the abhor classroom-based assessment and test. An example can be found in Pollard and Triggs (2000) study that in Key Stage 1 (Grade/Class 1), most children felt unequivocally positive about their teachers looking at their work as they felt their work would be positively received and this would please their teacher and earn their approval. However, the eagerness with which children welcomed teachers' looking at their work in years 3 and 4 declined and this trend was continuous strongly in years 5 and 6.

It was found out that pupils expressed similar feelings of uncertainty with the teacher going through their work. In the Polard and Triggs (2000) study pupils in some cases used one or more of the following descriptors to capture their concern about the teacher looking at their work: 'worried', 'nervous', 'scared', 'upset', 'guilty', ashamed', 'embarrassed', shaky' and 'doubtful' (p.134). Similarly, in the present research related feelings are expressed by the pupils but regarding their parents, in particular. It shows that parental support could be harnessed to school and schooling efforts.

A question wanted to know ways pupils would like to be tested by their teachers, such as by writing, by drawing, and by speaking. The trend for writing to be mentioned first merely reveals again that the pupils mainly think of assessment as being a written activity. Similar conclusions were reached in Egypt (Hargraves, et al., 2016) where many school teachers focused on written English skills than on English for communicative purposes. Interactive or active learning approaches were restricted and teachers used the 'one size fits all' approach, taking little account of pupils' individual needs, feelings, and backgrounds. The pupils advised teachers to make learners speak English as well as like the language.

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A suggestion from the present findings is that the assessment pupils are aware of is mainly pencil-and-paper. However, in another study, pupils expressed a dislike of traditional pen-and-paper, sitting at a desk approach to testing, and expressed a preference for more active and fun-type assessments such as presentations, investigations, research, group work, and project-based assignments (Wellcome Trust, 2010).

The assessment methods pupils loved are in line with Obeid's (2017) study. He sought the voices of both EFL teachers and learners regarding writing assessment. Students' perspective was that writing assessment should take another, more holistic approach rather than a narrow one. It may be concluded then that methods, formats, strategies and techniques of assessment matter in assessment activities. MCQs and gap-filling items are common findings but not necessarily the best strategies for assessing English as a Second Language (ESL). Assessment questioning leads to regurgitation, rote learning and recall in the main. The children are not helped to use their brains in solving problems of language. For example, field notes from lesson observation indicated that the teacher did not really ask thinking questions to make children apply their skills and knowledge or evaluate facts, instead, the questions were simply for recall, comprehension, no application, analysis, or synthesis.

Findings of this study suggest that pupils are disoriented when it comes to feedback. Little or no feedback is given even on items they are assessed on. Such feedback as there is tends to be a response to things that are 'wrong' and is couched in strongly negative terms as pupils' exercise books showed (for instance, foolish, very poor, poor, very bad). There is no consultation or explanation why the work is good or unsatisfactory. Teachers' feedback does not seem to be transparent; some pupils have problems with improving their learning and because they do not get a proper feedback to help them, they withdraw from class participation and become passive in class. Teachers do not seem aware of the potential of feedback as an assessment tool to improve learning.

Learners in another context have voiced opinions too indicating that understanding the requirements for assessment is very important to success. In a study of year 3 pupils, Doddington and Flutter (2002) found that the way testing was explained to pupils could make a profound difference to their confidence, for example in some schools the tests seemed to make children 'very conscious of what they did not do, rather than what they could do', while in other schools, pupils understood that they were given tests to help make progress in their learning.

Findings showed that the pupils perceive success because of ability as a fixed attribute; success or failure because of own efforts; holding both opinions, and a final category of 'Others' has reasons which cannot easily fit in with the rest. For example, some pupils believe that passing or failing depends on witchcraft. Children who see the world of assessment in this light believe that no good or bad occurrence may take place without the power of external forces. Some of the attributes to success mentioned in this study have also been found to be the case in other inquiries. On pupils' assessment of their work, 'effort' was most important by children in determining the reason why some children do better at school work than others, with ability and skill being of far less importance. Fluter and Rudduck (2004) also concluded that where pupils assessed their own work, effort, and time taken were generally foremost in their evaluations and their sense of pride and accomplishment were very clear. They also found that younger pupils, especially, thought that working hard was about being quiet, producing large quantities of work and completing work on time. In like manner, pressure on children at Key Stage 2 tended to be greater and the assessment process was much more overt than at Key Stage 1. Where schools had created a secure, non-threatening environment, Pollard and Triggs (2000) found that high attainers began to feel more confident and even exhilarated during the test period. This was not the case with other pupils who became demotivated and dysfunctional with the difficulty of the SATs.

The second research question asked to know what Young Learners' experiences of school and schooling were. Same like the first research question, to provide answers participants' opinions were elicited through a number of statements and questions. The study concluded that pupils love schooling and are happy to be in school. In all the school types, there was a general welcoming attitude to school. The children know that school is a normal part of their lives. Also, they form new acquaintances and friendship grows from there. The children are happy to go to school; they have a positive attitude, so that nobody needs to convince them or reason with them to attend school. This is encouraging because the corporal punishment they are likely to get does not reduce school attendance. There is a clear will to succeed. These children are highly motivated to come to school and want to do well for instrumental as well as for reasons of knowledge acquisition.

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As to things that reason why pupils come to school results indicate knowledge acquisition and instrumental reasons. For some, the aim was simply to 'become educated' with no particular goal mentioned beyond that. Others explicitly mentioned education as the path to a better future. The importance of motivation is stressed by the Laboratory for Student Success ((2005) that it is what stimulates and focuses actions. What is more, it is an internal state that may conceived as reason for doing things. Not only needs and thoughts, but emotions invariably contribute to motivation. A broad base of evidence has been developed that links personal motivation to positive learning outcomes.

This investigation had indications that four things pupils did not like about school which included punishment, poor performance on school work, method of pupil control, and means of displaying the stronger person in the teacher-pupil relationship, disempowering the children. With beating in school and in the classroom specifically, hardly any pupil would not be frightened. They are not encouraged to voice their opinions for fear of the unknown. The school may not necessarily be a reassuring environment and motivation to learn may be killed. Research has demonstrated the critical link in pupils' life in school to the teacher. In the study of Hargraves, et al. (2016), pupils advised teachers how to improve English language learning during lessons such as treating pupils nicely, being calm and humorous with the pupils, and made pupils like English. Talking about barriers to their learning, the pupils described teachers' shouting and physical violence, pupils blamed themselves and other pupils for hindering learning, large class sizes for hindering their learning and unfair treatment by the teacher for hindering their learning. In the Obeid's (2017) research, there was an indication of general resentments and strong feelings amongst the EFL students where the majority stressed that they are sometimes graded unfairly and writing assessment should take another, more holistic approach rather a narrow one.

Half of the sample chose English language as their best subject. The findings in a related study (Hargraves, et al., 2016) describe pupil attitudes to English language. Apart from pupils explaining why they were learning English they also described the two Englishes that they had to learn. In both contexts, the same thing applies but in the case of Cameroon there is no L1 used for instruction. The majority of participants are aware that mastery of the English language is central for academic, employment, and socio-cultural mobility.

6. Conclusion

This study attempted to catch glimpses of Young Leaner's voices concerning classroom-based assessment, schooling and school. From the findings and discussion then implications may be made on creating "space" for children in the English language classroom. The sociocultural theory may be drawn here since it posits efficient learning is through social interaction and pedagogy as constructivism (Fleming, 2015). The teacher would need to reflect on the huge impact that may be exerted on pupils at this age of language development and schooling. The teacher is a role model who should be guided by moral ethics thereby motivating children to like not only English language but above all school and schooling. Knowledge of pupil perspectives as concluded by Coleyshaw, et al. (2010), develops in the teacher an appropriate pedagogic approach.

The teacher must create an interesting classroom set-up in order to encourage the pupils who already like schooling to engage and contribute to their own learning. Self-withdrawal from school and classroom participation is very easy when erstwhile good feelings are not maintained. Pupil voice must be listened to in an open and frank relationship so that they may feel free to voice their concerns. Learner-centred approach which the curricular highlights may begin to be practiced in reality, education policy notwithstanding, only with a change in teacher and teaching approaches. Even though the divide between assessment of learning and assessment for learning may be blurred, teachers have to be aware that assessment is like a sword of Damocles over the heads of pupils the further they progress in school. Assessment and specifically tests or tasks accompanied by test procedures put pupils off as they progress in school. Pupils would feel part of the learning process if their views on assessment are considered rather than always perceived in fright.

To improve learning, it would be important for the teacher to know pupils' perspectives on assessment, methods, and procedures. Such knowledge would create a better understanding of things to emphasise, explain, and sequence in class. As much as possible classroom-based assessment needs to be inclusive by bringing in variety and procedures so that each pupil feels part of the process. It would also be important for teachers to relate feedback that is meaningful. Scores only do not help very much as scores and comments. There has to be consistency among the trio of score, grade, and comment. Education policy that supports teachers along would be beneficial.

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Awareness of pupil attribution of success could be used by the teacher in classroom when building confidence or challenging some of them. Knowing how each pupil views success would provide a map that the teacher could make use of, when necessary. The teacher has to be aware that joining the rest of the pupils in making a mockery of a pupil has devastating consequences regarding a pupil's ego and it would make a pupil not only withdraw from classroom participation but conjure superstition as a reason for poor performance. Teachers' attention should be drawn to the consequences of a pupil losing face in the classroom. In the case of Cameroon and similar contexts, short of supporting resources teachers may require Continual Professional Development (CPD) to improve on key elements regarding or supporting pupil voice. In Cameroon, the concept of pupil voice is generally not considered most of the time for a number of reasons. Some of them include inadequate training, overcrowded classroom, lack of teaching-learning materials, working condition of teachers, education policy, and cultural trappings.

Implementation of policy and curriculum is done principally by the classroom teacher but successful practice depends to a great degree on adequate training. In Cameroon like some other transitional countries, current concepts and practices are not within the cognition of early and primary school teachers. It means that they cannot practice what they do not know nor be able to describe its purpose. That apart, it is difficult listening to more seventy pupils in a classroom without any teaching assistant. The tendency is whole-class interaction and structural or multiple-choice assessment questions. Despite the situation, CPD may provide a way to teachers to upgrade both their knowledge and skill in the area of pupil voice. They would be trained specifically on the classroom frame that entails interaction and pedagogy. CPD would help in introducing the concept of pupil voice, train teachers in ways of monitoring it, and its practice. Teachers would understand better, for example, the underlying approaches to assessment as well as to distinguish the various approaches of assessment for learning.

Cultural trappings play a great part on how adults may perceive pupil voice. In contexts such as Cameroon, cultural practice is defined with exclusion to children's voices. They may be heard but they may not be listened to (O'Sullivan, 2004). In spite of the globalised trends, children are still kept in a corner of silence because the culture advocates good behaviour in the light of silence when an adult person is present and children's voices may be tolerated only if requested by the adult person. The findings of this study suggest that there is plenty to benefit from if the teacher monitors pupil voice for it is an effective approach to be in sync with the pupils at all the times. Listening to pupil voice is the cookbook how to prepare a delicious dish.

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