

The Significance of Formative Assessment for Promoting Students' Self-Regulation in English Learning Class in China

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Abstract: Formative assessment is of great importance for both teachers and students. It is significant for students to foster their initiative and enthusiasm in learning and for teachers to have a better idea of their students' performance. It is especially helpful for students to develop their ability of self-regulation, which is considered to be a major factor that leads to students' improved language competence in English language learning. With the debut of the National Standards for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Colleges and Universities (National Standards, NS) in China, applying formative assessment in English learning class appropriately should be the trend at present and in the future in China.

Key word: formative assessment, self-regulation, English learning

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I. BACKGROUND

Formative assessment was first brought about by American philosopher M. Scriven in 1967 when he talked about curriculum reform 1967. And it was the American educator Bloom who first applied formative assessment in teaching and educational practices.

Formative assessment refers to a set of activities carried out by teachers and students to collect information 'to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities' (Black and Wiliam 1998, 140)¹. The key idea of formative assessment is that the data and information collected can be used to foster student learning. Rather than focusing on what students have achieved, formative assessment, on the backdrop of sociocultural approaches, helps to identify learning gaps, scaffold new learning, anticipate future teaching steps, and promote students' self-regulation of learning (Andrade and Heritage 2018; Heritage, 2010; Clark, 2001).²

From its definition, we can easily find some features of formative assessment. Compared with summative assessment, formative assessment takes place in the process of teaching and learning and is an integral part of the process. All the data and information collected is for the purpose of improving teaching and facilitating learning. In a word, it is for the purpose of development. According to Biggs and Watkins, formative assessment helps students target their problems, find the solutions for their problems, improve their way of learning and better assess their their learning fruits.³

The common tools for formative assessment includes: interview, questionnaire, quiz and recording cards for their growth. Students in the process of assessment is not only the object of assessment but also its subject. Formative assessment have the features of process assessment, performance assessment and objective assessment.

Formative assessment could be very useful if it provides feedbacks both to teachers who consequently can adjust instruction, and to students, who in turn can improve their learning. As a result, formative assessment

¹Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 2(1), 5e31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695940123775>. Boekaerts, M., & Corno, L. (2005).

²Andrade, H. L. (2010). Students as the definitive source of formative assessment: Academic self-assessment and the self-regulation of learning. In H. L. Andrade, & G. J. Cizek (Eds.), *Handbook of formative assessment* (pp. 90e105). New York, NY: Routledge.

³J Biggs, D A Watkins. *Teaching the Chinese Lerner: Psychological and Pedagogical Perspective [M]*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong, 2001: 23-187.

is related to a change for better or improvement. The general positive association between formative assessment and student learning has been progressively demonstrated in several research studies focused on the best practices that teachers can use in the classroom.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Formative assessment is of great help for both teaching and learning. The different methods of formative assessment not only reinforce students' understanding to the knowledge they need to grasp, but also take regard to non-intellectual factors in learning. To be specific, formative assessment can reinforce students' willingness of participation and initiative in learning and the awareness of students' responsibility in self-check. It increases the opportunities for both teachers and students to have more communications and inspire each other. As a result, students' initiative and enthusiasm in learning will be greatly enhanced and their ability of critical thinking on their performance and the spirit of team work and cooperation will be improved. All in all, formative assessment will promote students to actively pursue self-improvement and up-grade their abilities of cooperation and communication. It is also helpful for teachers to have a better idea of their students' performance and progress.

III. III. FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND SELF-REGULATION

The significance of formative assessment is especially true in its role of fostering students' self-regulation, which has been considered as a major factor that leads to the improved language competence in English language learning.⁴

Self-regulated learning is a self-directive learning process where learners transform mental abilities into academic skills by setting learning goals, and attempting to monitor, regulate and control their cognition, motivation and behaviour to reach their goals.⁵ Self-regulated learners bear several distinctive characteristics. Self-regulated learners are adaptive by engaging in self-regulative processes, including (a) setting learning goals, (b) adopting strategies to achieve goals, (c) managing resources, (d) extending efforts, (e) responding to feedback and (f) producing products.⁶ Self-regulated learners are positive in developing a deep interest in learning and demonstrating self-confidence in attaining goals. Self-regulated learners are also proactive in making efforts to learn based on self-awareness of and reflection on strengths and weakness.⁷

As pointed by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, formative assessment and feedback have the potential to help students become self-regulated learners.⁸ On the one hand, the way in which students self-regulate their learning to achieve learning growth parallels with the learning processes that are promoted in formative assessment activities.⁹ More specifically, self-regulation is manifested in learner active involvement in monitoring and regulating a number of learning processes, including setting learning goals, adopting strategies to achieve goals, managing resources, making efforts, responding to feedback, and producing products. On the other hand, formative assessment studies suggest that enhancing students' capacity to regulate their own learning should be considered to be the ultimate purpose of formative assessment.

One key aspect of employing formative assessment to support self-regulated learning is providing students with opportunities to decide on their learning goals, self-evaluate performance against their goals, and make improvement.¹⁰ Hawe and Dixon (2017) identified various formative assessment strategies and activities that

⁴ Oxford, R. L. (2011). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies*. Harlow: Pearson Longman.

⁵ Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(2), 64e70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2.

⁶ Boekaerts, M., & Corno, L. (2005). Self-regulation in the classroom: A perspective on assessment and intervention. *Applied Psychology*, 54(2), 199e231. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2005.00205.x>.

⁷ Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. *Theory Into Practice*, 41(2), 64e70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4102_2.

⁸ Nicol, D. (2007). E-assessment by design: Using multiple-choice tests to good effect. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 31(1), 53e64.

⁹ Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2009). Developing the theory of formative assessment. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 2(1), 5e31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09695940123775>.

¹⁰ Andrade, M. S., & Evans, N. W. (2012). *Principles and practices for response in second language writing: Developing self-regulated learners*. New York, NY:

promote self-regulation among students. These strategies include setting learning goals, providing exemplars, adopting activities that elicit evidence of learning, dialogical interaction, peer review, and feedback on the current understanding and task-related processes.¹¹ Clark's (2012) review of 199 empirical studies also shows that formative assessment engaged students in the learning process through clarifying and sharing learning goals, providing feedback and activating themselves as a resource for learning.¹² These studies support the utility of formative assessment in developing students' capacity to monitor and regulate their learning.

IV. CONCLUSION

As is suggested by the above study, formative assessment is especially helpful for students to foster initiative and enthusiasm in learning and for teachers to have a better idea of their students' performance and get inspiration in their teaching process. The significance of formative assessment especially lies in its role in promoting self-regulation for students, which is considered to be a major factor that leads to students' improved language competence in English language learning. At the beginning of 2008, the National Standards for Teaching Quality of Undergraduate Majors in Colleges and Universities (National Standards, NS) has just been put forward to further educational reform in China. One of its major goals is to improve the assessment system and highlight the role of formative assessment. Thus how to apply formative assessment in English learning class appropriately should be the trend at present and in the future in China.

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Routledge.

11 Hawe, E., & Dixon, H. (2017). Assessment for learning: A catalyst for student self-regulation. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 42(8), 1181e1192.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2016.1236360>.

12 Carless, D. (2011). *From testing to productive student learning: Implementing formative assessment in Confucian-heritage settings*. New York, NY: Routledge