

Formative Assessment in College English Teaching

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Abstract:

In China, academic evaluation is still dominated by traditional summative assessment which gives top priority to scores but ignores learning process, let alone teachers' professional development. Formative assessment as a new concept has attracted a wide attraction, while few researchers have focused on its influence on teachers' teaching. Therefore this paper aims at exploring the application and impact of formative assessment on college English teaching by adopting interview method and questionnaire method whose subject are college English teachers. The paper analyses the connection between formative assessment and teachers' self-efficacy from the perspective of becoming a good teacher, teaching motivation and teaching attitude. It is hoped that this paper may has some value in that it makes a tentative trial in promoting the formative assessment in English teaching by proving the positive impact of formative assessment on teachers' self-efficacy.

Key words: summative assessment; formative assessment; English teaching

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Due to the globalization and economic development, English has gained its importance increasingly day by day, while China's English teaching is still time-consuming and low-efficient. Most students' knowledge accumulation and skill upgrading are still relatively poor, and higher investment is in exchange for lower teaching efficiency. From another perspective, under the background of test-oriented system, teachers easily lose their professional identity, self-efficacy and the sense of professional fulfillment. What's more, in the context of Internet plus, teachers are no longer the masters of students in terms of learning but become researchers, promoters and partners. It's clear that the summative assessment is no longer appropriate. Therefore, to promote both English learning and teaching, formative assessment should play a pivotal role.

1.2 The Significance of the Study

Up to now, many researches have focused on the developmental history and theoretical foundation of formative assessment. However, the majority of the researchers primarily poured attention into the impact of formative assessment on students' learning rather than teachers' teaching. In general, the limitations of these studies can be concluded as following: firstly, the research perspective should be innovated; secondly, the effectiveness of conclusions of these studies are uncertain; thirdly, how to completely enforce formative assessment in daily education is not clear. This paper aims to further explore the insufficient application of formative assessment in English teaching on the part of English teachers, hoping this tentative trial will make some contribution to the prevalence of formative assessment.

1.3 Research Questions and Methods

The present thesis intends to investigate the following questions: 1. what are the effects and problems in the practice of formative assessment on English teaching? 2. whether there is a connection between formative assessment and teachers' teaching attitudes, teaching motivation and teaching effectiveness? 3. What are the possible solutions to these obstacles? The paper tries to prove that when school takes formative assessment, teacher's self-efficacy, including his or her professional motivation and teaching attitudes, will be enhanced greatly.

The author of this paper takes a qualitative method, that is interview and a quantitative method, questionnaire. In the Interview, two semi-structured interviews of two college English teachers are carried out. By questionnaire, the author plans to target at college English teachers to have a comprehensive understanding about their opinions of formative assessment.

1.4 Structure of the Study

The essay can be divided into five parts.

Part one is the introduction, mainly talking about the research background, the research

significance and research questions and methods.

Part two is the exploration of formative assessment.

Part three carries out the research procedure, including research questions, research subjects, research method and data collection.

Part four contains results and discussion.

Part five is the conclusion.

2. An Overview of Formative Assessment

2.1 The Definition of Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a process that consists of four main aspects: identifying the gap in students' understanding; educators give students timely feedback; students' positive involvement in evaluating their studying results; the use of learning progressions. Formative assessment takes place during the learning process, which mainly adopts a number of ways to access student's learning results, learning potential and discipline level in a comprehensive and authentic way. Its merits can be summarized as following: the diversification of the assessment's content, the diversification of the assessment's form, diversification of the participants of the assessment, and diversification of the assessment's criterion---more emphasis is put on the personalized development.

2.2 The Developmental History of Formative Assessment in the West

In the West, the research of formative assessment began with the publication of *Methodology of Assessment* written by M. Scriven in 1967. Actually the term "formative evaluation" was first coined by the American scholar Bloom. It was not until the end of the 20th century, some scholars have paid attention to the evaluation, and based on several large-scale literature review, the development and benefits of formative assessment gradually gained recognition and attention. In 1998, Black and William published an article entitled *Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment*, which brought more attention to the role of formative evaluation in teaching. The biggest driver of the development of formative evaluation comes from the Evaluation Reform Group, a research organization set up in the UK, which has guided the UK in its four regional areas.

2.3 The Developmental History of Formative Assessment in China

In China, it was until the Reform and Opening-up policy was adopted that assessment was returned to its right track. The formative evaluation of the West has slowly evolved into "process evaluation" in China. Process evaluation refers to the assessment of students that is no longer only determined by the final grade, but it also includes the attendance rate and the usual homework score. The proportion of these three parts in the final grade is slightly different due to the school's

regulations, but overall, process evaluation is still a certain universality in China's major universities. This process evaluation can be regarded as one of the forms of transition to ideal formative evaluation in China. In 2001, a new curriculum system was adopted and implemented in China, and since then, teachers and educators have had a deeper understanding towards student assessment.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

2.4.1 The Theory of Self-efficacy

Albert Bandura proposed the theory of self-efficacy in 1977 from the point of view of social learning to explain the causes of motivation in special situations. Self-efficacy is a subjective assessment of one's ability to accomplish a certain aspect of his or her job. The results of the assessment will have a direct impact on a person's behavioral motivation. Bandura believes that human behavior is influenced not only by behavioral outcomes, but also by expectations of self-behavioral abilities and behavioral outcomes formed through human cognition. The process of speculation and estimation is in fact a manifestation of self-efficacy. By distinguishing between performance expectations and outcome expectations, Bandura has created the concept of self-efficacy.

2.4.2 The Theory of Motivation

According to The Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychology, motivation is the psychological tendency or internal drive that stimulates and sustains the actions of the organism and directs the action toward a goal. Motivation is a state of mind in psychological phenomena. Motivation has following functions: the act of stimulating, stimulating the individual to produce a certain behavior; the function of maintaining and adjusting---so that the individual's behavior can maintain a certain period of time, and the individual can adjust the intensity and direction of the behavior.

2.4.3 The Theory of Attitude

The earliest definition of attitude was put forward by Spencer and Bain (1862). Attitude is a kind of preconceived idea and tendency that guides judgment and thinking to a certain direction, that is, psychological preparation. Influenced by behaviorism, Allport (1935) thought that attitude is a state of psychological and neural preparation, which is organized through experience and affects the individual's response to the situation. Krech (1948) thinks that attitude is a lasting organization of individual's motivation process, emotion process and perception process of some phenomena in the world they live in.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

The focus of the research is to investigate the influence of formative assessment on college English teaching.

The research questions are presented as follows:

1. How dose formative assessment contribute to becoming a good-teacher?
2. Will formative assessment impact teachers' teaching motivation?
3. Dose formative assessment have a negative or positive role in improving teachers' teaching attitudes?
4. What are the problems in the practice of formative assessment?

3.2 Research Subjects

Firstly, in order to assure the reliability and validity of the research, the author of this paper invites two college English teachers to be interviewed. Secondly, the author of this paper designed a questionnaire aimed at college English teachers. The participants are aged from 25 to 60 years old. The professional qualifications of these teachers are senior professional title, intermediate grade and junior grade.

3.3 Research Instruments

The quantitative data and qualitative data were collected from questionnaires and interviews of teachers.

Firstly, the quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire in April, 2020 to the college English teachers. It was designed to investigate the effect of formative assessment on teachers.

Secondly, the qualitative data were collected through two semi-structured interviews which aimed to get more detailed and practical information through Wechat. In order to assure the authenticity of the research, all the conversations of the interview would be proceeded in Mandarin.

3.4 Data Collection

There were two steps to collect data. For the first step, the questionnaires were distributed to college English teachers. The author entrusted teachers of two universities to hand out to their colleagues. Totally, 50 questionnaires were recycled and 48 were valid while 2 were ineffective.

The next step is to carry out the interviews of two teachers. To ensure the success of the interview, the author tried to choose the appropriate time, spent a few minutes to coordinate the relationship, obtained permission and gave participants freedom to speak. After the interview, the author stored all the conversation and elected valid part for the following discussion.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Influence of Formative Assessment on Teacher's Teaching

4.1.1 Formative Assessment and a Good-teacher

A good teacher should also be interesting and encouraging		
Attitude	Number of People	Percentage
Strongly disagree	1	2%
Disagree	1	2%
Average	0	0
Agree	16	33%
Strongly agree	30	63%

What is a good-teacher? The author thinks that a good-teacher is one who, in addition to possessing some common features such as an organized class plan, clear teaching difficulties and important points etc., can give adequate attention to learners' learning behavior. According to the data of the item 2 of the questionnaire, nearly 33% of the participants agreed with this, and 63% of the participants strongly agreed with this thought. During the interview, Participant A said

"I think a good teacher should know not only a lot of knowledge but also students' emotional needs. Good-teaching is not to possess dozens of certificates but rather have spiritual communication and interaction with students as well as teaching students the fundamental methods to learn "

The point here is that formative assessment gives access to becoming a good teacher for it can check students' learning by constant tests, give timely feedback about students' cognitive level, and then cultivates a good habit of study for students by interacting with students.

4.1.2 Formative Assessment and Teaching Motivation

By interview, when participant B was asked about her opinion of how formative assessment was related to teaching motivation, she answered:

"when I feel I can play an important role in students' development, and my class activities can arouse students' learning interest, I become somehow enthusiastic about my own job and can't wait carrying out my teaching content."

Therefore, if teachers develop a strong motivation by adopting formative assessment which features multiple and novel forms of teaching content, they are enthusiastic about their career, and willing to totally devote themselves to their job.

4.1.3 Formative Assessment and Teaching Attitudes

I prefer to have more freedom in designing teaching content		
Attitude	Number of People	Percentage
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Average	5	10%
Agree	18	37%
Strongly agree	25	53%

Attitude is a stable psychological tendency of an individual towards a specific object (person, idea, emotion or event, etc.).

The term 10 of the questionnaire explored the correlation between freedom in designing teaching content of teachers and positive teaching attitudes. As a result, data revealed that when teachers are given more freedom in designing teaching activities, they are more active

4.2 Potential Problems in the Implementation of Formative Assessment

By means of interviews and items 14 and 15 of questionnaire, the author summarized the obstacles to completion of formative assessment as follows:

Firstly, formative assessment heavily relies on some high-tech devices. For some elder teachers who are not good at computer knowledge, this is relatively difficult.

Secondly, formative assessment needs teachers to help each other. However, under the pressure of college competition and promotion, educational roles of teachers change from collaborators to competitors. What's worse, there is a lack of communication between teachers and school leaders in terms of revolutionizing assessment system.

Thirdly, formative assessment often requires a lot of time and energy. On the other hand, college teachers are often expected to achieve major scientific research findings by the society. It is difficult for teachers to strike a balance between completing teaching tasks and carrying out teaching research.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Major Findings

According to the analysis of all the qualitative data and quantitative data, the major findings of this study can be summed up as follows:

Firstly, formative assessment has a positive impact on becoming a good-teacher. Paying attention to students' learning behavior, which is one prominent feature of a good-teacher, requires that teachers insist on evaluating or revising teaching according to the learning effect and examining the students' cognitive status constantly. From this perspective, it is obvious that

formative assessment which puts emphasis on the learning process and is learner-centered is beneficial to become a good teacher.

Secondly, formative assessment can strengthen teacher's teaching motivation. Under the formative assessment, teacher becomes a guide, a facilitator, a counselor and a coach for learners so that teachers' importance in students' learning process has been increased drastically.

Thirdly, formative assessment exerts great influence over teachers' teaching attitudes. Thanks to the formative assessment system, students are no longer regarded as negative receivers of knowledge, and there are more interactions between students and teachers. Thereafter, teachers will find more meaning and fun in their career in the sense that students now are more enthusiastic about their own learning, which in turn results in aspiring attitude of teachers towards their own job.

Lastly, in terms of practicing the formative assessment, some teachers said that they had limited classroom time to carry out various forms of academic assessment, and after class, they did not have too much energy to analyse those complicated statistics. What's worse, formative assessment contains some subjective elements which may result in the disagreement between teachers and students.

5.2 Implications of the Study

Based on the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, the author of this paper provides the following implications to enhance the college English evaluation system.

Firstly, educational administrators should pay more attention to teaching achievement rather than achievement in research. The burdens put on the college teachers should be reduced so that they can feel more active in their teaching career. Secondly, school board should leave more space for teachers to decide the teaching methods as well as teaching content. Thirdly, teacher themselves should cultivate an awareness of lifetime study. To better grasp and practice the latest educational concepts, teachers should advance along the development of society.

5.3 Limitations

The current research has some limitations. Firstly, the participants in the research is in a small number. Only two college English teachers were interviewed and 50 questionnaire were collected. When participants were attending the experiment, they might aware such a process, and then make a more ideal but unauthentic choice. Secondly, the results of the interviews are interpreted by the author subjectively, though some psychological concepts are referred. Thirdly, the selected samples come from specific provinces and regions. Thus, the results can only represent the current situation in certain areas.

5.4 Future Research

Firstly, if possible, the future studies can combine the quantitative methods and qualitative approach to get a more comprehensive vision. The author recommends that future studies adopt field observation method over one or two semesters to complete the research.

Secondly, due to the limited time and energy, the author only investigates the influence from the perspective of teacher's self-efficacy, while future studies could also explore the connection between formative assessment and teacher identity.

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