

Original Paper

Formative Assessment is a Scaffold for ELs to Reach ZPD's

Second Layer: A Literature Review Study

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Abstract

Learning and teaching can't function well without assessing students' performance. More so, formative assessment is the most essential sort of evaluation in academic contexts. Teachers and students alike benefit from the dynamic nature of this evaluation as it brings students and English teachers closer together; instructors are better able to encourage and assist student learning. Both teachers and students benefit from this assessment process, which helps them better understand each other's strengths and flaws. Instructors can provide input to students based on their needs, similar to how a building is built. As a result, formative assessment appears to be a scaffold for ELs, assisting them when they encounter difficulties and preparing them to move to an optimum level of efficiency. The purpose of this critical review is to (i) explain formative assessment from major theoretical perspectives. (ii) Conceptualize formative assessment and Scaffolding. (iii) Reiterate my belief that formative assessment propels learners to the second layer of ZPD.

Keywords

formative assessment, scaffolding, ZPD, ELs

1. Introduction

Formative assessment allows instructors to track students' progress toward specified learning objectives and provide appropriate support where it is due (Guilbert, 1992; Wass et al., 2001). In general, evaluation keeps learners and we teachers on track with knowledge, motivates us to exhaust the taught themes, and gradually but steadily leads to internalization of the learning outcome for higher retention (Mathews, 2006a). As a result, I find it inseparable component of education, and believe if students wish to enhance their information absorption, assessments must be related with learning objectives

(Rolfe & McPherson, 1995; Cohen-Schotanus, 1999; Wass et al., 2001). More precisely, formative evaluation is widely used to analyze ELs' academic progress in order to enhance their learning points at the pace of the offered course (Wass et al., 2001; Rushton, 2005). The nature and dynamics of this formative or continuous review, I believe, convey crucial academic skills as well as abilities required in real-world contexts (Wolf, 2014). In this regard, Gottlieb (2016) becomes more attentive in addressing the value and necessity of formative evaluation, stating, "If assessment is reliable, valid, and fair (for ELs) from start to end, then it can serve as the bridge to educational equity" (p. 1). Most importantly, formative assessment, according to Umer et al. (2021), stimulates learners' intrinsic motivation to improve their language abilities more than summative testing.

I, however, saw many instructors encounter serious challenges employ assessments with their ELs because the students' field judged in the assessment process. ELs' with low self-confidence suffers from constant negative input from the instructors. Under such circumstances, formative assessment comes into play, serving as a go-between for stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students in order to maintain the desired proportion of learning outcomes (Wolf, 2014). This assessment system makes me better able to adjust my teaching techniques when I have access to accurate information about my students' current competency and expected growth through a well-designed formative assessment. This isn't merely a test for ELs but a tool to repair learners' deficiency and add suitable value to their existing knowledge (Bennett, 2011). In this process, I found my ELs to be autonomous and self-regulatory body for their learning uptake though it occasionally come as counter-productive (Geisler- Brenstein & Schmeck, 1996).

Despite considerable differences concerning its impact on learners' academic advancement, instructors mostly agree that formative evaluation helps to maintain student engagement and encourages them to assume greater responsibility for their own learning (Lea et al., 2003). As a result, pupils become more independent and capable of leading their own learning (Moser, 2017). So, in my observation, formative assessment is an efficient alternative for increasing learners' proximal development because it supports them in going through all phases of the development process. If ELs have done their studies, they can make a smooth transition from one level to the next.

2. Theoretical Perspectives

2.1 Socio-Cultural Theory

I regard formative assessment more of a learning method rather than testing because instructors can treat ELs in this system according to ELs' need. They connect with students, students communicate with other students, and sometimes instructors make one to one interaction hence the complete process make teachers and students on the same phase of learning. To highlight the role of interaction in learning theory, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the necessity of social interaction in learning as well as the importance of an instructor who is knowledgeable about all aspects of learning. He feels that this period of participation will improve young people's cognitive capacity. Similarly, constant involvement

between teachers and ELs both within and outside of the classroom is required for effective formative assessment. As a result, ELs move toward perfection step by step as they gain experience with teachers and their peers (Vispoel & Austin, 1995). In a formative assessment technique, students and instructors bargain for increased uptake of their learning in the classroom context, and they proceed to the next phase of their competency, which they investigate before making a final judgment on. As a result, formative assessment accounts for a range of minute processes that are related to the central concepts of SCT theory. When students are assessed formatively, they learn by identifying and controlling their own learning (Bernstein, 1996). So, regular assessment enhances student knowledge of their duties and allows them to reflect on their learning. Overall, students' participation and engagement with their instructors is viewed as extremely important because instructors' interactive abilities improve learning; in other words, teachers play an important role in formative assessment by creating an environment conducive to various types of multi-contextual interactions (Torrance & Pryor, 2001).

A hexagonal diagram is a visual representation of the continual formative assessment process in class talks, smaller group discussions, or individual interactions between teachers and students. It is essential to travel over a divergent–convergent continuum. Teachers and students can observe each other in person, online, or through evaluating students' work as they move between activities in the classroom (Barbara & Crossouard, 2008).

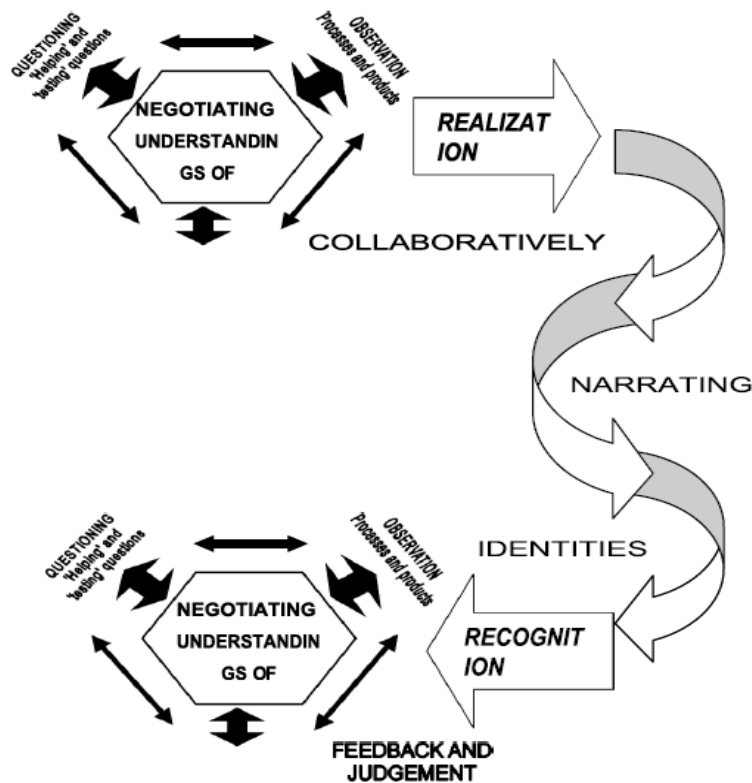


Figure 1. A Socio-cultural Model of Formative Assessment

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky (1978) highlights the necessity for “help in learning” as well as student limitations in ZPD model. Also, in formative assessment, ELs find support from their teachers and peers, and slowly they reach to an optimum level of proficiency. So, formative assessment is viewed as guidance for ELs to attain a particular competency level.

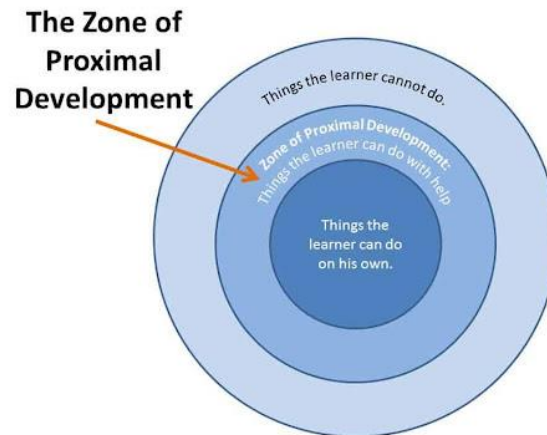


Figure 2. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

More than merely offering comments, formative assessment includes showing or leading students so that they refrain from repeating the same mistakes again and take the lead in their own development for extended periods of time. An analogy may be drawn between constant evaluation and the construction of a building. Each step serves as a brick that is stacked on top of one another to create a larger structure (Silver, 2011).

3. Conceptualizing Formative Assessments

3.1 Formative Assessment

This is a type of on-the-spot evaluation of ELs' performance that is normally undertaken in a stress-free context. It is based on the learning point for English language learners. Formative assessment is defined as work that a student completes outside of class throughout a course for which they receive feedback to help them better their learning, whether or not it is graded (Higgins et al., 2010). Formative assessments can be divided into four categories: temperature gauges, breakpoints, students directed assessments, and comprehensive assessments (Sulla, 2019).

3.2 Formative Assessment in Practice

According to Sadler (1989), the most difficult aspect of formative assessment is ensuring the quality requirements for putting this into practice. The comprehensiveness of the assignment or activities assigned to students during classroom discussion greatly influences the quality of ongoing assessment. This well-thought-out task design is not only significant for classroom performance; it also forecasts a learner's future growth. The components on the outside of the diagram-3 represent the roles of teachers

and learners during the assessment. The circle in the middle emphasizes the significance of making assessment criteria explicit, while the other links emphasize the relevance of students' learning. Teachers' participation in the process completes the formative assessment processes (Torrance & Pryor, 2001).

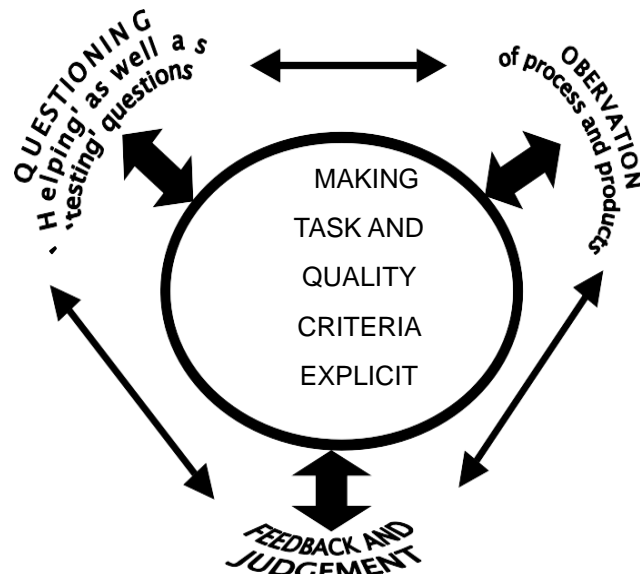


Figure 3. Formative Assessment in Practice

Source: Torrance & Pryor, 2001

In my opinion, this is important not only in the context of language learning, but it might also be applied to other disciplines. This could have a comparable impact on non-ELs teachers and pupils (Ecclestone, 2002; Knight & Yorke, 2003). Instead of focusing solely on competency, regular assessment is more likely to ensure learners' language absorption. Rather placing ELs in the next level, it aids them in taking their knowledge or language skills to the next level (MacLure, 2003).

3.3 Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a type of instructional support that instructors hope will help ELs study language or any other topic more effectively. This mentality is crucial for teachers to adopt in order to better equip ELs and guide them to the next level of their knowledge (Raymond, 2000). Vygotsky (1978) considers learning as an interactive social process in which teachers and students work together to learn and grow. With this in mind, formative assessment can also be considered as a linked unit that allows for interaction between teachers and students, as well as between students themselves, with the goal of providing or receiving feedback that will help them improve their learning (Goldstein, 1999). Scaffolding, in my opinion, is a building zone that needs collaboration between students and teachers. ELs must remember that they are now in a construction zone. Furthermore, teachers make certain that they only assist students for a brief time and progressively hand over control to ELs. As a result, scaffolding is employed proactively to help students advance to the next developmental stage.



Figure 4. Scaffolding with Intentionality and Reflection

These four common conditions are:

1. **Focus:** We are proactive in our approach, teaching toward a clearly defined and purposeful aim, based on recursive and ongoing assessment, as well as an understanding of the learner.
2. **Flexibility:** We have created scaffolds that are responsive and organic in nature, and they adapt in ideal time to fit the individual demands of our learners. Our scaffolds are tied to our emphasis and have an organic feel.
3. **Feedback:** Scaffolds that are both strong and expanding are present and expanding in an ongoing feedback loop that emphasizes and builds on students' thinking so that they can assess their progress and take the next, appropriate steps toward independence
4. **Responsibility:** It is our goal in every scaffolding scenario that we assign the learner as much accountability as feasible along the process, so that our students can eventually assume full responsibility for the knowledge they have received.

3.4 Types of Formative Assessment

The types of assessments are adopted from (Sulla, 2019)

3.5 Temperature Gauges

Assessing students in real time allows the teacher to gain a feel of where they are at in the process. While the teacher is giving a lesson, this is frequently the case. The teacher can alter the course content and tempos based on student responses, as well as detect any urgent student needs that have arisen. This includes adjective Check-in, three Finger check-in.

3.6 Breakpoints

When instruction comes to a conclusion (such as the completion of a class session or lesson), teachers might take a step back and rethink their lesson plans. The teacher can arrange instructional activities and whole-class courses based on the responses of the students in the class. This includes Exit Cards, One Sentence Summary, Do Now, Higher-Order Questioning, Quizzes.

3.7 Student Directed Assessments

Student self-evaluation that provides the teacher with insight into the students' perceived needs. In response to the student's response, the teacher can guide the student to the most appropriate resources, which may include small group or one-on-one training, websites, learning exercises, and how-to sheets. This includes Checklists, Self-Assessment on a Rubric, Peer Evaluation, and Student Journals.

3.8 Comprehensive Assessments

Individual skill and concept achievement data is collected in a systematic manner. Based on the responses of the students, the teacher can conduct tailored small-group education, re-teach fundamental ideas, and provide extra resources. This includes Rubrics, Tests, Facilitation Grids, Individual Conferences/Oral Interviews, Student Folders, Notebook/Portfolio Check.

4. Discussion: Formative Assessment Appears as a Scaffold for ELs

Vygotsky's ZPD model has three layers: the first is about ELs' current level, the second is about the level they can achieve with scaffold, and the last layer is beyond ELs' reach. In this discussion, I demonstrated how a formative assessment system can assist learners in progressing to the second layer of ZPD. Formative assessment, in my experience or observation, has proven to be more effective in students' academic performance due to its supportive nature. It only advances ELs to the next level when they are ready for it. Learning is not imposed on ELs but scaffolded once they are assessed through formative assessment.

Firstly, formative assessment naturally brings students and professors closer to discuss learning points, and it allows students to explain their confusions, and instructors to assist students improve knowledge (William, 2010). Some instructors also argue that while formative assessment may lack unifying elements, its impact on learner progress is decisive. Teachers around the world employ it differently but they do it with a concrete purpose. Also, instructors think that ELs gain and expand knowledge when they are assessed after a shorter period of time because this keeps them motivated (Bennett, 2011). ELs remain on track because they can see or measure the reward of being assessed through formative assessment. In fact, the effective incorporation of such dynamic assessment system caters for ELs' easier and increased learning outcome (Gitomer & Duschl, 2007).

Secondly, it helps to build up ELs' cognitive ability because it makes learning relevant and contextual to the students, and meaningful learning lasts for longer period of time (Bennett, 2010). It even necessitates that ELs acquire or digest knowledge deeply, which allows them to retain it for a longer amount of time (Schunk & Swartz, 1993). An efficient and cohesive design of regular assessment can showcase learners about where they are and what they should accomplish, as well as contribute to long-term retention of learners (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Regular evaluation requires a significant amount of time and effort from both teachers and students, and while learners enhance their abilities with time, learning becomes sustainable in the end (Vispoel & Austin, 1995). As a result, it can be observed that learning is a process rather than a product, and that learning can only occur through a

series of phases. Each phase prepares learners for the next, which ultimately leads to improved uptake (Lyon et al., 2001).

Thirdly, dynamics of this assessment enable teachers to be aware of each individual while offering instruction or feedback. They can take individual care in formative assessment so this can even benefit ELs with learning disabilities. It is hard for instructors to focus individual learners if they are assessed after longer period of time hence instructors potentially overlook special need for each of the learners (Wolf, 2003). Another notable advantage of regular evaluation is that it detects learners' deficiencies early on, making it easier for teachers to provide appropriate education. The approach works like medication, tracking the ailment and treating the ELs based on their merits (Wolf, 2007). As ELs receive individual support in formative assessment, it promotes self-motivation and confidence. It boosts their strength to take on additional risks for future learning, and they finally become effective in language and content learning (Black et al., 2002; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). To focus on the importance, Gottlieb (2016) considers formative assessment as a bridge to educational equity for all the ELs.

Fourthly, formative evaluation can serve as a guide and opens the door to the possibility of reciprocal learning. ELs learn from one another at their own pace and length, which is referred to as an auto scaffold (Black et al., 2003). This assessment fosters learner autonomy by gradually empowering ELs to take charge of their own learning (Black et al., 2006). Collaborative learning is widely highlighted in the 21st century education paradigm, and it is considered that collaboration helps learners attain their full potential. Continuous assessment attempts to bring learners together and position them in groups where they may help each other internalize the language and content of any session (Slavin et al., 2003).

Finally, continuous assessment makes learners autonomous and it functions to them as a self-steering process; they can accelerate, slow down, and finally change the process of learning. ELs start taking more responsibility once they are made ready through formative assessment (Boekaerts et al., 2005). Vermeer et al. (2001) discover that learners in this sort of assessment are persistent with their learning outcomes, that they try to alter their inequalities and manage to fill in the gaps, and that this occurs when the formative assessment method increases learners' metacognitive skills. Formative assessment never seeks just to measure ELs' language competency, but it is a continual process in which teachers must design hard tasks so that learners can find ground to progress, however ELs must be assisted if they meet any problems with their learning point (Popham, 2008). Teachers can utilize regular assessment to scaffold their instruction when teaching ELs or non-ELs since it tells them what to teach and allows them to take prompt action to assist learners in removing ambiguity or barriers to learning something new (Furtak, 2012). By encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own education, this assessment system encourages greater productivity (Moser, 2017).

5. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that formative assessment uniquely supports ELs, and puts teachers and students on the same lounge allowing instructors to better comprehend the degree of linguistic proficiency of their students. As a result, instructors can select what to teach their ELs based on need and situation. Also, formative evaluation is used to assist ELs on a helpful trip in their learning process rather than to grade them. If teachers discover a gap in an EL's ability, they fill it by instilling or transferring skills. It helps ELs stay consistent with their learning outcomes by analyzing their day-to-day performance and offering feedback based on their needs. Because formative assessment contextualizes learning for the learners, ELs stay constant when they are assessed. As a result, formative evaluation mediates or bridges the gap between ELs' current and expected levels, preparing them to progress. It significantly functions as a scaffold for learners, encouraging them to go to the optimum level of their learning stage.

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