



## The Practice of Formative Assessment in College English Teaching

Liu Yu<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences, Hohhot City, China

<sup>2</sup>Philippine Christian University Center for International Education, Manila City, the Philippines

Correspondence: 275458512@qq.com

**Abstract:** With the increasing demand for a higher level of college English teaching, a proper way of evaluation, which is a vital part for the whole process of teaching, is in great need. As an effective method of teaching evaluation, formative assessment has attract great concern among professors and scholars and is now extensively being applied to college English teaching, contributing to the effective implementation of college English teaching evaluation. Based on the present situation of college English teaching, this paper analyzes the challenges and problems that college English teaching is facing and tries to put forward some practical paths to integrate formative assessment into present college English teaching.

**Keywords:** Practice, Formative Assessment, College English Teaching

### Introduction

As an essential part for the whole process of teaching, assessment measures the teaching and learning efficiency. With the development and updating of educational theories, teaching is undergoing great changes. Thus, ways of assessments are in great needs of change correspondingly. The same situation applies to college English teaching. As a compulsory course in most colleges and universities in China, college English has attracted great concern for its roles and teaching effects in the college curriculum system. Basically, college English are introduced into universities with the purposes of cultivating students' basic language knowledge and abilities in cross-cultural communication. Guidelines on College English Teaching (2017) pointed out college foreign language education is an important part of higher education in China, and it is of great significance to promote the coordinated development of college students' knowledge, ability and comprehensive quality<sup>[1]</sup>. In order to meet the requirements specified by the guidelines, teaching objectives for college English should also be set based on the following three dimensions from an overall perspective: the aspect of knowledge, ability and emotion. However, it seems that the learning effects, especially for those non-top colleges and universities, are far to be satisfying. And among all those reasons contributing to the current situation, deficiency in constructing a valid way to evaluate students' performances is worthy of being mentioned. Traditionally speaking, students are evaluated based on attendance, class participation, result of quizzes and so on. Such evaluating results are reliable, to some extent, for a traditional teacher-dominant class. However, with the reform in college English teaching, students-centered class are massively applied, and the evaluation system should be shifted too. Thus, a proper utilization of assessment should be strictly employed in the whole process of learning and teaching, aiming to evaluate students' learning effectiveness from the three dimensions faithfully. And the formative assessment is believed to function well in this regard.

### Literature Review

The term "formative assessment" was firstly suggested around 1960s and it instantly aroused great discussion among scholars and experts about its definition and connotation. Bloom introduced formative assessment into the teaching and argued that the application formative assessment was to promote teaching to a higher level and to optimize learning contents based on the practical teaching situation<sup>[2]</sup>. Another influential overview on the definition of formative assessment is stated by Paul Black and Dylan William in their work *Assessment and classroom learning*, believing that the assessment can provide both teachers and students with help and feedback so as to improve teaching effect<sup>[3]</sup>. A scholar named Chen Yukun from China also expressed his perspective on it by conceptualizing formative assessment as an efficient way for teachers to reflect their teaching through the problems in the process of teaching<sup>[4]</sup>. Zhang Limei stated that the formative assessment should be carried out in the whole process of teaching to judge teaching and learning effects which can provide accurate information for further

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acceleration in teaching<sup>[5]</sup>. Based on the perceptions from all the scholars, the research department of formative evaluation publicized a revived version in the year of 2018 for the definition of formative assessment which has now been recognized as an authoritative one: formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become a self-directed learners<sup>[6]</sup>.

Studies on formative assessment continues to today since the term has been proposed in 1960s. Early studies were conducted on its definitions and connotations. Bloom combined formative assessment with teaching, forming some related theories and methodologies around 1970s<sup>[7]</sup>. In 1980s, the study focuses shifted to the differences between summative assessment and formative assessment, Bachman (1981), Long (1987) and Brown (1989) shared their opinions respectively. Around 1990s, more studies were carried out on the application of formative assessment in teaching. Among all the researchers, Weir's idea that teachers should use formative assessment in teaching so as to further improve teaching and students' learning is a typical one<sup>[8]</sup>. Since the 21<sup>st</sup> century, related studies became increasingly abundant, systematic and comprehensive. For example, McMillan's studies concentrated on the features of different forms of formative assessment from the angle of the teachers' and students' roles, the procedures and methods of formative assessment<sup>[9]</sup>.

Compared to the foreign studies, domestic ones are mostly confined to the correlation between the the formative assessment and teaching since the term has been introduced by Wan Yong in 1983. Related studies has become adequate from the year of 2000, especially after the College English Curriculum Requirements has been released in 2007. A great many studies focused on the application of formative assessment in college English teaching. Li Qinghua (2008) discussed the application of formative assessment in college English teaching based under the guideline of validity theory<sup>[10]</sup>; Cui Min argued that the application of formative assessment can stimulate students' autonomous learning abilities<sup>[11]</sup>; Cao Rongping put the research emphasis on the writing part of college English teaching and investigate the role that formative assessment played in the teaching process<sup>[12]</sup>. Zhang xiaohua studied the application of formative assessment to college English teaching with the concentration of reading, writing and translation<sup>[13]</sup>.

In summary, studies on the issue both from home and abroad have achieved a lot both in quality and quantity which has offered great insights for the future studies.

### **Problems of Current Evaluation System for College English Teaching**

Traditionally, College English teaching is designed with the sole objective of knowledge. Thus, classes are usually examination-directed ones. Hence, students are cultivated to be more focused on vocabulary, grammar, reading and so on. With the continuous change for the curriculum requirements and the reform for college English teaching, the objectives of ability and emotion have been introduced and students are all expected to be cultivated from different aspects. However, the traditional teaching model has been rooted deeply and current situation are far away from meeting the demands. Due to the sole teaching objective, the evaluation system is constructed in a relatively simple way. Usually, a mid-term and a final test will be the only measures to assess students' performances, which is known as summative assessment. Such evaluation system puts more emphasis on the final outcomes with the regardless of learning process which is actually more important. Consequently, students seldom concentrate on the learning skills and abilities under such teaching model, let alone for a higher lever to carry on the cross-cultural communication. As for the methods of the methods of evaluation, it is a teacher dominated one. Teachers are the only subject to offer evaluation which is contradicted with the different forms of evaluation in formative assessment as self-assessment, teacher assessment, peer assessment and parents assessment.

### **Change the Traditional Concept of Assessment**

In the practice of college English teaching, it is necessary to change the previous concept of English teaching evaluation and implement the formative assessment into current teaching system in order to improve the effectiveness of college English teaching and build a comprehensive college English teaching system. First of all, teachers need to involve formative assessment in the process of teaching, being aware of the teaching and learning value, effects, methods, which lays the theoretical foundation of formative assessment and forms a practical model, and promotes teaching to meet the requirements of the standards of college English set by the Ministry of Education. Secondly, the emphasis of the employment of formative assessment in college English teaching evaluation should be placed to solve the existing problems, to gap the bridge between the current teaching situation and the required one, to highlight the effects of daily teaching and learning. Finally, formative assessment should be used to promote the change of college students' English learning concept, to make them master the curriculum information more effectively and to promote their English learning ability.

### **Develop a multi-subject in the Formative Assessment System**

The implementation of formative assessment in college English teaching should carry out during the whole process of students' learning, and should be integrated into the whole English teaching system, meanwhile highlighting the significance of its application. First of all, according to the characteristics of formative assessment in college English teaching, it is necessary to

design the teaching plan on the basis of formative assessment in order to clarify the students' subjective assessment status. In addition, in college English practice, through the application of formative assessment, the value and nature of formative assessment should be permeated into the whole process so as to stimulate students' learning interests in college English. In order to make students adapt to the new evaluation model, teachers should also shift their teaching focus and teaching model to ensure the sustainable development of formative evaluation. For example, with the wide utilization of online courses, the blended teaching pattern emerged, promoting a new pattern of teaching and learning, which also accelerates the popularization of formative assessment, providing a new angle to monitor the whole process for students' learning. Through online APPs or software, Teachers' supervision would not be limited by space or time, pre-class previews, in-class performances and autonomous learning after class can all be evaluated. Teachers also benefit from the overall evaluation process. Based on the information gained from the evaluation, teachers reflect on and improve their class teaching so as to adapt to the evaluation model of student-centered formative teaching for college English. Besides, assessments can also be conducted in different approaches, apart from the traditional way in which teachers plays the critical role, students' self-assessment or mutual assessment among students should also be encouraged which would increase the reliability of assessment from a multi-dimensional perspective<sup>[14]</sup>.

### **Deepen the Integration of Formative Assessment into College English Teaching**

The application of formative assessment to the college English teaching needs to be further designated based on the teaching and learning needs with the practice reinforced. Factually, both teacher and students are all accustomed to the traditional way. Inevitably, the integration of formative assessment into college English teaching faces great difficulties and challenges. However, to improve college English teaching to a higher level, such changes needed to be made. And the integration should never be blended solely. The involvement should be made in each step of the teaching. Apart from the teaching objectives that has been mentioned above, teaching focus, teaching methods, teaching process and reflection should all be set or planned with the references of formative assessments. According to the characteristics of the formative assessment, the whole process of college English Teaching System should be carried out from the premises of multi-dimensional formative assessment system and multi-subjectivity formative assessment system and to give full play to the role of the system in college English teaching which would be of great significance in deepening the ingratiation to improve the quality of college English teaching and the effective implementation of college English teaching reform.

### **Conclusion**

The practical research on the integration of formative assessment into college English teaching is of great value. It not only changes the teaching mode and content of college English, but provides a new perspective to improve the effectiveness of teaching. Beside, it promotes college English teaching to a higher level in teaching which would meet the demand for current college English teaching. The new evaluation contents and ideas are integrated into the college English curriculum education system, thus promoting the innovative development of college English teaching. Therefore, in the practice of college English teaching, both teachers and students should attach great importance to the application of formative assessment from the following aspects: transforming the traditional concept of college English teaching evaluation to a comprehensive and systematic one, clarifying the subject of evaluation and constructing an all-round evaluation system instead of a simple one, and focusing on the integration of formative assessment into each step of teaching process to ensure the orderly use of formative assessment and to give full implementation of the effectiveness of assessment in college English teaching assessment.

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