

**FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AND ITS APPLICATION IN TEACHING ENGLISH
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE WITHIN FSES IN RUSSIA**

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This article is about formative assessment in teaching foreign languages. It briefly describes historical evolution of assessment methods and shows how formative assessment satisfies new requirements of educational standards adopted in Russia for TEFL.

Assessment is an inseparable part of teaching: everything that is taught sooner or later should be assessed. In teaching a foreign language assessment performs a special role due to a variety of its methods and forms. Historically this variety occurred as a result of development in theory of language acquisition and following changes in teaching methods which led to new approaches to assessment.

In the 1950s and 1960s, on the base of behaviorism, assessment involved discrete-point tests and translation exercises. Tests developers and teachers considered vocabulary and grammar as an important part of learning languages. In the 1970s and in the early 1980s integrative tests in the form of dictations and cloze tests became more popular. With the arrival of communicative language teaching assessment became more communicative too and included new forms, for example, task-based one and integrative tests [2]. Today there are different approaches to assessment in teaching a foreign language (TEFL).

Brown points out new trends in assessment construct [3]. They are: informal and formal, formative and summative, process and product. Informal assessment is an unplanned teaching action and following feedback to elicit students' performance, but not to record their results and judge about student's language skills. The major part of informal assessment is called formative assessment which captures how students are forming their competences and skills in order to help them in their learning. Thus, formative assessment is tracking the process of learning.

On the other hand, formal assessments have their particular purpose that is to assess what students have learned to do in terms of their skills and knowledge. Such assessments are undertaken regularly and limited in time. They are often summative since they assess students' achievements for a definite period of time (a lesson, unit, or a course) and tend to focus on the results of learning a language.

Another approach is to classify assessments according to their levels of formality. Brown suggests two opposing assessment processes: traditional and alternative ones [3]. The alternative assessment is continuous long-term, formative, criterion-referenced scored and oriented to process. It has untimed free-response format, contextualized communicative tasks and fosters intrinsic motivation. It supports students' open-ended, creative answers and interactive performance.

Two characteristics out of this list have become two directions in the modern teaching language assessment. They are formative and summative assessments.

Hughes believes that assessment is formative when teachers use it to check on the progress of their students, to see how far they have mastered what they should have learned, and then use this information to modify their plans. Summative assessment is undertaken at the end of the course (a semester, a term) to measure students' achievement [4].

The majority of teachers, language learners and their parents experienced summative assessment which means that they received their assessment after teaching and learning. However, today there are some reasons to pay attention to other methods of assessment. First of all, raising standards of learning is a priority in education systems of different countries. Federal State Education Standards (FSES) accepted in Russia also declares the need for programme evaluation with a purpose to improve teaching and learning [1]. However, in practice "a focus on standards and accountability that ignores the process of teaching and learning in classrooms will not provide the direction that teachers need in their quest to improve" [5, p. 19 – 20].

In order to overcome this problem there is a need to study what is happening in the classroom. Black and William call the classroom a black box [6]. They say that there are certain inputs such as pupils, teachers, other resources, management rules and requirements, parental anxieties, standards, tests with high stakes,

and so on – are delivered into that box. More educated students, higher tests results, teachers' satisfaction are expected as outcomes. In this scheme there is no place for direct help and support for teachers' work in the classrooms. The whole responsibility lies on teachers, they have to work better.

The researchers give two reasons why this is not a good idea [6]. First, some changes in the inputs can be counterproductive and will not allow teachers to raise education standards. Teachers themselves cannot cope with raising standards. Professionals should provide teachers with direct help and support in achieving better learning. In addition, further development in theory of education shows the need for alternative assessment, for example, some changes in teachers' attitudes to students' mistakes and to the area of error correction demand such assessment. It is considered that for effective learning students should have freedom "to experiment, to try out their own hypotheses about language without feeling that their overall competence is being "judged" in terms of these trials and errors" [3, p.402]. To deal with these issues formative assessment seems to be an effective tool.

Apart from language competence students will develop their self-confidence since one of the features of formative assessment is to follow an individual language development. Formative assessment is based on criteria. This allows teachers to follow an individual student's achievements without comparing students with each other.

The meaning of the word "assessment" in Latin means "to sit beside". Bearing in mind that observation is a key feature of any assessment it seems very suitable. Besides, any assessment involves interpreting the observed information about students' performance and making judgments concerning the future teaching plan on the base of such information. These basic features of assessment have been transformed into the following characteristics of formative assessment: sharing criteria with the students; active involvement of learners; effective feedback; constant adaptation of teaching on the base of students' performance; self-assessment and peer assessment [6]. Apart from language competence students will develop their self-confidence since one of the features of formative assessment is to follow an individual language development.

These characteristics correspond with the requirements of modern approaches to teaching a foreign language such as dialogic classrooms, learner-centered teaching, the need for development critical thinking skills and reflection.

It is important that this assessment is carried out by three agents: a teacher, a student and a peer. Everyone performs a definite role and achieves certain learning aims. The students are a source of information about each other's learning progress. On the base of this evidence students and teachers adapt their further teaching and learning.

New trends in assessment seem to be suitable for new educational standards in Russia. FSES (Federal State Education Standards) impose some requirements for an education system [1]. Firstly, the Standards establish certain teaching objectives. The document mentions three types: language skills and communicative competences, cognitive skills and personal development. While summative assessment aims at language competences, the other two are left out without any evaluation. In order to pursue these goals it is possible to use formative assessment.

Besides, formative assessment coincides with the whole format of a modern lesson according to FSES: the students are asked to set the goals of the lesson, develop some criteria of assessment and reflect on their performance. This similarity means that students will master their skills and become more confident. FSES focuses on individual student's achievements, use different methods, instruments and types of assessment (standardized oral and written tests, projects, competitions, field works, creative competitions, self-reflection, self-assessment, observation, any kinds of tests). In order to achieve these goals it is important to carry out different forms of assessment. Broadly speaking it might be formative and summative types. For external evaluation of learning in Russia there are different types of summative assessment: NEF (National Examination Format) and SFE (State Final Assessment). For internal evaluation formative assessment will be suitable to examine what is happening in the classroom. Together with summative assessment educators will receive a fuller picture of quality of teaching and learning.

In teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) there is a wide range of assessment types [2]. Its complex nature can be explained by the object of assessment – a foreign language. Teachers have to assess language skills: listening, speaking, writing and reading. There are different assessment techniques to do in each skill. In addition, other skills (or language aspects) should not be overlooked either. Besides, there are integrative procedures. This implies that different assessment activities can be performed by different agents (teachers, students and peers). This fact lends itself to the requirements of FSES for a diverse range of teaching procedures.

Formative assessment also can influence another aspect of testing, i.e. washback. This is a positive effect from assessment and in particular tests to learning. Hughes gives the following definition of washback: 'the effect of testing on teaching and learning is known as backwash, and can be harmful or beneficial. If a test is regarded as important, if the stakes are high, preparation for it can come to dominate all teaching and learning activities. And if the test content and testing techniques are at variance with the objectives of the course, there is likely to be harmful backwash' [4, p.1].

It is connected with some negative aspects of test preparation. First of all, exam preparation will focus on some topics and a certain range of grammar and vocabulary. This can result in narrowing the scope of learning. Teachers and students' obsession with exams results can be harmful to learning. Secondly, there is a possibility instead of teaching a foreign language to rely on rote learning during the exam preparation. Formative assessment can regulate programme content to avoid this disadvantage and together with summative assessment provide students with a diverse range of language and texts for developing their language skills.

To conclude, formative assessment has some advantages which are applicable to the modern system of language education in Russia. The opportunity to involve students in their own learning and development of different skills complies with the requirements of FSES. In addition, it has positive effects on students' psychological conditions because it gives them a sense of achievement and boosts their self-confidence and self-esteem.

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