



Impact of Formative Assessment on Students' English Writing Skills at Elementary Level

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the current study was to measure the impact of formative assessment techniques on students' writing skills. The techniques of formative assessment were used with sixty-four students. Formative assessment techniques were provided to students for three months. Summative assessment techniques and students' survey was applied. In this study formative assessment was provided during the English writing process. After the completion of the intervention, it was found that when students are provided with formative assessment during their studies, this method of assessment improves their learning process. The result depicts that when student remained under continuous assessment process, it improved their English writing skill. On the basis of these conclusions, it is recommended that teachers should use formative assessment in their classes during their teaching. They should also provide formative assessment not only to the students by themselves but also enable them for self-assessment for improvement in their learning.

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1. Introduction

Learning is a complex and subjective process. During this process, not only students but also teachers have to be aware of the learning extent. Teachers should know about the amount of learning of their students and how this learning can be accelerated. In order to explore this aspect of learning, assessment is used as an effective tool. This study is experimental in nature, it is an attempt was made to know how formative assessment affects the students learning in general and writing skills in particular. Before discussing the effect of formative assessment, firstly it is essential to know that what formative assessment is and what aspects of assessments are included in it.

Black & William (1998b) defined assessment in a broader sense; they included all the activities of students and teachers in it. According to them, these activities can be used to diagnose the problems of learning as well as teaching. And on the basis of this, changes can be made. so according to this definition assessment includes all those observations which teachers make all classroom discussions and all the analysis of students' work which include their homework and all their tests when this acquired information is used for making changes in teaching and learning accordingly as it becomes formative assessment in nature due to this information when teachers come to know about the progress of their students and their troubles, they can use this information to change their teaching methodologies, instructional approaches and can provide students with more learning practices. so that they can improve their learning.

Black & William (1998a) reviewed 250 journal articles and many chapters of different books about formative assessment to know whether the formative assessment is effective or not on the basis of this research, they concluded that the results of that group of students on which formative assessment was applied were better than the result of that group of students on which formative assessment was not applied. The improvement of the result was ranged between 0.4 and 0.7 from the results it was evident that formative assessment was not only helpful for normal students but also for low achieving students and the students having learning disabilities (Black & William, 1998).

Formative assessment in the form of feedback helps the learners to make yourself conscious of those breaks that are present between their destination and their present knowledge, their understanding and their skills .and, as a result, guides the learner to take their necessary actions that are essential to obtain their goal (Ramaprasad, 1983; Sadler, 1998). When the feedback is given in the form of specific comments and specific suggestions about errors and their improvement on the students' tests and homework, it proves more helpful as compared to just write answers on their tests and homework (Bangret, Drowns, Kulick & Morgan, 1991; Elawer & Corno, 1985). This type of feedback is particularly helpful for low achieving students; about them it is presumed that they lack innate ability learning. Formative assessment supports the notion that every child can learn to the high level. And in this way, it discourages that thinking due to which students showing low performance are discouraged and their further learning is not given any importance (Ames, 1992; Vispoel & Austin, 1995).

Although feedback that is synonymous to formative assessment is generally given by the teacher, however, the learner can also be used as a formative evaluation tool when he evaluates himself .it is evident from results of two experimental research studies, in which two groups of students were provided with different status. The group of students which were given information about their learning objectives, their assessment criteria and the chances of self-evaluation, show greater achievement as compared to the group which was not given the same opportunity (Fontana & Fernandes, 1994; Frederikson & White, 1997). The Results of another study also strengthen this belief that even the students with learning disabilities also show improvement in their performance when they are given knowledge about the use of self-monitoring strategy while doing their reading and writing tasks (Mccurdy & Shaprino, 1992; Sawyer, Grahem & Harris, 1992).

The results that have been derived from the comprehensive review of research by Paul Black and Dylan William, have changed the concept of assessment that is being used today. The deductions on the basis of their work are largely responsible for that kind of assessment that is called "formative assessment" and is being used today in this world of education. the results of their research review (1998) included all those studies which were conducted through the world, from Kindergarteners to elementary students including all subject areas such as reading, writing, social studies, mathematics,

and science. The results of their study are the largest found for any educational interventions. The results of the students whose teachers were using formative assessment were showing effective size between 0.4 and 0.7. in other words, it can be said that the achievement gains of students on which formative assessment strategy was used on a widely used standardized achievement test score scale, it can range from 15 to 25 percentile points, or two to four grade equivalents. it can be said that the rank of the United States could be moved from the middle of the pack of 42 nations (that were tested) to the top five countries if the formative assessment applied (Black & William, 1998).

When formative assessment was used in the case of low-performing students, it also proved useful. it increased not only their learning but in some cases, their achievement reached to the point of high-achieving students, that was an additional and excessive quality of formative assessment, so Black & William pointed out that the studies in which formative assessment was involved, mostly showed learning gains (Black & William, 1998). On the basis of results reported by Black and William and some other researchers, many programmes and products have been developed. This term of formative assessment is excessively being used in tests are all examples of commercially prepared tests and item banks. assessment classroom assessments. Now the question is that all the products, tests and practices which are being sold and are used with the label of formative assessment are they really formative in their true sense! how formative assessment gains its power? how the results of these studies reveal the facts about the process of learning and how these results could be used?

Formative assessment, according to Black & William and many other educational experts, is not a single instrument or case. These activities require a set of particular acts that result in increased learning and development. When describing the process of formative evaluation, many educators emphasize this point. As a result, formative evaluation is critical input (Ramaprasad, 1983) to both teachers and students regarding current comprehension and ability growth in order to decide the best path forward (Harlen & James, 1997). Formative assessment is a type of assessment that is designed to provide input on results in order to help students develop and accelerate their learning (Sadler, 1998). An evaluation is formative if the information gained from it is fed back into the system and is then used to enhance the system's output in some way (William & Leahy, 2007). Formative assessment is an appraisal that takes place during the educational process with the intention of enhancing teaching or learning (Shepard, 2008). From the researches, articles and books it is clear that all these sources say /depict one common thing that formative assessment is a process, not an instrument. in this process teachers and students both gather evidence through all possible means which may be formal or informal in order to improve learning. So it is advised that before applying any action, or test or activity which is apparently labelled as formative assessment, should be reviewed properly that either it is formative in its true sense or not?

2. How formative assessment gets its power?

When we observe the collected studies of William and Black (1998, 1998) we can get a large collection of those practices which were used as interventions and resulted in remarkable achievement gains. one thing that can be noticed in all these studies, is the presence of some common features. some of these common features are as under.

- Most of the teachers used classroom discussions, tests, and homework and classroom task to get the information about students learning and understanding after getting the information they took necessary actions to improve students learning and correct their misunderstandings.
- They also provided feedback in descriptive forms, in which guidance was also included. this guidance was about the improvement during learning.

- From these studies, it was also clear that most of the teachers using formative assessment strategy, tried to develop the skill of self-assessment and peer-assessment in their students. From the analysis of these studies, Black and William drew some key features of formative assessment. These features are as under
- Any piece of teaching should provide opportunities for students to articulate their understandings, as this will begin the engagement in which formative evaluation aids learning (p.143).
- The conversation between students and teachers should be insightful, reflective, based on eliciting and exploring understanding, and conducted in such a way that every student has the opportunity to think about and share their ideas (p.144).
- Any feedback to a student should focus on the unique aspects of his or her work, and suggestions for how he or she may develop, rather than a contrast to another student (p.143).
- “Feedback on the test, seatwork and homework should give each pupil guidance on how to improve, and each pupil must be given help and an opportunity to work on the improvement” (p.144).

So from these recommendations of Black and William, it is clear that formative assessment is a powerful tool in the hand of teachers and students both with the help of it, the teacher can also get feedback about his teaching and the effectiveness of his instructional methodology. on the basis of this feedback, he can take spontaneous decisions about the change in actions to make his students learning better while students on the basis of formative assessment have a greater ability to assess their own learning and to assess their peer abilities.

3. Uses of Formative Assessment for Teachers

Many strategies used in formative assessment are generally related to teacher’s information needs, and as a result, they can get the answers to some questions that are critical to their to their instructions, such as

- Who is it that isn't grasping the lesson?
- What are the strengths and needs of this student?
- What misunderstandings do I need to clear up?
- I'm not sure what kind of feedback I can give students?
- What changes should I make to the Instructions?
- How do I divide my students into groups?
- What kind of distinction do I need to make?

When teachers act on the information that are gathered during the process of formative assessment, the learning of students can be increased. Questioning and Dialogues, these two techniques play a very important role in the process of formative assessment. And the success of formative assessment is mostly attributed to these two techniques. in other words, it can be said that the success of the formative assessment process mostly depends on these two techniques. There are many programmes and practices, that help that help the teachers to obtain information about students achievements, to interpret these information and then to decide the suitable action for improving their learning, while making decisions, teachers mostly focus on data-driven decision-making, interim evaluation, student response to action, differentiated teaching, minute-by-minute assessment, and questioning techniques are all examples of data-driven decision-making.

4. Use of Formative Assessment for Students

A research review of Black and William (1998) shows the student as a decision maker .many other educationists such as Rick Stiggins, Lorrie Shepard, Grant Wiggins, Jay McTighe and Sue Brookhart also say that involvement of students in assessment process proves beneficial for them. Sadler (1989) agreed that formative assessment helps the student to develop their ability of self-assessment during their work. The fundamental condition for student's self-assessment is that the student, firstly, learns the concept of quality that is almost similar to the concept of his teacher's concept .and during the process of production, he observes this concept of quality throughout the process. He tries to match his work with that "quality concept". During this process, he also has some other alternative strategies which he can use at any point of his learning and self-assessing process. From the work of Sadler ,which he done about formative assessment in science classroom, some educationists such as Atkin, Black & Coffey (2001) have raised three questions: "whatever the procedures by which the assessment message is generated, it would be a mistake to regard the student as the passive recipient of a call to action"(Black & William,1998). These three questions are

1. What are you attempting to accomplish?
2. Where are you now?
3. What's your current location?

These three questions reflect Sadler's conditions, which frame what is known as "Assessment for Learning" _formative assessment strategies designed to meet students' knowledge needs in order to improve both motivation and achievement by including students in their own learning from the beginning (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis & Chappuis, 2004).

5. The hypothesis of the study

There is no effect of formative assessment on student's writing skills at the elementary level.

6. Procedure

This study was aimed at documenting the effectiveness of formative assessment on the English writing skill of students at elementary level. In order to evaluate the effectiveness were taken as a sample. They were provided with formative assessment in the form of oral feedback to a group of 60 students of 1st year elementary level along with written feedback. Students were given those prompts of creative writing which were developed by the researcher according to the "National Curriculum for English Language, Grades 1-VIII". Those prompts covered the four types of creative writing i-e descriptive writing, narrative writing, explorative writing and analytic writing. These prompts were given to the students in the form of a pair. In the first week, the prompt was given to the students. They were asked to write about it. When the written work of students was evaluated, they were given feedback. They were given instructions and advice that how they could remove their mistakes and could improve their English writing. In the classroom, they are given examples on whiteboard. At first, their mistakes were discussed collectively and then individually. Every day 10 student's work was evaluated and discussed in class and at the end of the session, they were given oral and written feedback on the written work. Along with this feedback, students were also assigned homework, related to that kind of creative writing that was given to them in the form of prompts. After one week of practice, they were given the same prompt in the next week. This process continued for twenty-four weeks. Total twenty-four prompts were given to the students in the form of a pair. After these twenty observations all the written work of students' were quantified with the help of those rubrics that were developed especially for the measurement of students' creative writing. Students' written work was assigned marks with the help of these rubrics. After assigning marks, data was evaluated with the help of SPSS. The graph was

plotted by taking the values of observation along the x-axis and the marks of students along Y-axis. The curve of the graph was showing the gradual progression. It depicts that formative assessment was working and students writing skill was improving with formative assessment.

7. Collection of Data and Analysis

According to the pattern of designed base experimental research, a group of 64 students was taught for three months. For the first two weeks, students were taught different types of creative writing. After two weeks they were given different prompts of creative writing at different at different period of time. after giving every prompt, students written work was checked and they were provided with formative assessment. After the formative assessment, the same prompt which was already given to the students was given again to them to check the effects of formative assessment.

Table 1: Collection of Data for Period I

Students of class I	Formative assessment 1 st test	Formative assessment 2 nd test	Without formative assessment 3 rd test	Without formative assessment 4 th test
Id A1	90%	83%	80%	81%
Id A2	90%	85%	87%	86%
Id A3	90%	85%	58%	68%
Id A4	96%	98%	85%	87%
Id A5	90%	83%	83%	70%
Id A6	95%	90%	87%	81%
Id A7	100%	100%	97%	100%
Id A8	90%	80%	82%	81%
Id A9	86%	83%	78%	74%
Id A10	90%	78%	70%	80%
Id A11	90%	85%	80%	81%
Id A12	90%	90%	87%	77%
Id A13	86%	93%	81%	91%
Id A14	98%	96%	88%	88%
Id A15	98%	98%	91%	96%
Test average	96%	92%	87%	87%
Test average with formative assessment	94%			
Test average without formative assessment	87%			
Average increase	7%			

Note. Table 1 showed participants' scores on four different summative assessment of 15 students. Out of these four tests, two of them were made by using formative assessment techniques and the remaining two were without formative assessment techniques. The data showed that the test average for formative assessment was 94%. The average score of those tests in which formative assessment

techniques were not used was of 87%. The difference was test increase of 7%.

Table 2: Collection of Data for Period II

Students of class I	Formative assessment 1 st test	Formative assessment 2 nd test	Without formative assessment 3 rd test	Without formative assessment 4 th test
Id B1	98%	91%	88%	89%
Id B2	98%	93%	95%	94%
Id B3	98%	93%	66%	76%
Id B4	96%	98%	85%	87%
Id B5	98%	91%	91%	78%
Id B6	96%	91%	95%	89%
Id B7	98%	98%	95%	98%
Id B8	98%	88%	90%	89%
Id B9	86%	83%	78%	74%
Id B10	98%	86%	78%	88%
Id B11	98%	93%	88%	89%
Id B12	98%	98%	95%	85%
Id B13	87%	93%	81%	91%
Id B14	98%	96%	88%	96%
Id B15	98%	96%	91%	96%
Test average	97%	95%	88%	89%
Formative assessment test average	96%			
Without formative assessment Test average	88.5%			
Average increase	7.5%			

Note. Table 2 showed participants' scores on four different summative assessment of 15 students. Out of these four tests, two of them were made by using formative assessment techniques and the remaining two were without formative assessment techniques. The data showed that the test average for formative assessment was 96%. The average score of those tests in which formative assessment techniques were not used was of 88.5%. The difference was test increase of 7.5%.

Table 3: Collection of Data for Period III

Students of class I	Formative assessment 1 st test	Formative assessment 2 nd test	Without formative assessment 3 rd test	Without formative assessment 4 th test
Id C1	96%	89%	86%	87%
Id C2	96%	91%	93%	92%
Id C3	96%	91%	64%	74%
Id C4	94%	96%	83%	85%
Id C5	96%	89%	89%	76%
Id C6	94%	89%	93%	87%
Id C7	98%	98%	95%	98%
Id C8	98%	89%	90%	89%
Id C9	86%	83%	78%	74%
Id C10	98%	86%	78%	88%
Id C11	98%	93%	88%	89%
Id C12	98%	98%	95%	85%
Id C13	86%	93%	81%	91%
Id C14	98%	96%	88%	96%
Id C15	98%	98%	91%	96%
Test average	88%	84%	67%	83%
Test average with formative assessment	85%			
Test average without formative assessment	72%			
Average increase	14%			

Note. Table 3 showed participants' scores on four different summative assessment of 15 students. Out of these four tests, two of them were made by using formative assessment techniques and the remaining two were without formative assessment techniques. The data showed that the test average for formative assessment was 85%. The average score of those tests in which formative assessment techniques were not used was of 72%. The difference was test increase of 14%.

Table 4: Collection of Data for Period IV

Students of class I	Formative assessment 1 st test	Formative assessment 2 nd test	Without formative assessment 3 rd test	Without formative assessment 4 th test
Id D1	91%	98%	78%	51%
Id D2	88%	68%	55%	59%
Id D3	83%	88%	73%	72%
Id D4	98%	78%	71%	60%
Id D5	98%	98%	78%	77%
Id D6	98%	91%	91%	87%
Id D7	86%	86%	45%	85%
Id D8	91%	71%	61%	79%
Id D9	91%	98%	81%	92%
Id D10	91%	98%	81%	92%
Id D11	83%	71%	78%	80%
Id D12	98%	93%	75%	78%
Id D13	96%	96%	81%	75%
Id D14	96%	91%	71%	78%
Id D15	96%	93%	78%	69%
Test average	91%	85%	71%	73%
Test average with formative assessment	88%			
Test average without formative assessment	72%			
Average increase	14%			

Note. Table 4 showed participants' scores on four different summative assessment of 15 students. Out of these four tests, two of them were made by using formative assessment techniques and the remaining two were without formative assessment techniques. The data showed that the test average for formative assessment was 88%. The average score of those tests in which formative assessment techniques were not used was of 72%. The difference was test increase of 14%.

8. Findings

Over the course of a two-and-a-half-month teaching cycle, the quantitative data was collected through four independent summative tests that presented results of student learning achievement. Each chart is organized by class time, with all students listed on the left side. The quantitative data shown on each map provides the following information:

1. Scores for each of the four tests by individual students.
2. Individual summative assessment averages, both with and without formative assessment.
3. The average of the four summative evaluations for the entire class.
4. The summative assessment class average with and without the use of formative assessment (two

summative assessments each).

5. The percentage increase or decrease in average summative assessment scores when formative assessment was used versus average summative assessment scores when formative assessment was not used.

9. Discussion

This study was aimed to investigate the effectiveness of formative assessment on the English writing skill of students at elementary level. Many studies and research works were studied for this purpose. From the study of that research work, one thing was evident that in the past, most of the people and researchers were confused about the clear and solid definition of formative assessment. They defined this term with respect to its uses. They were not clear that what a clear definition of formative assessment is.

Formative assessment is being used at a large scale nowadays, but what is the clear concept of formative assessment, it is not defined. The definition of this term becomes difficult because of its complexity. Most of the time this term is defined in the context of its uses. Due to the lack of this clarity, it becomes difficult to say that either formative assessment is being used or not. But one thing is clear that in spite of this vagueness, formative assessment is being used at a large scale as cited by Black and William (1998) and Leung and Mohan (2004).

10. Conclusion

According to the findings of this report, formative evaluation has a positive effect on student learning. Teachers may use formative testing to help inform their instruction and determine what students know versus what they don't know. Students may benefit from the use of formative evaluation to help evaluate what material is understood and to act as a reference for what needs to be changed.

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