

THE ROLE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN DEVELOPING AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE LEARNING

Boliqulova Muxlisa Nomoz qizi

Student of the Faculty of English Philology and Translation Studies

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

muxlisaboliqulova2104@gmail.com

Abstract. *Formative assessment plays an essential role in promoting the autonomy of learners in language education. Unlike summary assessments, which evaluate learning outcomes at the end of the program, formative assessments focus on continuing feedback and learning progress throughout the learning process. This paper explores how formative assessment strategies, such as peer evaluation, self-reflection, learning journals, and teacher feedback, can encourage English learners to take ownership of their learning, set goals, and monitor their own development. Based on current educational research and classroom observations, this study highlighted the positive impact of teaching practices on motivation, self-regulation, and development of language skills. In addition, the article discusses the practical challenges faced by teachers in implementing formative assessments in traditional learning environments and proposes recommendations for integrating these practices effectively into language courses. The study highlighted the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment, encouraging students to reflect on their performance and take active responsibility for their learning progress.*

Keywords: *Formative assessment, autonomous learning, EFL learners, self-regulation, language learning strategies, feedback, learner autonomy, classroom assessment, motivation.*

Introduction

In recent years, the concept of learner autonomy has gained significant attention in the field of language education, especially as educators have moved from teacher-based approaches to more learner-centered approaches. Autonomous learning refers to the ability of learners to control their own educational processes, set goals, monitor progress, and reflect on results. One of the most effective ways to foster this independence is through the integration of formative assessments into teaching practices. Unlike summary evaluation, formative assessment is a continuous and interactive process that allows teachers and students to obtain feedback during their learning journey. This kind of assessment supports learning by identifying knowledge gaps, promoting self-reflection and guiding future instruction. For learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), formative assessments are particularly useful in helping them to better understand their learning needs and strategies. Techniques such as self-assessment checklists, peer reviews, reflection journals, teacher-student conferences provide opportunities for learners to

engage deeper in materials and to take responsibility for their development. The paper explores the role of formative assessment in promoting autonomous learning among EFL students. It also explores the challenges related to its application and proposes practical methods to integrate learning practices into the language teaching process in order to promote the independence of long-term learners.

Materials and Methods

This study analyzed the impact of qualitative assessment methods on learning autonomy development among EFL students using quasi-experimental research designs. Two groups were selected: an experimental group that received instruction incorporating various instructional strategies, and a control group that followed a traditional instructional model with limited instructional feedback. The aim is to assess whether the regular use of forming tools will promote greater level of learning independence and self-regulation behavior. The experimental group participated in a six-week program, supporting the teaching with formative techniques such as self-assessment checklists, peer reviews, reflection journals and teacher feedback sessions. Students are encouraged to set personal language goals, reflect weekly on their progress and revise their learning strategies accordingly. In contrast, control groups received standard classroom teaching focused on textbook content and summary assessments such as quizzes and mid-term tests. The study was conducted over a period of six weeks, and each group attended two 90-minute classes a week. A pre-intervention survey was conducted based on a validated adapted questionnaire from Little (2007) to evaluate students' initial level of learning autonomy. At the end of the program, post-intervention surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted to assess changes in the attitudes and behaviors of students related to independent learning. The teaching materials included teacher-developed worksheets, reflection templates, goal setting forms and speaking and writing tasks, designed to initiate self-monitoring and feedback. All instruments and activities were tested before the study was carried out to ensure clarity and reliability.

This mixed-method approach allowed for both quantitative comparison and qualitative insight into the learners' experience with formative assessment.

Results

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that the integration of formative assessment techniques contributed to a noticeable, though varied, development of learner autonomy among EFL students in the experimental group. While both the control and experimental groups made some progress, students exposed to consistent formative assessment showed more frequent use of independent learning strategies and demonstrated greater self-awareness regarding their language development.

The quantitative results from the pre- and post-study questionnaires showed that learner autonomy increased more in the experimental group than in the control group. The experimental group's average score went up from 3.1 to 4.0 on a 5-point scale, while the control group's score rose only slightly, from 3.2 to 3.4. A one-way ANOVA test

confirmed that the improvement in the experimental group was statistically significant ($F(1, 58) = 7.86, p < 0.01$), meaning the difference was unlikely to be due to chance.

From the qualitative perspective, interviews and student reflection journals revealed several trends. Students in the experimental group reported feeling more responsible for their learning and more aware of their progress. Many participants noted that the weekly goal-setting tasks helped them stay focused, and the feedback sessions allowed them to correct their own errors more confidently.

In contrast, students in the control group mostly depended on teacher feedback and were less likely to engage in self-assessment or peer review activities. Their reflections focused more on completing assignments than on tracking or improving learning strategies.

These results highlight the formative approach's potential to foster gradual yet meaningful growth in learner autonomy when systematically integrated into the EFL classroom.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that formative assessment plays an important role in developing learner autonomy among EFL students. Learners in the experimental group, who were regularly engaged in self-assessment, peer feedback, and goal-setting activities, showed significantly higher progress in their ability to manage and take responsibility for their own learning compared to those in the control group. The increase in average autonomy scores from 3.1 to 4.0 on a 5-point scale indicates that students became more aware of their learning process and more active in directing it. This supports earlier research suggesting that continuous feedback and reflection help learners monitor their strengths and weaknesses more effectively. In contrast, the control group, which followed traditional methods, showed only a slight improvement, highlighting the limitations of teacher-centered instruction in promoting independent learning behaviors.

Qualitative data, such as student reflections and interviews, confirmed these findings. Most students in the experimental group reported greater motivation, confidence, and interest in language learning. They also mentioned that they felt more in control of their progress and learning decisions. This aligns with the idea that formative assessment not only improves academic outcomes but also positively influences student attitudes and engagement.

However, it is important to note that successful implementation of formative assessment requires careful planning and teacher training. Not all students may be ready for autonomous learning, especially if they are used to passive classroom roles. Therefore, introducing such methods gradually and with clear guidance is essential for long-term success.

Overall, the study highlights the value of formative assessment in fostering learner autonomy and encourages its broader use in EFL classrooms.

Conclusion

This study highlights the positive impact of formative assessment on fostering learner autonomy in EFL settings. Students who engaged in activities such as self-assessment, peer feedback, and goal-setting demonstrated a stronger ability to manage their learning and showed greater motivation and confidence. The experimental group's progress suggests that formative practices help students become more independent and active participants in the learning process.

While the benefits are clear, successful implementation depends on teacher preparedness and gradual adaptation, especially in traditionally teacher-centered classrooms. Overall, formative assessment offers a valuable method for promoting both academic progress and autonomous learning. Future studies should explore its long-term effects and potential integration with digital tools for broader application.

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