

AN INVESTIGATION INTO EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AT SOME COLLEGES IN THUA THIEN HUE PROVINCE

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Abstract: This descriptive study aims to investigate intensively teachers' understanding of formative assessment, how they implement formative assessment in their classroom as well as the challenges they have to confront when conducting this kind of assessment in their own classroom. The current study was conducted with the participation of 40 teachers from some colleges in Thua Thien Hue province. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected via questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Main findings revealed that almost all teachers were highly aware of formative assessment in relation to its importance and necessity. Besides, most of the teachers applied formative assessment in the right sequence. Also, size of class was one major difficulty that teachers had to deal with when they used formative assessment. The paper ended with some implications for a better use of formative assessment in the future.

Keywords: teachers' perception, formative assessment, teaching effectiveness, classroom practices.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is considered as the most important stage that reflects significantly the students' levels. It is meant to "first and foremost, serve the purpose of supporting learning" (Black & Wiliam, 2006, p.9). At some colleges in Thua Thien Hue province, paper tests have been the predominant methods employed to evaluate student learning. Teachers seem to rely heavily on summative assessment to judge their students' knowledge. As a result, formative assessment, which has been seen as an essential element to improving students' learning, is neglected. Moreover, some EFL teachers at some colleges in Thua Thien Hue province seem to be confused when being asked about the concept of formative assessment. When being asked to give the definition of formative assessment, they give the answer that that it involves testing students in the middle of one semester and then using the test results to remind students of some important parts of lessons that they need to mainly focus on. Nonetheless, this definition is quite general and does not express an understanding of the value of formative assessment in the teaching and learning process. This way of understanding even might lead teachers to perceive formative assessment as extra work. As a result, formative assessment seems to be excluded from their classroom. Therefore, it is important in this article to investigate intensively EFL teachers' understanding of formative assessment,

how they implement formative assessment in their classroom as well as the challenges they have to confront when conducting this kind of assessment in their own classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From the beginning, Black and William (1998) considered formative assessment as “all those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by their students that provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (p. 7). Additionally, Greenstein (2010) noted that formative assessment is purposefully directed toward the student. It does not emphasize how teachers deliver information but, rather, how students receive that information, how well they understand it, and how they can apply it. With formative assessment, teachers gather information about their students' progress and learning needs and use this information to make instructional adjustments. In recent days, Guadu and Boersma (2018) also agreed with these previous studies that formative assessment intention neither evaluates students' proficiency nor certifies their achievement level by giving marks, but rather to foster student learning through exploring their weaknesses and taking actions to eliminate them.

In classroom learning practices, formative and summative assessment both have their own advantages. However, to reach the desired goals, teachers have to be able to distinguish these two types of assessment. Harlen and James (1997) characterized the purpose of these two testing procedures as follows: Formative assessment is essentially feedback, both to the teacher and to the pupil about present understanding and skill development in order to determine the way forward. In contrast, summative assessment has a quite different purpose, which is to describe learning achieved at a certain time for the purpose of reporting to parents. Similarly, Biggs and Tang (2007) claimed that the main difference between summative or formative assessment is the purpose for conducting the assessment. Summative assessment is usually conducted in the last few weeks of term to see how well students have learned what they were supposed to have learned. In contrast, formative assessment does not form part of the student's final grade or mark. It is used to provide constructive feedback to improve learning and understanding.

Many researchers have proved that formative assessment is vital to improve the teaching and learning processes in EFL classroom (Elliott & Yu, 2013; Good, 2011; Karimi, 2014; Newton, 2007; Ruiz-Primo & Furtak, 2007). Ellis (2003) agreed that formative assessment can be closely linked to a task-based instructional syllabus. As a task-based syllabus is organized in stages to reflect the achievement of communicative ability, teachers need information on how well the students are mastering the instructional materials and developing their skills in relation to each stage of a course. Moreover, Popham (2008) noted that formative assessment is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes. It can be seen as a potentially transformative instructional tool. In a study conducted in 2007, Ruiz-Primo and Furtak found that there are various types of formative assessment that can be used by teachers to gather detailed information about the students' learning. By

using various types of assessment, teachers can collect useful information about students' learning condition.

According to Popham (2008), the approach of formative assessment involves a planned process consisting of multiple, varied activities, such as formal and informal assessment procedures. These assessments allow educators to obtain evidence about what students know and can do. Such evidence enables teachers to guide and modify their subsequent instruction as well as it helps students become aware of adjustments they may need to make for successful learning. In a study in 2011, Garrison and Ehringhaus presented that questioning strategies should be embedded in lesson or unit planning. Asking better questions allows an opportunity for deeper thinking and provides teachers with significant insight into the degree and depth of understanding of their students. On the concept of exit and admit tickets, Lemov (2010) referred to this activity as a closure technique whereby students need to answer a question in order to leave the classroom. This promotes learner autonomy and justifies the teacher's role as a facilitator. Garrison and Ehringhaus (2011) also mentioned "thumbs up/ middle/or down" as example of formative assessment. It helps teachers to quick check during instruction. Besides, self and peer assessment are listed as well. This type of assessment helps to create a learning community within a classroom. Furthermore, criteria and goal setting plays an important role in EFL classes. Teachers and students engages it in instruction and the learning process by creating clear expectations. Darling-Hammond (2008) asserted that using feedback and formative assessment continuously has incalculable implications for effective teaching and learning. Similarly, earlier work by Perkins (1993) prioritized a combination of active engagement or performance on the part of the students and ongoing, rich, appropriate feedback provided by the instructor.

Previous studies

Karimi (2014) conducted a case study in Iran. The study focuses on EFL teachers' perceptions of formative assessment. Participants were interviewed, then the audiotaped were transcribed, coded, and categorized into four major themes. The subjects include 42 Iranian EFL teachers. The study came to conclusion that formative assessment gives positive effect to teaching and learning process. Besides, participants also showed their full of confidence about the benefits that formative assessment bring about in their EFL classes.

Meanwhile, Lira-Gonzales (2012) did research on teachers' perceptions and practice of formative assessment at the University of Montreal. In particular, she pursues an aim of finding out the answers to understand how formative assessment is practiced in classroom and how these practices are perceived and performed by teachers and students. 51 respondents including 9 teachers and 42 students were chosen as the sample for this study. The results showed that both teachers and students consider formative assessment as a valuable and useful assessment. Furthermore, she also mentioned to particular challenges (e.g., large classes, limited number of hours, pressure on students to have good grades) that can persuade teachers to avoid formative assessment, especially if they perceive that summative assessment is something quite different from formative assessment.

Besides, another study conducted in 2015 by Pham and Renshaw provides the complexities of the implementation process of formative assessment in Vietnamese higher education classrooms. Two lecturers and 250 students from two colleges in Vietnam get involved in this research. A combination of structured interviews and informal discussions and structured lesson observations was used. The employment of these data collection methods aimed to reveal how the teachers adopted and adapted formative assessment practices. The analysis and interpretation of collected data indicated that there were various structural and cultural obstacles that hindered the implementation of formative assessment practices. Thus, the initiative needed to be modified to become hybrid and transformative types of practices.

Generally, the studies conducted on EFL teachers' perceptions and practice of formative assessment are still inadequate. Formative assessment is still considered as a new concept in Vietnamese context. As a result, very limited research on formative assessment has been done, especially in EFL contexts like Vietnam. More importantly, most of the research focused on the difference between summative and formative assessment or the definition of formative assessment, not on teachers' perceptions and practice. Hopefully, the current research study was conducted to fill the research gap.

Research Questions

The research study aimed to answer 3 questions as follows:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of formative assessment?
2. How do EFL teachers practice formative assessment in their classes?
3. What challenges do EFL teachers encounter when conducting formative assessment activities in their classes?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Forty EFL teachers from four colleges in Thua Thien Hue province were selected to participate in this study. Particularly, 40 teachers were purposefully chosen in terms of gender, age, teaching experience, educational qualification and teaching area. Then, five participants after completing the questionnaires were invited to have the interviews. They are intentionally selected based on their use of formative assessment in their classroom.

Instruments

According to McDonough & McDonough (1997), using questionnaires proves favorable to the participants since it creates opportunities for the respondents to think carefully, give well-thought answers and send their replies back in a sufficient amount of time. Moreover, questionnaire helps researchers to collect a mass of data gathered for analysis and interpretation during a short period of time afterwards (Mills & Airasian, 2009). Besides, the interview helps researchers gain deeper insights into the participants' perceptions (Punch, 1998). Additionally, Patton (2002) considers the interview a method that preserves the consistency of the data procured from the questionnaire.

Therefore, two major instruments were employed in this study, including (1) questionnaires for the sake of exploring teachers' perceptions and practice of formative assessment; and (2) semi-structured interviews aiming to gain further information about the participants' thoughts and expectations about the implementation of formative assessment in their settings.

The questionnaire is designed with 4 parts in English. The first section includes the participants' background information (name (optional), gender, years of English teaching experience). The second section gives brief definitions about two types of assessment: Summative and formative assessment with the purpose of making sure that participants get the right perceptions about formative assessment before conducting the questionnaire. Part three is considered to be the most important part among others. It contains 33 questions designed based on the format of a five-level Likert item ranging from *Strongly disagree (1)*, *Disagree (2)*, *Undecided (3)*, *Agree (4)* and *Strongly agree (5)*. Specially, with the third section in part 3, a five-level Likert item ranged from *Never (1)*, *Rarely (2)*, *Sometimes (3)*, *Usually (4)* and *Always (5)* to find out the frequency of using the given types of formative assessment.

The interview questions were designed based on the questionnaire content. The interviews were conducted in Vietnamese so that the participants would be able to comprehend the inquiries and feel at ease to express their stances on formative assessment to the fullest.

Procedures

Firstly, 10 teachers who were not from the sampling of this present study were responsible for checking whether the questionnaires could be clearly comprehended. Also, interview questions were piloted by two experienced and knowledgeable teachers who were not from the research population. Because of the outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic, the questionnaire is delivered online to teachers via e-mail after asking for their participation. It was not until the quantitative data from the questionnaires were synthesized that the interviewees were contacted to join real interviews. Also, teachers were interviewed online through voice call. After asking for permission, the researcher had all happenings during the interviews recorded and transcribed the recorded utterances for later data analysis. With the help of Microsoft Word 2010, Microsoft Excel 2010 and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0, the raw data were statistically analyzed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results from the questionnaires & interviews

Research Question 1: EFL teachers' perceptions of formative assessment

The total mean score of teachers' perception of the necessity of formative assessment ($M=4.20$, $SD=0.43$) was observed to be significantly high. In other words, the results indicate 40 EFL teachers at some colleges in Thua Thien Hue province strongly agree that formative assessment plays an essential role in their classes.

Table 1. *Teachers' perception of the necessity of formative assessment*

N=40	M	SD
1/ Formative assessment helps teacher to gather detail information about the Ss' learning.	4.43	0.50
2/ Formative assessment is considered one of the most influential ways to improve teaching and learning processes.	4.20	0.61
3/ I think formative assessment can help teachers identify the areas of students' difficulty in understanding the learning materials.	4.18	0.71
4/ Applying formative assessment, teachers can adjust ongoing teaching process to be more effective.	4.35	0.62
5/ Formative assessment helps my students concentrate on their mistakes and giving them a clear understanding of what is wrong and how to make it right.	4.03	0.80
6/ Using formative assessment helps teachers identify the gap between Ss' current learning and intended learning outcomes.	4.02	0.66

As can be seen in Table 1, the mean score of item 1 ($M=4.43$, $SD=0.50$) was the highest and that of item 6 ($M=4.02$, $SD=0.66$) was the lowest. Moreover, the second position belongs to item 04 ($M=4.35$, $SD=0.62$). It shows that thanks to formative assessment, teachers can adjust their ongoing teaching process to be more effective. In addition, that the mean scores of item 2 ($M=4.20$) and item 03 ($M=4.18$) are nearly the same proves the teachers' agreement on the benefits including improving teaching and learning process and helping identify the areas of Ss' difficulty in understanding the learning materials of formative assessment.

All of the five teachers emphasized that formative assessment is considerably necessary for EFL teachers.

Formative assessment is an important assessment towards teaching and learning process. (Teacher 4)

In my opinion, formative assessment plays an important role in teaching process. (Teacher 5)

When asked about the necessity of formative assessment, three teachers also conceded that formative assessment was fully essential as it could be beneficial to both teaching and learning process. Specifically, the interviewees gave some explanation for the significant role of formative assessment in EFL classes. All of five teachers agreed that it helps them to assess the students' level of understanding towards the lesson. Also, teachers gave some explanation about other benefits from formative assessment.

Through it, I can look back of the previous lessons to see what need to be improved. Then, I can add, remove, adapt these lessons to deliver them in the most effective way. (Teacher 3)

In addition, formative assessment was also advantageous to EFL students. Also, this form of assessment is believed to build a tremendous rapport between teacher-student and student-student. These points of view are illustrated in the following statements.

Research Question 2: EFL teachers' practice of formative assessment

Table 2. Types of formative assessment EFL teachers support

N=40	M	SD
7/ Among formative assessment activities, I think strategic questioning is very effective one.	3.60	0.87
8/ "3 things" can be both interesting and effective in classroom.	3.62	0.77
9/ Unit tests can be easy for teachers to apply in classroom.	3.87	0.76
10/ Exit/admit tickets is one of formative assessment activities that I support.	4.0	0.88
11/ Thumbs up/ middle/ or down is one interesting way to check Ss' understanding.	3.63	0.77
12/ Asking questions then giving specific feedback is one effective way that helps Ss improve their learning.	4.28	0.68
13/ Doing self-assessment activity can help Ss to make better work next time.	4.03	0.73

The results in Table 2 show that to the greatest degree, EFL teachers expressed their general agreement on item 12 ($M=4.28$, $SD=0.68$). Also, item 13 obtained a quite high mean score ($M=4.03$, $SD=0.73$), which demonstrates teachers' agreement on the benefits that self-assessment activities bring about. In contrast, most of the respondents expressed their least agreement, their neutral views, on item 7 ($M=3.60$, $SD=0.87$). Besides item 7, EFL teachers offered impartial views on item 8 ($M=3.62$, $SD=0.77$), item 11 ($M=3.63$, $SD=0.77$).

The results in Table 3 show that to the greatest degree, EFL teachers expressed their general agreement on item 19 ($M=4.08$, $SD=0.83$). Also, item 16 and item 14 obtained a quite high mean score, with ($M=3.90$, $SD=0.78$) and ($M=3.80$, $SD=1.14$) respectively. The results demonstrate the regular use of two activities including "Unit tests" and "Strategic questioning" in EFL classroom. In contrast, most of the respondents expressed their least agreement, exactly their neutral views, on item 18 ($M=3.0$, $SD=1.09$). Besides item 18, EFL teachers offered impartial views on item 15 ($M=3.05$, $SD=1.04$) and item 20 ($M=3.58$, $SD=0.84$).

Table 3. Types of formative assessment that EFL teachers use

N=40	M	SD
14/ I use <i>strategic questioning</i> in my classroom.	3.80	1.14
15/ I use "3 things" activity in my classroom.	3.05	1.04
16/ I use <i>unit tests</i> in my classroom.	3.90	0.78
17/ I use <i>exit/admit tickets</i> in my classroom.	3.70	0.97
18/ I use <i>thumbs up/ middle/ or down</i> in my classroom.	3.0	1.09
19/ I <i>give specific feedback</i> in my classroom.	4.08	0.83
20/ I let Ss do <i>self-assessment</i> activity in my classroom.	3.58	0.84

Table 4. *How EFL teachers use formative assessment in classroom*

	N=40	M	SD
21/ Before starting lesson, I with my students usually share our learning expectations.		3.60	0.87
22/ I often make questions from easy to hard level with specific intention to get information about Ss' understanding.		4.07	0.78
23/ I allow Ss to give me hint when they need me to move on/ slow down or reteach one part.		3.95	0.99
24/ I often check what my Ss get after delivering a part of lesson before moving to the next.		3.97	0.73
25/ After Ss perform, I usually give them specific and immediate feedback.		4.07	0.89
26/ I encourage Ss in class to give and receive feedback from others.		4.23	0.73

It was seen in Table 4 that item 26 gained the highest mean score ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.73$) while the lowest one ($M=3.60$, $SD=0.87$) belonged to item 21. Specifically, most EFL teachers agreed that they often make questions with specific intention (item 22) and they often give specific, immediate feedback after students' performance (item 25). The rest of items illustrating other ways of applying formative assessment achieved the mean scores at a high level of agreement ($M=3.97$ and $M=3.95$).

Four teachers in the interviews claimed that they often shared the description as well as the expected outcomes with their students before starting a course/ lesson/ semester.

At the beginning of each semester, I usually share with my class about the types of assessment I will apply. Then, I will let students make questions if they still don't understand any points. We also share expected outcomes that we want to reach after this semester. (Teacher 2)

Before starting a course, I always provide the objective, expected results and types of formative assessment that I will use in details for classes. (Teacher 3)

When questioned about the types of formative assessment teachers often used in classes, three teachers regarded feedback as the most common one.

Feedback is one type of formative assessment that I use most often. (Teacher 5)

Another common type of formative assessment that interviewees usually apply in classroom is self/peer-assessment. Some other activities were also listed by teachers, which could be implied that teachers applied various types of formative assessment in EFL classes. These activities include presentation, portfolio, questioning, exit/ admit ticket, unit test, discussion, etc.

Research Question 3: EFL teachers' challenges when conducting formative assessment

Particularly, teachers expressed an agreement on item 29 to the greatest extent ($M=4.25$, $SD=0.93$). It means big class size is the most common challenge that most of EFL

teachers have to deal with whenever formative assessment is used in their classes. Also, the mean score of item 28 ($M=4.08$, $SD=0.66$) demonstrates that the teachers agree on the effect of teachers' beliefs towards the effectiveness of formative assessment. On the contrary, item 31 gained the lowest degree of agreement from 40 teachers ($M=3.15$, $SD=1.00$), which illustrate teachers' neutral opinions based on the average mean scores in the five-degree scale.

Table 5. *EFL teachers' challenges when conducting formative assessment in classroom*

	N=40	M	SD
27/ There are little professional development programs to train teachers in formative assessments.		3.63	1.00
28/ Teachers' beliefs affect the effectiveness when applying formative assessment in classroom.		4.08	0.66
29/ Big class size is also the challenge in implementing formative assessment.		4.25	0.93
30/ Formative assessment is very time-consuming and requires a lot of effort and energy.		3.55	1.09
31/ My institution focuses more on summative assessment than formative assessment.		3.15	1.00
32/ I meet difficulties in finding appropriate ways of giving feedback to make Ss really aware of their weaknesses.		3.35	0.92
33/ When doing peer-assessment, Ss mostly preferred teachers' feedback rather than their classmate's feedback.		3.88	0.82

The first cause mentioned by teachers is lacking of time.

Doing formative assessment is time-consuming. I can't get enough time to do some activities that I really want. (Teacher 1)

Formative assessment is still new for me and my institution. Therefore, I need more time to research and design activities for it but I don't have time because of other errands. (Teacher 2)

Most of interviewee agreed that formative assessment requires more time and effort than summative assessment. The appropriateness of activities was another problem that met by two teachers when being asked. Depending on level of classes, teachers have to design the activities which were able to brings about the most effective results. Moreover, some causes consisting of size of class, students' perception, institution's choice of assessment, lack of training, class period were also be listed.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the questionnaire and the interview showed that EFL teachers believe in the essential role of formative assessment in their classes. This conclusion did support the hypotheses proposed by Ruiz-Primo and Furtak, (2007), Newton (2007), Good (2011), Elliott and Yu (2013), and Karimi (2014) that mentioned formative assessment

brings about positive effect to teaching and learning process. Besides, teachers also showed their full of confidence about the benefits that formative assessment bring about in their EFL classes. The highest mean scores for perception of the necessity indicated that teachers are highly aware of the importance of formative assessment because it is a tool used for collecting students' learning status/ condition and their learning needs. This confirmed the ideas presented in the literature review that Ruiz-Primo and Furtak (2007), and Laura Greenstein (2010). Another aspect that proved the essential role of formative assessment towards EFL teachers is closely related to learning materials. Besides, as a study conducted in 2007 by Newton, when implementing formative assessment, teachers can recognize the area of students' difficulty in understanding the material. It is also one important skills needing to acquire by teachers. Moreover, the gap between students' current condition vs. their targets is revealed by teachers through formative assessment. It corresponds with the hypotheses and other authors' findings in Hanover Research (2014) and Viktorovna & Arkadyevna (2015).

From the questionnaire results, giving specific feedback was one formative assessment activity had the high mean score. This indicated that teachers have a significant sense of support towards this kind of formative assessment and they frequently give detailed feedback to their students in class. This finding confirms what Perkins (1993) found out, that is, giving specific feedback needs to be considered by teachers in any situations. Another finding indicated that teachers agreed that self-assessment, unit tests and exit/admit tickets are three activities considered as effective forms of formative assessment. However, self-assessment seems to be carried out occasionally in most of EFL classroom. This is completely converse to what Darling-Hammond (2008) had mentioned. What is more, while teachers believed that "3 things" is one effective activity, they tend to rarely use it in their classes. In contrast, Garrison and Ehringhaus (2011) support the use of thumbs up/middle or down because of its benefits including quick check of students' understanding. Different from the above activities, strategic questioning stood in the middle position in the rating board when asked about the effectiveness. However, it ranked the third about the frequency of implementing in classroom. The finding is in agreement with some viewpoints stated by Peavey (1997), Tan (2007) and Garrison & Ehringhaus (2011), who claimed that strategic questioning should be added in lesson or unit planning because it allows an opportunity for deeper thinking. In terms of how EFL teachers practice formative assessment in their classes, all of the basic steps mentioned in the questionnaire received quite high mean scores. This means teachers have researched about formative assessment and applied it in the appropriate way in their classes.

At the beginning of a lesson, participants in the questionnaire seem not to share with their students about learning expectations regularly. Thus, the finding is in disagreement with a viewpoint stated by Garrison & Ehringhaus (2011), who claimed that this helps students understand where they are, where they need to be, and an effective process for getting there. In the middle of one lesson, participants all agreed that questions is often designed from easy to hard level with specific intention when teachers want to get information

about students' understanding, which is in line with an affirmation stated by Tan (2007). Besides, the result also showed that teachers allow students to give them a signal to move on/ slow down or reteach a part of lesson. Apart from this step, checking students' understanding about a part before moving to the next in lesson is also one essential stage. This finding is consistent with a viewpoint made by Garrison & Ehringhaus (2011). At the end of an activity, often in a post-stage, feedback should be given in detail and immediately right after students' performances. This result supports a study conducted by Darling-Hammond (2008). Moreover than that, the findings from questionnaire also show that most of teachers encouraged their students in class to give feedback and receive feedback from others. This can be seen as peer-assessment activity. This finding is not compatible with the findings stated by Quyen and Khairani (2016).

The first and also the most challenging problem when conducting formative assessment is big class size. This confirms the ideas presented in the literature review that big class size is the main problems of teachers (Stiggins, 2005; Lira-Gonzales, 2012). The second problem is teachers' belief about formative assessment. This problem was mentioned by Quyen & Khairani (2016) in the literature review. Also in Asian contexts, they shared that EFL teachers still keep their traditional method which prevents formative assessment to be implemented in classroom. The third problem is the negative evaluation when receiving feedback from peers. This problem is also stated in a study of Quyen and Khairani (2016). In terms of training, participants honestly share that there are little professional development programs of formative assessment. It corresponds with the hypotheses and other author finding in Wei (2010). Besides, formative assessment requires teachers to devote a lot of time, energy and effort into it. This is why it turns into a nightmare of teachers when mentioned to formative assessment. This finding is in line with the study conducted 1997 by NCIHE. Referring to the next problem, teachers are required to finding appropriate ways of giving feedback to make students focus on their weaknesses. This confirms the challenge presented in the work of Perkins (1993). The last but not the least difficult is about institution's choice/ policy of assessment. It is similar to the study conducted by Quyen & Khairani (2016), who affirmed that school's policies discourage them to use formative assessments in the classroom.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

EFL teachers in this study were highly aware of the necessity of formative assessment in their classes as well as its considerable benefits to teachers and students. Moreover, most EFL teachers expressed their frequency of using formative assessment. Teachers acknowledged about various types of formative assessment and applied them in the appropriate ways. Some activities can be listed as strategic questioning, 3 things, thumbs up/ middle or down, exit/ admit tickets, self-assessment and giving specific feedback. Furthermore, teachers shared their real concerns about some challenges that they need to deal with when conducting formative assessment in classroom. Some highlight challenges mentioned are big class size, teachers' beliefs and students' preference of feedback.

In light of the major findings from this present study, four issues will be discussed together with some suggestions with the purpose of improving the quality of formative assessment and meeting the participants' demands.

Firstly, besides the importance of EFL teachers' self-consciousness of formative assessment, the board of managers and leaders of the departments should also fully perceive the key role of formative assessment in order to select appropriate forms of student evaluation and stimulate the procedure then.

Secondly, the lack of training about formative assessment should be considered as well. It is recommended that the teaching institutions should promote the practice of formative assessment. An assessment system should be established so that teachers will have a clearer view of formative assessment. Also, a reward policy should be created for teachers who are willing to join in implementing formative assessment in classroom will achieve pay rise or promotion.

Thirdly, teachers should actively find out some seminars or suggest the teaching institution to organize one. By doing that, the colleagues will have chance to share their thinking, perceptions about formative assessment. Also, they can suggest some interesting way to apply formative assessment that brings out effective results in their real classroom.

Finally, it is necessary to found a department at the teaching institution that takes responsibility for consulting problems related to formative assessment. This department is considered a bridge connecting teachers and the institutions, so they can report what difficulties teachers have to faced up with to the higher level department, which helps to solve those problems in the shortest time.

Limitations

Firstly, the sample size (n=40) was not large enough to generalize the results to all teachers at colleges in Thua Thien Hue province. Five interviewees merely expressed their personal perspectives, so the results could not be generalized either. Secondly, the outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic this year did restrain the researcher from contacting the participants in person but online. Thus, it was impossible to notice facial expressions and comfortably extend the conversations when doing interview as well as to remind teachers for doing questionnaire. Lastly, as matter of fact, formative assessment seems to be seen as unfamiliar type of assessment. Hence, participants need to spend much time to finish the questionnaires.

Suggestions for further research

To tackle the problems of online instruments, it is advisable to set up an official deadline for completing the questionnaire. Furthermore, before inviting people to join the survey, the researcher should make sure that they all have knowledge or experience of formative assessment. It is recommended that the next studies can be conducted to investigate students' perceptions, practice and challenges of formative assessment in the same or different contexts.

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