

An Analysis Of Classroom-Based Formative Assessment
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Introduction

Meta-analyses consistently underscore the significance of formative assessment in enhancing student achievement (Black & Wiliam 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kingston & Nash, 2011). Many educators are cognizant of and deliberate in their use of assignments and tests as means of planned assessment but may give less thought to the contingent, or unplanned, assessment they regularly employ in their lessons. In fact, because of limitations in their assessment literacy, some educators face distinct challenges when implementing formative assessment in their classrooms. This study examines one teacher's implementation of Classroom-Based Formative Assessment (CBFA). Using an argument-based framework, an analysis of the instructor's CBFA practices was conducted. Through a discussion of the analysis, the educator collaborated with the researcher on strategies for more seamless integration of CBFA into his teaching practices, thereby enhancing the overall learning experience for students.

Background

1. Classroom-Based Formative Assessment (CBFA)

Classroom-Based Formative Assessment (CBFA) involves the gathering of learning evidence, the provision of feedback, and attempts to close performance gaps through ongoing assessment, and it can be planned or unplanned (Gu, 2021). Formative assessment, a process that, ideally, guides learners from their current status to their intended destination, has long been acknowledged as a factor in enhancing educational standards (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Educational authorities across the globe have been actively pursuing reforms that underscore the significance of formative assessment. Gu (2021) has presented a CBFA framework that encompasses five interconnected elements: goal clarification, evidence collection, interpretation, feedback, and teacher-student action. These steps aim to advance student learning. Ensuring alignment between teaching, learning, and assessment objectives is critical in formative assessment. In addition, in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, that alignment is also influenced by curriculum standards and language competence theories. Teachers proficient in assessment literacy fully grasp and interpret success criteria, thereby strengthening their pedagogical content knowledge to effectively employ formative assessment in their classrooms.

2. Argument-based Framework for Validity

In recent years, the experts in educational assessment have increasingly embraced an approach to validation known as argument-based validity. This framework seeks to present all evidence coherently, moving beyond fragmented evidence lists from the early days of testing. The core idea is that validating assessments stems from constructing a persuasive argument for the assessment's quality and relevance to its intended purposes.

Teachers should ideally validate their own CBFA, with the support of peer teachers and researchers who can bring theoretical and empirical expertise. This study presents a comprehensive framework for argument-based validation of CBFA and includes collaboration between teacher and researcher. It seeks to emphasize the importance of the quality and accuracy of teacher interpretations and actions based on assessment data.

3. Assessment Literacy

Assessment literacy comprises the principles and practices related to educational assessment. It encompasses the ability to design, implement, and interpret assessments effectively. Assessment literacy includes knowledge of assessment types, validity, reliability, and fairness. Of particular import to this study is the capacity to use assessment data to inform instructional decisions. Assessment literacy is a critical component of effective teaching and learning as it enables educators to create assessments that accurately measure students' knowledge and skills, provide meaningful feedback, and drive improvements in instruction. In the past, teachers have worked with experts in enhancing their assessment literacy, resulting in improved student performance in areas such as math and science. However, research on improving assessment literacy among EFL teachers remains scarce, despite emerging exploratory studies such as Gu, 2021, and Hill & McNamara, 2012.

Present Study

This study aims to explore one EFL instructor's use of CBFA over a course of eight weeks with a class of 38 first-year university students. The study employs a comprehensive approach, combining live classroom observations, coded video recordings, and discussions with the instructor to assess and improve his use of CBFA. Using an argument-based framework, an analysis of the instructor's CBFA practices was conducted, feedback provided, and enhancements in instruction implemented.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected and analyzed video recordings of classroom sessions to capture the formative assessment practices employed by the teacher in his class. Patterns derived from this analysis were then examined. This investigation involved a total of four 90-minute lessons: three in the baseline phase and one after discussions with the instructor about his assessment practices. Specifically, the focus was on the instructor's teaching and assessment of new vocabulary and listening comprehension.

In a 45-minute discussion, the teacher described his knowledge, beliefs, and practices related to formative vocabulary assessment and listening comprehension assessment and received feedback from the researcher. The instructor then implemented changes to his approach to lexical and aural comprehension assessment in a subsequent lesson.

The video recordings and discussions were transcribed and analyzed using a coding scheme of the teacher's actions related to the areas of vocabulary assessment and listening comprehension. After coding, instances of each code to gauge the teacher's classroom assessment practices were tallied.

Findings

The discussion with the researcher had a notable effect on the enhancement of the instructor's proficiency in CBFA practices in the areas of lexicon and aural comprehension, resulting in modified assessment methods. The instructor became aware of the fact that his examination of his educational targets and his criteria for attaining them depend on his assessment literacy. In other words, the instructor became aware of much of which he did not know about assessment methodology, interpretation of results, feedback, and follow-up actions.

Initially, the teacher's goals for his students' vocabulary and listening skills lacked specificity and coherence. His overall goal, as stated in the university curriculum, was to help students develop their knowledge about the world while acquiring the English skills necessary to logically express their own ideas through reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities,

including discussions and presentations. At the same time, his short-term objectives revolved around completing the textbook units, while managing a large class. This led to CBFA practices that sometimes prioritized expediency over solid assessment practices.

The instructor's reflection on his assessment literacy improved after discussions. He began to clearly explain lesson objectives to his students and his assessment became more closely aligned with those objectives. To illustrate, his vocabulary assessment practices went from requiring immediate use of new words in sentences to contextualized speaking and writing practice of new lexicon that reflected his overall curriculum goals. This shift exemplified the impact of his participation in the CBFA research.

Discussion

This study has documented the development of an EFL teacher's assessment literacy with regard to his CBFA practices within the context of an eight-week EFL course. The discussions with the researcher had an impact on the teacher's understanding and beliefs regarding formative assessment of vocabulary and second language listening comprehension skills. Furthermore, notable enhancements in classroom methodologies conducive to student learning were observed.

These enhancements improved the teacher's purposeful evidence collection, interpretation, feedback, and follow-up actions. This marked a significant departure from aimless choral repetition, decontextualized vocabulary practice, and repetitive listening exercises.

As might be expected, implementing formative assessment also revealed complexities in instruction. Focus on specific lesson targets meant that immediate issues, like repeated spelling errors, garnered little attention, leading to missed opportunities for feedback. Interpreting learning targets also posed a challenge. Curriculum-defined objectives became less clear when focusing on textbooks activities, impacting the connection between textbook learning targets and broader competencies. This had the effect of leading to overlooked teaching objectives. The crucial alignment of teaching, learning, and assessment objectives is a delicate and fleeting balance in the classroom. However, focused reflection during and after discussions with the researcher helped clarify teaching objectives, enabling purposeful formative practices.

Conclusion

Formative assessment, as explicitly mandated in curriculum guidelines, underscores the need for continuous reflection among teachers to enhance their assessment literacy. The study provides some evidence of the potential of such reflection in nurturing classroom-based assessment literacy. Despite the study's limitation as a single-case investigation, it makes a significant contribution, emphasizing the key role of CBFA in student development of vocabulary and listening comprehension skills.

References

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