

Article

Assessment Issues in Chinese High School English Classrooms: A Focus on Formative, Peer, and Self-Assessment

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Abstract: This paper explores the issues of formative, peer, and self-assessment in Chinese high school English classrooms, offering critical perspectives and suggestions. The essay begins by explaining the concepts of formative assessment and related self and peer assessments, then discusses the advantages of these assessments in improving student motivation, fostering critical thinking, and enhancing classroom interaction. However, the paper also highlights the challenges in implementing these assessment methods, primarily due to educational policies, teachers' attitudes, and students' acceptance. Specifically, the uneven distribution of resources, lack of professional training for teachers, and students' negative attitudes towards assessments make it difficult for formative assessment to be widely applied in Chinese high schools. Finally, the paper provides suggestions to address these issues, emphasizing the importance of teacher training and policy support to promote the effective use of formative assessment in Chinese English education.

Keywords: formative assessment; peer assessment; self-assessment; Chinese high school English education; educational policies

1. Introduction

Education authorities have adopted the use of formative assessment in the classroom in many countries, and its positive impact on student learning is evident [1]. The primary role of formative assessment is to provide feedback to students on their performance in the classroom so that they can acquire knowledge more efficiently [2]. Teachers often use peer or self-assessment in their classrooms to help students receive correct feedback. In the context of English education in China, using formative assessment and the related self or peer assessment in the classroom is a highly controversial topic. Some scholars believe that it can help students make more progress in their learning, as well as help students increase their engagement in the classroom and enhance their cognitive abilities [3]. Others believe that formative assessment is still very problematic and that the results of its implementation in the classroom are not promising [4]. According to the context and in response to the problem mentioned above, the main argument of this paper is that although formative assessment has many advantages and should indeed be used in the classroom, it still has many issues that cannot be ignored. This paper aims to explore the problems of formative, self, and peer assessment in Chinese high school English classrooms and provide critical perspectives and suggestions. The structure of the paper begins with a detailed explanation of formative, peer, and self-assessment. Next, it will elaborate on the advantages of the assessment precisely, and then the opposing viewpoint will be presented. In other words, the problem with using formative assessment in Chinese English classrooms will be stated in opposition to the arguments of benefits of formative assessment. Finally, implications are provided to address the issues raised, and the essay's main points will be summarized.

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2. Formative Assessment and the Related Self and Peer-Assessment

Formative assessment is an ongoing process used to evaluate students' learning progress and understanding, providing feedback that helps improve their knowledge application and depth of comprehension of course content [5]. Formative assessment is also a way of judging students' learning outcomes at a stage, with the primary purpose of providing feedback to students to help them improve their learning [6]. There is no denying that formative assessment can significantly help students improve their learning and achieve their learning goals. Studies have shown that students who have received formative assessments in the classroom perform better in summative assessments than students who have not received this training [7].

As mentioned earlier in this essay, the primary way formative assessment is used is to provide feedback to students, and the assessment can help make the classroom atmosphere more dynamic [8]. Therefore, teachers use self and peer assessment to motivate students and increase their engagement in the classroom. Self and peer-assessment are strong indications that the classroom is being conducted in a student-centered environment for teaching and learning [9]. Besides, students need to evaluate their learning, be evaluated by their peers, and give feedback to other students. From the above discussion, it can be concluded that using self and peer assessment in the classroom can help formative assessment to be effective. Moreover, the assessment is a process that helps students move from passive learning to active participation in the classroom and can help students improve their self-assessment and critical thinking skills [10].

Assessment plays an undeniable role in language learning classrooms worldwide. In this essay, the following sections will present the advantages and problems of formative, self, and peer assessment in the context of the Chinese high school English classroom.

3. The Argument for the Positive Impact on Formative, Self and Peer Assessment

Many educators and scholars widely accept the positive role of formative, self, and peer assessment in teaching and learning. This section will describe the advantages of these assessments in the following points.

First of all, the use of formative assessment has contributed to the development of language education in China. The assessment has also played a critical role in developing English pedagogy and curricula for primary and secondary school students in China [11]. The Theories involved in the syllabus and standards can help Chinese students improve their comprehension skills and enhance their English abilities. Secondly, in the face of globalization and social and economic progress, students must enhance their ability to self-assess and critically examine issues [12]. It is reflected in students' academic performance in school and enhances their competitiveness when they enter the workplace. Thirdly, the self and peer assessment create a student-centered classroom, so students actively participate in the class task, and the teacher only acts as a facilitator. Dochy et al. state that this classroom assessment allows for more communication and interaction between the teacher and the students and between the students and the students [13]. It will increase students' confidence and motivation to learn and develop their assessment skills and responsible attitude. From this argument, it can be concluded that the interaction between students and teachers in Chinese English classrooms can lead to more opportunities for students to cooperate, such as collaborative group discussions. Fourthly, self-assessment and peer-assessment tend to highlight students' ability to learn independently, their motivation to participate actively, and their confidence level about the learning content [14]. It suggests that these two assessments can help teachers evaluate students' learning ability and psychological state in the learning process. Hence, it can help teachers develop teaching methods to help each student progress. Finally, in China, most students' English learning main problem is their weak speaking skills [15]. Implementing peer assessment in the classroom may increase the opportunities for classroom communication in English and thus improve their speaking skills.

4. The Issues of Classroom-Based Assessment in China

However, while classroom assessment has many benefits, it is also very problematic in its implementation in Chinese English classrooms. By stating the advantages of formative, peer, and self-assessment, the following section will counter the above by discussing the problems of classroom assessment in terms of China's educational policies, teachers' attitudes towards classroom assessment, and students' acceptance of assessment in the classroom.

4.1. *Issues with Classroom Assessment as a Result of Educational Background and Policy*

The implementation of Formative assessment in the Chinese educational context is very problematic. It is mainly due to the influence of traditional cultural values and the implementation of current educational policies.

Formative assessment is a new teaching method for many Chinese teachers. Due to prestigious schools and schools in wealthy areas receiving better educational resources, teachers may receive professional training in classroom assessment. However, teachers in remote areas cannot receive this training because of the inequitable distribution of resources. Therefore, they cannot use formative assessment to help students improve their language skills. In general, classroom assessment cannot be used equitably in every school, which hinders the widespread implementation of formative assessment across the country. Second, in ancient China, the imperial examination system was an important way for candidates to change their fate or social class [16]. Until now, it has evolved into the Chinese entrance exam (Gaokao), the primary way for high school students to lead a high quality of life and earn more salaries [17]. Third, because the educational environment in China is test-based, teachers focus more on the knowledge and skills tested in the English exam, such as grammar, reading, and writing [18]. Fourth, teachers do not have time to implement formative, peer, and self-assessment due to the time constraints in the classroom and the heavy learning load [19]. Therefore, students cannot have a more interactive class to strengthen their motivation for language learning.

These four reasons demonstrate the current state of the educational environment in China and make it substantially challenging to implement and promote classroom assessment.

4.2. *Issues Caused from the Teacher's Perspective*

Several reasons make classroom assessment challenging to implement from the teacher's perspective.

First of all, teachers' misunderstanding of classroom assessment due to lack of professional training makes the primary function of formative assessment impossible [20]. For example, teachers may overlook that formative assessment intends to give students feedback to improve their language skills. In addition, they may only use students' performance in class and the quality of their work as a measure of their ability. Secondly, some teachers may have received professional training in classroom assessment but lack experience in implementing formative assessment. Thirdly, many teachers cannot use classroom assessments due to educational policies or orders from their supervisors [21]. Fourthly, the teacher's perception of classroom assessments is almost a determining factor in whether or not assessments can be implemented in the classroom [22]. For high school teachers, high-stakes testing is crucial, so even though they are aware of the importance of classroom assessments, they choose to focus on the content of the test after weighing the pros and cons [23].

The above four reasons illustrate the power that Chinese high school teachers have over implementing or not classroom assessment and reflect the current situation that they ignore formative assessment due to the policy is ordered by their superiors. In general, teachers can decide whether or not to use assessments in the classroom, but most are reluctant to do so, making it very difficult to implement classroom assessments.

4.3. Issues Caused from Students' Perspective

From the student's perspective, there are several reasons for the problems associated with classroom assessment.

Firstly, peer and self-assessment can be stressful for students [24]. The implementation of peer assessment creates anxiety for many students. Students fear both hurting their peers when judging them and being hurt themselves if peers evaluate them negatively [25]. Such emotions may have a negative impact on students' learning outcomes. In addition, high school students with low English proficiency may find self-assessment unhelpful due to their limited language knowledge, which restricts their ability to accurately evaluate themselves. Secondly, in China, most students are not good at interacting with their teachers in the classroom due to the influence of Confucianism [26]. They are more accustomed to the teacher-centered classroom and receive knowledge passively. As a result, many students have a negative attitude toward classroom assessment, showing reluctance to cooperate actively with teachers or to fairly evaluate their peers' performance. Therefore, students' passive and reluctant acceptance of classroom assessment is also an essential factor that hinders their development in the Chinese educational environment. Finally, as mentioned earlier in this paper, since the goal of high school students is to pass the college entrance examination and thus enter their desired university, they pay more attention to the knowledge that may occur in the test papers. They hope teachers can teach them more about the knowledge that can help them achieve great gaokao results. Therefore, teachers spending class time on assessments may provoke resistance and anxiety among students.

In conclusion, the above discussion shows that many high school students' personality traits formed by their environment may cause difficulties in advancing classroom assessment.

5. Implication

By arguing the above three aspects of the problems of classroom assessment in China, it can be inferred that the current problems caused by the policy and cultural context are difficult to solve. However, as educators and teachers, there are still some ways to try to tackle these issues.

Firstly, the issues addressed in this essay are primarily directed at the Chinese high school student population. High school students have a heavy academic load and are under tremendous pressure to prepare for the college entrance exams. In contrast to the intense workload in high school, students in elementary and college levels generally face less academic pressure. Therefore, it is possible to implement formative assessment in elementary or college classrooms and develop their self and peer assessment skills. Secondly, national education authorities should allocate funding and resources more equitably, particularly toward professional development and training for teachers. It is necessary to pay more attention to schools in remote areas and provide professional training for these teachers in classroom assessment.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, this essay analyzes classroom assessment issues from the context of Chinese high school students' English classrooms. It illustrates the problems of formative, peer, and self-assessment from three main perspectives. First, the educational background and current educational policies in China have made classroom assessment challenging to implement. Second, teachers' attitudes and lack of professional competence hinder the implementation of formative, peer, and self-assessment. Finally, students' negative attitudes toward classroom assessment are also the main reason for its problems in the Chinese educational context. Therefore, it is crucial for policymakers, educators, teachers, and students to acknowledge the importance of classroom assessment and collaboratively work towards improving its implementation in China.

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