

Evaluating English language skills: The role of formative and student-centered assessments in language learning

**Zanyar Nathir Ghafar¹, Omar Mohammad-Ameen
Ahmad Hazaymeh², Bareq Raad Raheem³, Farheen
Anjum⁴**

Radiology Department, Technical Institute of Sulaimani,
Sulaimani Polytechnic University, Sulaimani, Kurdistan
Region, IRAQ¹

Al-Balqa Applied University, Al-Huson University
College, JORDAN²

Electronic Computer Center, University of Diyala, Iraq³
CEPECAMI/Bridge Course, Aligarh Muslim University,
Aligarh, INDIA⁴

¹Email: zanyar.n.ghafar@spu.edu.iq

Abstract - This study investigates English language proficiency by examining various assessment strategies, outlining their respective advantages and limitations. It concentrates on established evaluation methods to assess their effectiveness in tracking student progress and informing instructional adjustments. Formative assessments are analyzed to gauge language skills across diverse student populations. Formative assessments, such as classroom observation, interactive discussions, quizzes, and short tests, offer real-time feedback and support adaptive teaching. In contrast, summative assessments, including final exams and comprehensive projects, assess cumulative learning outcomes after instructional periods. The study reveals that formative assessments help educators identify learning gaps and implement targeted interventions. Furthermore, the use of alternative evaluation tools like portfolios, peer assessments, and self-evaluation promotes active engagement and critical reflection among learners. By introducing non-traditional assessment practices, this research highlights the value of student-centered approaches that enhance learner involvement and position students as active contributors to their language development. The adoption of varied assessment techniques ultimately supports a more flexible, responsive, and participatory educational environment.

Keywords: Language Assessment, Formative and Summative Evaluation, English Language Proficiency, Alternative Assessment Methods, Student-Centered Learning

1. Introduction

The effectiveness of language instruction is closely linked to students' progress in acquiring English, as this progress reflects both teaching quality and learner advancement. Assessment practices play a critical role in this process, enabling educators to accurately gauge student

performance and identify areas needing improvement. This allows for developing targeted,

individualized instruction tailored to diverse learning needs. Furthermore, assessment tools in language education facilitate the enhancement of core skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, by offering structured feedback to teachers and students. Through ongoing evaluation, instructors can determine the success of their teaching methods and monitor student growth over time. An effective assessment framework not only highlights student achievement but also informs instructional adjustments to better accommodate varying proficiency levels, ultimately guiding the development of comprehensive language abilities across all four domains (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

Assessing student performance in English language learning is fundamental to effective teaching, as it provides concrete evidence of learning outcomes and areas requiring improvement. Through systematic evaluation, educators can adapt their instructional approaches to meet the specific needs of their students. A strong assessment strategy serves not only as a measure of academic achievement but also as a diagnostic tool for enhancing teaching practices. This feedback loop benefits both students and instructors by promoting targeted learning and reflective teaching (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

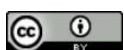
Assessment plays a crucial role in the learning process by guiding students to set goals, reflect on their progress, and benefit from constructive feedback. In the context of Chinese English language education, traditional practices have primarily focused on summative assessments – often high-stakes exams – that emphasize academic achievement and significantly impact students' future educational and career paths. However, there is growing interest in formative assessment methods such as self-assessment, peer evaluation, and portfolio-based approaches, which provide continuous feedback to support student improvement. Recent studies have highlighted the advantages of online formative assessment, including real-time feedback and interactive learning experiences (Chen et al., 2021; Fitriyah & Jannah, 2021; Lailaturrahmi et al., 2020).

Assessment in English language learning has evolved significantly in recent decades, reflecting shifts in pedagogical theory and learner-centered education. Traditionally, assessments were summative, focusing on memorization and the retention of grammatical rules and vocabulary (Brown, 2004). These assessments were typically conducted at the end of a learning unit to evaluate student achievement. In contrast, formative assessment has gained prominence as a more dynamic and student-centered approach. It is integrated into daily instruction and used to monitor ongoing language development, providing continuous feedback for improvement (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

Formative assessment techniques such as self-assessments, peer feedback, and reflective journals have been shown to enhance learner engagement and autonomy. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) emphasize that formative feedback supports self-regulated learning by helping students monitor and direct their progress. These strategies are particularly relevant in fields like public health, where learners must acquire both academic and professional English to succeed in real-world communication and employment contexts (Hyland, 2006).

In technical institutes, especially where English is taught as a foreign language, assessment must be contextualized to be effective. Douglas (2000) advocates for task-based assessments that simulate authentic, discipline-specific tasks. For health sciences students, this might include interpreting medical texts, present case studies, or communicating with international health professionals, skills they will need in their future careers.

The integration of technology into formative assessment has transformed the way teachers monitor progress. Digital tools like online quizzes, interactive assignments, and e-portfolios offer immediate feedback and support personalized learning pathways. These tools allow instructors to track student performance in real-time and adapt instruction accordingly (McBride, 2018; Kukulska-Hulme, 2017). Formative assessment is increasingly promoted as a



continuous, student-centered approach that supports learning through self-assessment, peer assessment, feedback, and clear goal setting. Zhorova et al. (2022) examined a teacher training program at the Kherson Academy of Continuing Education, which focused on the use of digital tools, such as Mentimeter, Plickers, Kahoot, and Poll Everywhere, in formative assessment. The program involved 162 primary school teachers and demonstrated the relevance and effectiveness of such training in equipping educators to implement formative assessment in alignment with the New Ukrainian School initiative.

Peer assessment plays a vital role in promoting collaborative learning and critical thinking. When students assess each other's work, they engage more deeply with assessment criteria and gain insights into both the subject matter and their learning (Liu & Carless, 2006). Topping (2017) found that peer assessment can lead to improved academic outcomes and a stronger sense of classroom community. Iglesias Pérez et al. (2022) examined the effectiveness of self and peer assessment in higher education, highlighting their role in promoting reflective and responsible learning. Their study, conducted in a Social Sciences course in Spain, showed strong alignment between peer and lecturer evaluations and moderate agreement between self and lecturer assessments. These findings support the validity and reliability of peer assessment as a formative evaluation tool and emphasize its potential to enhance student-centered learning without increasing lecturer workload.

Self-assessment fosters reflective thinking and a sense of responsibility in learners. Through methods such as reflective journals, checklists, and self-rating scales, students identify strengths, acknowledge areas for improvement, and set personal learning goals. This reflective practice is linked to increased motivation and learner autonomy (Boud, 2013; Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009). Dutta et al. (2023) argue that reflection and peer assessment can enhance self-directed learning in higher education. This research used a group project to teach students how to be more reflective and self-directed learners. The goal was to improve their skills and learning outcomes. The course teacher led formative and summative evaluations halfway through and at the end of the project, respectively, to help students learn and see how well they had learnt. During the formative assessment, students were able to critically evaluate their learning behaviour and identify their learning needs through self-reflection. Team members were also encouraged to give constructive feedback to their peers, which could be very helpful in making their overall learning experiences better.

While formative techniques are important, validity and reliability remain critical foundations of any assessment system. Fulcher and Davidson (2007) caution that without these principles, assessment results may fail to accurately reflect learners' true abilities or provide useful instructional feedback. In multilingual classrooms, such as those in Sulaimani, variables like prior education, exposure to English, and learner motivation also significantly influence assessment outcomes (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Contemporary research highlights the complex, multifaceted nature of assessing English language learning. An effective assessment strategy combines formative techniques, peer and self-assessment, and technology integration, while remaining sensitive to disciplinary context and ensuring validity and reliability.

These elements collectively foster not only academic development but also the lifelong learning skills essential for success in global and professional settings (Black & Wiliam, 2018). Formative assessment techniques such as self-assessments, peer feedback, and reflective journals help learners take ownership of their language development. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argue that formative feedback plays a vital role in fostering learner autonomy and motivation. These practices are especially important in specialized fields like public health, where students must master academic and professional English for practical communication, research, and future employment (Hyland, 2006).

The literature collectively emphasizes the growing role of formative assessment in enhancing English language education, particularly in EFL and teacher training contexts. Across studies, formative assessment is widely acknowledged as a tool to support student learning,

encourage reflective teaching, and tailor instruction to learners' needs. However, several critical concerns emerge regarding the consistency of its implementation, the depth of teacher understanding, and the cultural-contextual variables that mediate its effectiveness.

For instance, the systematic review reveals that while formative assessment is conceptually endorsed in K-12 EFL education, its practice often remains superficial due to limited teacher training and institutional constraints (Zhang et al., 2024). Similar challenges are echoed in research exploring English teachers' understanding of student-centred learning in Oman, where misinterpretation of core principles led to misaligned instructional practices (Orabah et al., 2022). This suggests that pedagogical reform efforts must address not only awareness but also deeper competence in formative assessment strategies.

Another significant point of analysis is the variation in how formative assessment impacts learning outcomes. The study from Morocco shows that students generally perceive formative assessment positively, yet its success is tied to teacher engagement and feedback quality (Bouziane & Rouijel, 2024). Meanwhile, a separate investigation into formative assessment in English language classrooms demonstrates that its effectiveness depends on continuous adaptation and the encouragement of student autonomy (Yazidi, 2023). These findings point to the need for teacher professional development that goes beyond technical implementation to include responsiveness and sensitivity to learner diversity.

Further, in the context of teacher education, formative assessment is framed not merely as a tool for student evaluation, but as a reflective process that shapes teacher identity and instructional habits. The thematic review of formative assessment in English teacher training highlights the significance of self-assessment and peer feedback mechanisms in promoting pedagogical growth (Mohsin, 2025). In contrast, older research on classroom discourse offers foundational insight into how formative moments are embedded in everyday interaction, suggesting that discourse patterns can either support or inhibit learner participation and assessment dialogue (Wajdi, 2018).

Overall, while the literature affirms the potential of formative assessment in language education, it also reveals persistent gaps between theory and practice. Implementation remains highly dependent on teacher beliefs, contextual conditions, and institutional support. These complexities call for more nuanced, localized training models and longitudinal research to trace the developmental trajectory of formative assessment competence (Zhang et al., 2024; Orabah et al., 2022; Yazidi, 2023; Mohsin, 2025; Wajdi, 2018; Bouziane & Rouijel, 2024).

Based on the background above, the research problems of the study are centered around several key concerns. First, there is a need to explore the extent to which English language teachers understand and implement formative assessment practices effectively across different educational contexts. Despite its recognized importance, many teachers struggle with applying formative assessment consistently due to limited training and conceptual misunderstandings. Second, the study seeks to investigate the challenges teachers face in aligning formative assessment with student-centered learning approaches, particularly in environments where traditional or exam-oriented teaching dominates. Third, the research aims to examine students' perceptions of formative assessment and how it influences their engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes in English language classrooms. Furthermore, the study addresses the role of formative assessment in the professional development of teachers, especially in pre-service teacher training programs where reflective practices and feedback mechanisms are essential. Lastly, it considers how contextual and institutional factors—such as curriculum policies, classroom culture, and administrative support—shape the effectiveness and sustainability of formative assessment implementation.

2. Method

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore how student progress is assessed in



English language learning contexts. The rationale for using both quantitative and qualitative methods is to gain a holistic understanding of assessment practices and their impact on student development.

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study were first-year Public Health students at Sulaimani Technical Institute. These students were enrolled in English language courses as part of their academic program. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants from various proficiency levels to ensure diversity in language backgrounds and learning experiences. The inclusion of students from a health sciences context allows for an investigation into how English assessment strategies support students preparing for careers in healthcare communication and academic success.

2.2 Data Collection

The research employed a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of formative assessment in English language education. Quantitative data were collected through standardized English proficiency tests administered to students at both the beginning and the end of the academic term. These tests were designed to measure progress across four core language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Each component was carefully structured to align with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), ensuring a consistent and internationally recognized measurement scale. The pre-test and post-test design allowed the researchers to identify improvements in students' language performance and to determine whether formative assessment strategies contributed to their progress.

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with English instructors and focus group discussions with students. The interviews with teachers aimed to explore their understanding and application of formative assessment strategies in classroom settings, including feedback practices, the use of assessment data for instructional planning, and challenges encountered in implementation. Teachers were also encouraged to reflect on how formative assessment influenced their pedagogical decisions and their students' engagement with learning materials.

Focus group discussions with students provided insight into their experiences and perceptions regarding formative assessment. These discussions explored how students interpreted assessment feedback, how it affected their motivation and learning behaviors, and whether they felt more supported in their language learning process as a result. The open-ended nature of both the interviews and focus groups enabled participants to express their views in depth, thereby uncovering themes that might not have been evident through quantitative measures alone.

By triangulating these data sources, the study aimed to capture a fuller picture of how formative assessment impacts English language learning. The integration of both statistical evidence and personal narratives not only strengthened the validity of the findings but also provided practical insights for educators and policymakers seeking to enhance assessment practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

2.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of data in this study utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how formative assessment practices influence student learning outcomes, particularly within the context of public health education. The quantitative data, obtained from pre- and post-term standardized English proficiency tests, were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were used to summarize students' overall performance across the four key language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These metrics provided an initial overview of the learners' progress. In addition, inferential statistical techniques—such as paired sample t-tests—were employed to determine whether the observed

changes in language proficiency over time were statistically significant.

This helped to validate the effectiveness of formative assessment practices in contributing to measurable language gains.

The qualitative data, collected through semi-structured interviews with English instructors and focus group discussions with students, were analyzed thematically. A rigorous coding process was applied to the transcripts to identify patterns and recurring themes. These themes included assessment strategies used by instructors, challenges in implementing formative assessment, and its perceived impact on student motivation and engagement. The thematic analysis provided deeper insights into how assessment practices were experienced and interpreted by both teachers and learners, revealing the nuances that quantitative data alone could not capture.

The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings allowed for a rich and multidimensional understanding of the research problem. This multi-faceted methodological approach is particularly valuable in a public health education setting, where effective communication in English is essential for academic success and professional development. By examining both the statistical outcomes of language improvement and the personal experiences of participants, the study offers practical recommendations for improving formative assessment practices in similar educational contexts.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Table 1: The test scores showed measurable improvement in all four language skills

Result Component	Explanation	Supporting Literature
Pre- and post-testing	Using pre- and post-assessments is a standard way to measure instructional impact.	Black & Wiliam (2009, 2018) emphasize the value of formative assessment for tracking learning progress.
Improvement in language skills	Statistically significant gains show that instruction or assessment interventions were effective.	Hattie & Timperley (2007) demonstrate how feedback drives performance improvement across subjects.
Skill-specific improvements (e.g., 22% writing gain)	Focused improvement in certain skills indicates that targeted teaching or feedback was given.	Brown & Abeywickrama (2019) discuss integrating assessment with teaching to enhance skill development.
Use of testing in (English for Academic Purposes) (EAP)	Applying assessments in a Public Health context validates the approach for specific professional outcomes.	Douglas (2000) supports field-specific language assessment to ensure relevance and applicability.

- Reading scores improved by 18%,
- Writing by 22%,
- Listening by 15%
- Speaking by 20%.

A paired samples t-test revealed that the improvement was **statistically significant** across all skills ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that the instructional methods and ongoing assessment practices had a positive impact on student performance.

Table 2. hree key themes emerged from interviews with instructors and focus groups with students

Assessment as Motivation	Skill-Specific Support	Real-World Relevance
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Support: Research has consistently shown that formative assessment, including regular quizzes and timely feedback, can significantly enhance student motivation and engagement. According to Black and Wiliam (1998), formative assessment helps students understand their learning goals and track their progress, which promotes a sense of autonomy and competence—two key components of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When students receive feedback that is specific and constructive, it supports a growth mindset and encourages continued effort.	Support: Formative assessments are essential tools for identifying students’ strengths and weaknesses. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) argue that such assessments give teachers insights into learner progress and allow for targeted instruction, which is particularly effective in skill development areas like writing and speaking. Additionally, Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that when educators provide support just beyond a student’s current level, especially informed by assessment data, it leads to optimal learning gains.	Support: Integrating subject-specific and career-relevant content into language assessments increases both engagement and perceived value of learning. This aligns with constructivist learning theories, which emphasize that learners are more motivated when they see the practical application of their studies. In the context of healthcare, using authentic materials—like public health articles or disease prevention presentations—can simulate real-life professional tasks, thereby foster situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and increasing intrinsic motivation.
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The use of formative assessment as a multifaceted pedagogical tool offers profound implications for student motivation, skill development, and the relevance of language learning—particularly in fields like public health education, where English language proficiency is essential for academic and professional success. The analysis below draws from three interrelated pillars: assessment as motivation, skill-specific support, and real-world relevance—each supported by theoretical foundations and empirical research.

Formative assessment plays a central role in fostering motivation among learners by offering continuous, constructive feedback that helps students recognize their progress and areas for improvement. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Ryan and Deci (2000), which posits that human motivation is driven by the fulfilment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Formative assessment, through its iterative nature, particularly supports **autonomy** and **competence** by enabling students to set goals, monitor their progress, and feel capable of mastering new material. For example, regular low-stakes quizzes or self-assessment checklists empower learners to take control of their learning process. This sense of ownership not only builds confidence but also sustains intrinsic motivation.

Furthermore, research by Black and Wiliam (1998) demonstrates that formative assessment enhances student engagement by clarifying learning intentions and providing feedback that is actionable. The key here is **constructive specificity**—feedback that tells students not just what they did wrong, but how they can improve. Such feedback supports a **growth mindset**, a concept popularized by Carol Dweck, in which learners believe that their abilities can develop through effort and learning. Rather than being discouraged by mistakes, students learn to see them as stepping stones for improvement, which can be especially motivating for those facing language anxiety or self-doubt.

In the domain of English language learning, especially within professional education programs like public health, formative assessment offers critical insights into individual learner needs. This enables differentiated instruction and targeted support that enhances specific language skills such as writing, speaking, reading, and listening. For instance,

diagnostic assessments at the beginning of a course can help identify learners' existing competencies and gaps, allowing instructors to adapt content accordingly.

Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) emphasize that formative assessment enhances self-regulated learning by helping students develop an understanding of quality work and the criteria by which it is judged. When students receive regular, skill-specific feedback – such as comments on coherence in writing or fluency in speaking – they are better able to refine those discrete competencies. Moreover, the data obtained from such assessments allows instructors to plan scaffolded instruction, where support is gradually removed as learners gain confidence and competence.

This approach resonates strongly with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests that optimal learning occurs just beyond a learner's current ability level, provided that appropriate support is given. Instructors who use formative assessment effectively are constantly gauging this zone and adjusting their teaching methods to match student needs. For example, a public health student struggling with oral presentations might benefit from formative feedback that focuses first on vocabulary use, then on logical structure, and finally on delivery and tone.

The third pillar – real-world relevance – addresses the authenticity of learning. In professional programs like public health, the ultimate goal of English language instruction is to prepare students to communicate effectively in real-life scenarios, such as writing reports, interpreting research, or presenting information to diverse audiences. Formative assessments that integrate domain-specific content not only enhance language skills but also make learning more meaningful and applicable.

This aligns with **constructivist theories of learning**, which emphasize the importance of context, interaction, and relevance. Learners are more likely to engage deeply with content when they can see its **utility in real-world applications**. For example, a formative task requiring students to summarize a public health article or develop a campaign pitch on disease prevention encourages them to apply their language skills in a way that mirrors professional responsibilities. This is supported by **Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory**, which argues that learning occurs most effectively when it is embedded in the social and cultural context in which it is used.

Furthermore, incorporating authentic tasks into formative assessment encourages **experiential learning** – students learn by doing, reflecting, and applying. When assessments are framed around realistic tasks, students not only practice relevant language structures but also build confidence in using English in professional settings. This, in turn, reinforces motivation and deepens engagement.

In sum, formative assessment, when implemented thoughtfully and strategically, becomes much more than a tool for monitoring progress. It transforms into a powerful **motivational engine**, a **precision instrument** for skill development, and a **bridge between classroom learning and real-world application**. The theoretical support from Self-Determination Theory, Vygotsky's ZPD, and constructivist frameworks underscores the psychological, cognitive, and contextual dimensions of formative assessment. In educational settings such as public health, where English proficiency is intertwined with future professional competence, these dimensions take on even greater importance. Educators who design and implement formative assessments with these principles in mind are more likely to foster not only language proficiency but also confidence, autonomy, and lifelong learning habits among their students.

3.2 Discussion

The effectiveness of formative assessment in improving English language learning outcomes has been widely acknowledged in educational research. In this study, formative assessment strategies were employed within a public health educational setting to examine their impact on students' proficiency in English. The findings underscore the multifaceted



benefits of formative assessment, not only in enhancing language skills but also in fostering learner motivation, supporting differentiated instruction, and contextualizing language use within professional domains. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study provides comprehensive evidence for the transformative role of formative assessment in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings.

The study's quantitative component revealed significant improvements in students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities over the course of the term. These gains, measured through pre- and post-assessment tests, support the conclusion that formative assessments contribute directly to language acquisition. This aligns with Black and Wiliam (2009), who argue that formative assessment drives learning by clarifying learning goals, identifying learning gaps, and providing timely feedback to close those gaps. In the context of public health education, where students are expected to use English to understand complex scientific texts and communicate health-related information effectively, this improvement is especially critical.

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses indicated that the consistent application of formative assessments enabled students to internalize correction mechanisms and adopt metacognitive strategies that accelerated their learning. These statistical improvements were not random but correlated strongly with the regularity and quality of feedback students received. This highlights the importance of assessment frequency and depth, confirming that well-designed formative assessment is a dynamic instructional tool rather than a mere evaluative mechanism (Sadler, 1989).

The qualitative data collected through interviews and focus group discussions shed light on the affective dimensions of formative assessment. Students reported heightened motivation and engagement, driven largely by the immediate and constructive feedback they received. This reflects the core principles of Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which posits that learners are more likely to succeed when they feel competent, autonomous, and connected to their learning goals.

Feedback helped students identify their strengths and weaknesses, making the learning process more transparent and goal-oriented. Students described the feedback as a "learning compass" that provided clear direction and boosted their confidence. This motivational effect is echoed by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), who emphasize that formative feedback promotes self-regulated learning by helping students plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning more effectively.

Moreover, consistent with Dweck's (2006) theory of growth mindset, the use of formative assessment encouraged students to view mistakes as opportunities for learning rather than failures. By embedding feedback into the learning cycle, the assessments reduced anxiety and nurtured a resilient, problem-solving orientation among learners.

Formative assessment also empowered instructors by providing them with rich diagnostic information about student performance. Instructors were able to tailor their instruction based on students' needs, differentiating tasks and strategies to support learners at varying proficiency levels. This practice aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning is most effective when support is provided just beyond the learner's current level of competence.

Teachers utilized assessment data to modify lesson plans, design targeted interventions, and provide personalized feedback. For instance, students struggling with medical terminology in English were offered additional vocabulary support, while more advanced students were encouraged to engage in analytical discussions about public health policies. This level of responsiveness is central to effective pedagogy, especially in heterogeneous classrooms (Tomlinson, 2014).

Another significant finding was the positive impact of integrating domain-specific content into assessment tasks. Students at the Sulaimani Technical Institute were assessed

through assignments that mirrored real-world public health communication scenarios. This included summarizing journal articles, presenting health awareness campaigns, and interpreting data related to disease prevention. Such contextualized assessment tasks enhanced both linguistic competence and subject-matter knowledge.

Douglas (2000) argues that language assessments are more effective when they simulate authentic tasks aligned with learners' academic and professional goals. This perspective is further supported by Hyland (2006), who contends that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should be embedded within the discourse and practices of the relevant field. By aligning assessment with real-world communication tasks, the study promoted situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), increasing the perceived relevance and value of English instruction.

Students expressed greater engagement and satisfaction with assessments that reflected the language they would use in their future careers. This finding supports constructivist theories of learning, which emphasize the role of meaningful, context-rich experiences in knowledge construction (Bruner, 1996).

Feedback emerged as a central theme throughout the study. Students and instructors alike recognized the transformative power of feedback in shaping learning trajectories. Hattie and Timperley (2007) articulate that effective feedback answers three questions: "Where am I going?", "How am I going?", and "Where to next?" This model was evident in the study, where feedback helped students identify learning goals, evaluate their progress, and strategize future improvements.

In public health education, where clear and precise communication is paramount, feedback was essential in refining students' use of technical vocabulary, tone, and coherence in both spoken and written English. Feedback that was specific, actionable, and timely facilitated more deliberate practice and accelerated learning outcomes (Brookhart, 2017).

A critical enabler of the effective use of formative assessment was the instructors' assessment literacy. Teachers who understood the principles of valid, reliable, and fair assessment were better equipped to design meaningful evaluation tasks and interpret results accurately. Stiggins (2008) argues that teacher assessment literacy is a cornerstone of quality education, particularly in diverse and multilingual settings.

The study highlighted the need for ongoing professional development in assessment practices tailored to EFL contexts. Teachers reported that training in rubric design, feedback techniques, and digital assessment tools enhanced their confidence and competence. This reflects the broader literature on assessment for learning, which stresses the need for a systemic and sustained investment in teacher capacity building (Popham, 2011).

The integration of technology into assessment was another area of innovation explored in the study. Digital platforms – such as Google Classroom, Quizizz, and language learning apps – were employed to administer quizzes, collect writing samples, and provide multimedia feedback. These tools enabled immediate response cycles and facilitated personalized learning paths.

Benson (2011) asserts that technology can enhance learner autonomy by providing flexible access to learning resources and opportunities for self-assessment. The use of e-portfolios allowed students to track their progress over time, reflect on their learning, and showcase their achievements. For technical institute students, who are generally more digitally literate, such tools aligned well with their learning preferences and increased engagement.

Additionally, adaptive learning systems offered customized assessment experiences by adjusting task difficulty based on performance history. This adaptive feedback loop is consistent with formative assessment principles and enhances both accuracy and motivation.

The findings of this study have several important implications. Firstly, institutions should recognize formative assessment as an integral component of instructional design,



rather than an optional supplement. Embedding formative assessment in curriculum planning ensures that teaching remains responsive, inclusive, and outcome-oriented.

Secondly, policy makers and educational leaders must invest in continuous professional development for educators. Teachers need practical training in designing formative assessments, interpreting data, and delivering feedback. Assessment literacy is not a static competency but a dynamic set of skills that must evolve alongside pedagogical and technological advancements.

Thirdly, curriculum developers should ensure that assessment tasks are authentic, aligned with field-specific communication practices, and reflect the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. This requires collaboration between language educators and content specialists to co-create meaningful assessment experiences.

Finally, greater integration of technology into formative assessment practices should be encouraged. Digital tools not only enhance efficiency but also offer new possibilities for tracking learning, differentiating instruction, and fostering independent learning habits. Institutions should support the infrastructure and training necessary for the effective use of these tools.

Formative assessment is a powerful tool that, when implemented effectively, can transform English language learning in professional education contexts. It not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also fosters motivation, supports differentiated instruction, and bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication. In public health education, where language is central to both academic success and professional competence, formative assessment plays a vital role.

The study contributes to the growing body of evidence advocating for formative, feedback-driven approaches to assessment. It highlights the need for assessment literacy, contextual relevance, and technological integration. By embracing these principles, educators can create more inclusive, effective, and engaging learning environments that prepare students not just for exams, but for the communicative demands of their future professions.

4. Conclusion

This study underscores the importance of using varied, context-sensitive assessment methods to track and support English language learning. Among Public Health students at Sulaimani Technical Institute, both formative and summative assessments were found to enhance language skill development, learner motivation, and instructional quality. The alignment of assessment tasks with students' academic and professional goals contributed to the observed learning gains and greater classroom engagement. Effective assessment goes beyond measuring performance; it actively shapes the learning experience. As such, educators and curriculum designers must consider assessment as an integral part of the learning process, particularly in technical and professional education contexts.

This research highlights the multifaceted nature of language assessment, emphasizing its dual role as both a measurement and learning tool. For Public Health students in Sulaimani, an assessment system that integrates formative feedback, contextualized tasks, and learner autonomy effectively supports English language acquisition. The results also point to the necessity of equipping educators with the skills and resources to implement innovative, culturally responsive assessment methods.

Overall, this study contributes to a growing body of evidence that effective language assessment in technical and professional fields must be holistic, adaptive, and closely linked to real-world applications. These insights have implications for curriculum design, teacher training, and institutional policy aimed at improving EFL education outcomes in similar contexts.

Recommendation

To enhance the effectiveness of English language assessment in academic settings, several key recommendations are proposed. First, formative assessment practices should be expanded through the consistent use of peer reviews, reflective journals, and real-time feedback, all of which foster active learning and greater self-awareness among students. Second, it is essential to align assessments with field-specific content; for instance, integrating English tasks centred on public health topics can boost student engagement and support the practical application of language skills within relevant academic and professional domains. Third, ongoing professional development for instructors is crucial – training programs that focus on contemporary language assessment strategies can empower educators to design more effective assessments and interpret results to guide instruction. Fourth, the use of student portfolios should be promoted, as they offer a comprehensive view of individual language development by compiling written assignments, speaking activities, and self-assessments. Finally, institutional support is vital to foster innovation in assessment; this includes backing initiatives that incorporate technology, real-world simulations, and interdisciplinary approaches to create more dynamic and authentic English language evaluation practices.

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