

---

## NGHIÊN CỨU/RESEARCH

---

### A case study into English classroom assessment practices in three primary schools in Hanoi: Implications for developing a contextualized formative assessment practice framework

Pham Lan Anh\*

*Foreign Language Department, Hanoi College of Education, Duong Quang Ham, Hanoi, Vietnam*

Received 07 September 2012

Revised 17 October 2013; accepted 06 December 2012

**Abstract:** Formative assessment (FA) has emerged as a lever to raise the quality of the teaching/learning process. While FA is claimed to enhance teaching and learning gains, the implementation of FA in particular settings has not yet been as successful as expected due to a lack of proper frameworks to guide the practice for optimal results. This article attempts to propose some principles toward developing a contextualized formative assessment practice framework (CFAPF), informed by a case study into classroom assessment practices of teachers of English in three primary schools in Hanoi, Viet Nam. First, several studies on formative assessment practices (FAPs) in Western countries and Hong Kong are reviewed, followed by the rationale for a much needed contextualized framework for the researched classrooms in Hanoi. Next, the methodology employed in the case study is depicted. Then, based on the major findings extracted from the observed classroom assessment process, on evidence of formative assessment elements embedded in daily teaching strategies, as well as threats to FA, such principles for the suggested framework as *particularity*, *practicality* and *learning promotion* are built up. Finally, the article concludes with an emphasis on some key points to be considered the necessary and sufficient conditions for the successful application of the framework, namely, *the importance of daily lesson planning*, *the simultaneous focus on the three components of FA* (i.e., identification of student learning, feedback and feedforward to that learning, and consequent remedies), and *considerations of the actual teaching and learning contexts*.

**Keywords:** Assessment, Assessment for Learning (AFL), Formative Assessment (FA), Teacher Assessment Practice (TAP), Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL), English as an Additional Language (EAL), English Language Teaching (ELT).

#### 1. Introduction

Educational reforms involving assessment have become a worldwide trend with the

emergence of formative assessment (FA) as a plausible lever to promote greater learning (Black & William, [1]; Brookhart, [2]; Carless, [3]; Bachman & Palmer [4]. Drawn from the work of Black & William [1], Brookhart [2], Colby-Kelly & Turner [5], Harlen & Winter

---

\* Tel.: +84-904308464

Email: anh730@gmail.com

[6], and Sadler [7], FA – a process of three components, namely, identification of student learning, feedback and feedforward to that learning, and consequent remedies – is the collection of information about student learning, gathered in the course of instruction with such purposes as: (1) to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses; (2) to inform teachers in planning instruction for remedies; and (3) to support students in revising their work, deepening learning and gaining self-regulation skills.

FA techniques generated from empirical research include providing clear learning targets, structuring the beginning and end of every lesson, asking effective questions, offering feedback about progress towards the targets, enhancing student self-assessment and self-regulation etc. (Black & Jones, [8]; Lambert & Lines, [9]; McMillan, [10]; Popham, [11]; Harris, [12]; Cohen, [13]).

Whereas the usefulness of FA under research-based manipulated conditions is repeatedly mentioned in relation to teaching and learning improvement ([10]; Rea-Dickins[14]), there have been very few studies on the actual process of formative assessment practices (FAPs) in everyday classrooms (Gattullo, [15]; Mc. Kay, [16]; Rea-Dickins & Gardner, [17]). The next section will briefly review these few studies on FAPs and justifies the rationale for developing a contextualized formative assessment practice framework (CFAPF)

## 2. Context to the Study

### *Studies on Formative Assessment Practices (FAPs)*

Among the very few ELT research into FAPs at primary level include the ones of Rea-

Dickins [14], Gattullo [15], Rea-Dickins & Gardner [17], Abedi [18], Carless [3]...

Rea-Dickins [14] and Rea-Dickins and Gardner [17] explored the nature of formative assessment in English as an additional language (EAL) elementary classrooms in 9 schools in the U.K, analyzing teacher assessment procedures, which comprised 4 stages: planning, implementation, monitoring, and recording and dissemination. The first stage included identifying the purpose, choosing the format of assessment activity and preparing learners for the assessment. The second stage was highlighted by introducing why, how and what to assess, scaffolding during the activity, learner-self and peer monitoring, and giving immediate feedback to learners. The third stage involved recording evidence of achievement, interpreting the evidence, revising teaching plans, sharing findings with other teachers and giving delayed feedback to learners. Finally, the fourth stage was marked with recording and reporting students' progress and achievement toward the national curriculum to stakeholders. The researchers concluded that, while formative assessment has generally been regarded as 'very attractive to teachers who wish to be responsive to learner needs, to gather information to inform lesson planning and teaching and to provide feedback to learners (p. 239)...', the FAP in the everyday classroom context still required further detailed analysis in order to confirm whether it actually facilitates learning and whether language learning is happening.

Gattullo [15] in her case study on FA in ELT elementary classrooms in Italy adapted a formative assessment framework suggested by Torrance and Pryer [19] to examine 'assessment incidents' taking place in the 'microsociology' of classroom. This framework comprised nine categories: *Questioning/eliciting*; *Correcting*;

*Judging; Rewarding; Observing process; Examining product; Clarifying; Task criteria; and Metacognitive questioning.* Based on this framework, the researcher found that teachers' use of information collected for formative purposes was not as effective as it had previously claimed to be; their use of some types of questioning and negotiations that could be fed into FA and enhance the learning processes was also problematic; and that teachers tended not to ask pupils about the way they are thinking (metacognitive questioning) in language classes. In terms of teacher factor, Gattullo [15] highlighted the importance of an open attitude towards learners to encourage and establish a dialogue with them. She also emphasized the importance of peer-teacher observations in developing new insights into one's own professional understanding and work.

Holding different perspective from that of Rea-Dickins [14] and Gattullo [15], Herman and Baker (in Abedi, [18]), when developing benchmark tests to monitor student progress toward standards throughout the academic year, discussed six criteria that determine the validity and efficiency of FA. These criteria include: (1) alignment, (2) diagnostic value, (3) fairness, (4) technical quality, (5) utility, and (6) feasibility. The researchers confirmed that these criteria could potentially provide accurate information about student progress as well as useful feedback to improve instruction. Drawing on the work of Herman and Baker, Abedi [18] claimed that in the USA, these qualities of summative assessment (validity, fairness, item characteristics...) can also be used to 'help in the development of formative assessments that may be useful tools in informing curriculum and instruction for English language learners...'. Abedi [18] also indicated a

problematic issue facing teacher assessment practice: 'the teacher-made FAs may not cover state content standards that should guide instruction and assessment for all students...'. On the other hand, FAs developed by publishers or official institutions may not be at the level of specificity that teachers would want. 'It is therefore imperative to pay careful attention to both the content and technical characteristics of FAs that are used for students' (p. 195).

Tackling the issue from another angle, Carless [3] when reviewing the implementation of FA in primary schools in Hong Kong with particular references to two examples of FAPs, proposed an exploratory framework of factors impacting on the promotion of FA for schools. The framework uses three levels, with the first level - the personal domain including teacher knowledge and beliefs, the second level - micro-level (local school forces) involving internal school support, views of parents, and external school-based support, and the third level - the macro-level (wider external forces) comprising existing societal teaching, learning and assessment culture, reform climate, the impact of relevant government or quasi-governmental agencies, and the role of high stake tests. Drawing on this framework, Carless [3] concluded that the effectiveness of teacher's FAP does not merely depends on their parts (level 1) but is heavily influenced by external factors at macro levels, namely the policy, culture, and stakeholders.

Obviously, the four studies on FAPs reviewed above vary in both scope and focus, with Rea-Dickins focusing on assessment procedures, Gattullo emphasizing formative strategies employed in assessment incidents during instructions, Abedi highlighting the value of validity in teacher formative

assessments, and Carless proposing the framework in order to explain the facilitating and inhibiting factors in the implementation of FA.

The reasons behind this difference are that the FAPs were conducted in particular settings, to serve particular purposes. This makes a strong case for investigating FAPs in various contexts in order to verify the usefulness of FA as Rea-Dickins [20] admits “relatively little has been written about the actual engagement of teachers and their learners—as evidenced by research studies—in the implementation of specific approaches and assessment activities.” (p. 510)

It is the gap that the case study into English classroom assessment practices into three primary schools in Hanoi attempts to partly fill in.

*Necessity of a Contextualized Formative Assessment Practice Framework (CFAPF)*

Following the worldwide trend of incorporating FA in daily teaching, classroom assessment in Vietnam is receiving considerable attention as stated in the English Language Curriculum (2010, [21]) directives as follows: “Achievement results are to be collected through a combination of formative and summative assessment... Evidence of student achievement is also collected from teacher observation and teacher feedback throughout the academic year. Formats of assessment should be varied, including both written and spoken.” (Guideline 6, p. 15)

Another good sign of incorporating FA in daily teaching is that since 2010, at primary level, summative tests have been administered only once a year – instead of four times as used to be – in the final term of the academic year,

reducing the negative impact on children cognitive and psychological development, simultaneously increasing the importance of FA in daily routine classrooms.

Moreover, the National Foreign Languages 2020 Project [22] has also laid an emphasis on the quality of teaching and assessing English at primary level. This is evident in a number of changes. First, a new series of textbooks is piloted with time allocation for English increasing to 4 periods per week. Second, a big amount of money is invested in training teachers of English to reach the expected qualifications and competency for the job of teaching English to young learners who are supposed to acquire English language proficiency equivalent to A1 level (CEFR) by primary exit time. To prepare for the new demands, the document of Primary English Teacher Competency Framework (2011, in press) has been proposed, in which teacher competency in assessment is specified to (1) *evaluate and select valid assessment procedures (tests, portfolios, self-assessment, etc.) appropriate to learning aims, objectives and content*, (2) *design and use in-class activities to monitor and assess learners’ participation and performance*, ... (6) *identify strengths and areas for improvement in the learners’ performance and uses them to inform future planning*, ... (9) *analyze learners’ errors and identify the processes that may cause them, including pronunciation, word order, grammatical differences from their own language*, (10) *identify learners’ errors and provide constructive feedback in a positive way (e.g., using echo correction, self- and peer-correction)*, and (11) *deal with errors that occur in class in a way that supports risk-taking, learning, encouraging learners to see errors as a way of improving their English*.

(Section 7, Primary English Teacher Competency Framework, [23], in press)

Against this backdrop, the directives of assessment implementation, however, have yet stated an explicit procedure to achieve these ambitious goals. While the aims of the Primary English Curriculum place a plausible emphasis on FA embedded in teaching and learning process, the curriculum guidelines do not seem to properly reflect these. This lack of transparency, therefore, leads to the fear that the curriculum guidelines are of little support for teachers in their teaching, let alone in assessment practices. Given such little support, a number of primary teachers of English, finding it difficult to conduct FA in their classrooms, continue traditional means of assessment. This clearly makes a strong case for a FAPF to tap into the nature of assessment for formative purposes.

The idea of developing a CFAPF arises when conducting this study into English classroom assessment practices in three primary schools in Hanoi. Realizing that the context of teaching English in Vietnam is obviously different from that of western countries and of Hong Kong (reviewed in the preceding section) in class size, teacher's workload, teacher status, conditions for teaching and learning, and status of English, the study attempts to generate potential formative strategies inherent in the target teachers' daily teaching practices in order to build up a teacher-friendly framework. It is a common sense that an innovation – however effective it is – seems difficult to be accepted and internalized by a majority if it requires enormous efforts or is totally different from the routines. Taking these into considerations, the study also seeks for FA strategies that make the best practice out of the target teachers' possibilities.

The section that follows will briefly describe the methodology of the study.

### 3. Methodology

The objectives of this case study is to investigate the procedures in which the target English teachers practise assessment to young learners; to identify how the procedures could be improved to increase formative elements which help create motivation for learning; and to generate potential formative strategies inherent in daily teaching in order to develop a contextualized framework to assess young language learners, which, hopefully, can facilitate teaching and learning in the researched primary classrooms.

#### *Research questions*

To what extent and in what ways are English teacher's classroom assessment practices evident in facilitating children learning? What needs improving?

#### *Research design*

The issue of classroom assessment practices is dynamic, and complex, which is difficult to explore through quantitative data. Qualitative case study is more powerful and effective to explore the wholeness or integrity of factors that may be influencing the phenomenon of classroom assessment practices (Cohen, [24], p. 253). Qualitative case study is especially suitable for clarifying teachers' understandings of their work, and responding to the problems encountered in their professional lives (Lankshear & Knobel, [25], p. 68; Nunan, [26]; Stoyoff, [27], p. 380). Qualitative case study enables the researcher to provide detailed descriptions of the context surrounding the teachers' practices of classroom assessment.

Moreover, with rich and thick description, there is a potential to theorize about the CFAPF in particular primary English classrooms (Denscombe, [28]; Merriam [29]; Yin, [30])

#### *Participants*

The participants include three female English teachers B, C and D who were selected among the elite group of primary English teachers for the longitudinal in-depth case study, in which observations, interviews and e-mails exchanges were the primary sources of data collection between 2009 and 2010. These three teachers are all qualified and experienced in teaching English to young learners, among whom two (C, D) were key trainers in the Primary Innovation Project initiated by British Council Viet Nam in partnership with the MOET (Ministry of Education & Training, Viet Nam), the remaining teacher (B) had been awarded 'Excellent Teacher' status by a rural district of Ha Noi. The reason behind this purposive sampling [24], [25] is that the researcher seeks for elements of formative assessment in everyday teaching, integrated with assessment. Furthermore, as defined by Gipps et al ([31], the formative elements in the assessment practice of good teachers are considered to be of much higher quality than those of less-able teachers. The three teachers were responsible for 12-18 classes each, ranging from 15 to 30 teaching hours per week.

#### *Triangulations*

As suggested in Cohen et al. [23], Denscombe [28], Duff [32], Stake [33], in order to develop greater clarity or validate the results of the case study research, a process of triangulation was employed wherever possible. In this study an attempt was made to include time triangulation, space triangulation, combined levels of triangulation, theoretical

triangulation, investigator triangulation and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1970 in Cohen et al., [24]). In terms of time triangulation, this case study was conducted over a period of two years with considerations of changes during the process of classroom observations, interviews and stimulated recalls. In terms of space triangulation, the three schools chosen are located in different parts of Hanoi. Regarding combined levels of triangulation, data collection and analysis were taken at both individual and group levels. With regards to theoretical triangulation, different theories of learning and different framework of formative assessment were examined, which help widen the viewpoint of the issue depicted. Investigator triangulation was also employed throughout the study, ranging from panel reviewing the survey questionnaire, co-observers in classroom visits, and critical peer researchers providing feedback on the various aspects of the research, namely research procedure, research methodology, data analysis and the findings. Finally, methodological triangulation using the methods of classroom observations backed up with questionnaires/interviews and document analysis was utilized to minimize bias of the researcher's interpretation of the findings ([24]; Lincoln & Guba, [34]; Silverman, [35]).

#### *Methods of data collection*

This study employed qualitative case study with such tools as observations, questionnaires, and interviews to tap into the processes and complexities involved in teachers' practices of assessment purposes. The classroom observations were taken in three classes of grade 3 with a total of visits being five times per teacher. Tools for classroom observation included both structured and unstructured ones. An example of structured observation is that

prior to data collection, the researcher develops checklists of formative elements to be observed while the teaching activities were implemented by the three teachers B, C, and D. Another example is the use of tally sheets for recording the frequency of assessment patterns during teacher's assessment practice. Unstructured observation was also employed to generate hypotheses since it "operates within the agenda of the participants [and] selectivity derives from the situation rather than from the researcher in the sense that key issues emerge from the observation rather than the researcher knowing in advance what those key issues will be" ([24], p. 398). In this sense, in order to conduct a detailed analysis of what was happening in the classroom, the researcher either took field notes or video records every lesson observed. Focus group interviews were conducted twice, one before and one during the observations, followed by an individual interview. Stimulated recall/reflection sections were implemented right after every single classroom observation. Besides, the data collection in the extensive period of the whole academic year was considered necessary in order to gain a comprehensive and realistic overview of teacher assessment practices as part of their routine teaching process. In addition, two children in each of the three classrooms were targeted as a means of tracking in detail the assessment experience from the perspective of individual learners.

#### *Methods of data analysis*

In this qualitative case study, the researcher employed both inductive and deductive methods for identifying and generating formative strategies. After collecting data from different sources, the researcher analyzed the written and spoken data of official and unofficial documents, survey questionnaire,

interviews, classroom observations, stimulated recalls, following the content analysis procedure, where data were (1) first broken down into discrete parts, using conceptual accounts, then (2) compared and contrasted through codes to form categories, and finally (3) identified, characterized and sorted by means of analytic questions for such codes as objectives setting and sharing, ways to collect learning evidence, types of feedback, reflection, self-regulation, etc. (Campbell et al., [36], p. 121; [24], p. 476; [25], p. 38). Such a procedure involved both predetermined and emerged codes, which enabled the researcher to look for themes and patterns of the target teachers' assessment practices.

#### **4. Major findings**

The findings, based on the analysis of the lesson plans, classroom observations, focus-group interviews, stimulated recall/ telephone and email exchanges, informal interviews to children and their parents, are reported under three themes, namely, (1) the routines of teachers' assessment or the classroom assessment process, (2) indicators of formative elements, and (3) threats to FA.

##### *The classroom assessment process*

The classroom assessment process explored in this case study includes the way teachers planned assessments, implemented assessment activities and reflected upon the whole process

##### *Planning*

The three teachers followed long-termed (yearly) teaching planning (including assessments) as directed in the curriculum guidelines. According to the curriculum/syllabus, among the total of 70

periods for the whole academic year there were 12 skill lessons, 8 review lessons and 36 language item/pattern lessons for spoken interaction purpose. Alongside these 56 lessons, the three teachers carried out at least 4 one-period class tests as directed in the teacher's guide, followed by another 4 periods of test follow-up where teachers gave feedback and provided corrections. Teachers could flexibly use the remaining 6 periods depending on the context of certain classrooms, preferably for tests or grammar practice with worksheets. Regarding short-term assessment planning, the teachers tended to develop assessment in mind as no clues could be traced in their lesson plans. The positive elements in lesson planning were found on the teachers' act of selecting and sequencing a variety of activities, and of evaluating the teaching procedures. The negative element was that the link between specifying learning outcomes, monitoring and supporting learning via a variety of activities, and assessing student learning in order to examine whether the learning goals are met is not clearly created on the daily-basis planning. Perhaps, the three teachers are rather experienced, thus, they tend to rely on their extensive experience to form a mental framework of how to run the lesson. Therefore, not all of their intentions was presented in the lesson plans. Obviously, teacher's planning lesson is much influenced by the curriculum, textbooks and teacher's guide book. However, the textbooks and teacher's guide provide little support to teacher's planning. This, definitely, leads to some messages missing in teachers' planning stage.

#### *Implementation*

Generally, there are three main types of lesson structures: (1) lessons follow a PPP model introducing a language item/pattern; (2)

lessons follow pre-/while-/post-model practicing reading/writing skills; and (3) lessons follow exercise format reviewing what has been taught/learned. As revealed by the three teachers, most of the available time was used for pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar practice, sometimes in the form of worksheets or class tests, sometimes in the form of games or chants/songs. Regarding class tests, as achievement in English is not combined into student's achievement records, the three teachers did not suffer much from the obligation of collecting evidence of learning followed by recording and reporting for accountability purposes. This also reduced teacher's responsibility in the teaching and assessment process. The three observed teachers had more freedom of choices when deciding what, when and how to assess. Teacher D followed a procedure of collecting student's exercise books weekly with marks and feedback, alongside with monthly progress tests marked by herself. Teacher B just managed to provide worksheets for children to do at home and then collected them for marking two or three times a term. Teacher C conducted class tests for peer assessment whenever she finishes a unit- i.e 4 times a term, without marking and grading. However, similar to other subjects taught at primary section recently, the teachers still had to design an end-of year test, regardless the results were not counted toward the final score. The tests were normally collected from different sources by the teachers, as they revealed. Compared to other compulsory subjects, the English tests did not create pressures on both teachers and children. The teachers, however, still had an obligation of reporting children's progress and achievement to stakeholders by the end of the academic year.

Surprisingly, hardly any parents asked the teachers about their children learning.

Regarding activities carried out during instructions, out of 121 activities for the total of 15 observed lessons there are 17 intended assessment activities (predetermined by the teachers), 26 potential assessment activities (ones that can be fed into FA), and 31 assessment snapshots (ones that use FA techniques). Based on the four main ways teachers collect evidence of student's work, namely, through interactions between and among teacher and children; through teacher formal and informal observation; through teacher marking and through teacher mental framework, focuses have been laid on the content validity of the task, the balance between challenge and support, the nature of the task input, the student response and the criteria to assess student response whereas the assessment snapshots outlines teacher or student intention of assessment, the moment when the incidents arise, and number of children involved. It is interesting to find that more evidences of student learning in vocabulary, grammar are revealed through intended assessment activities whereas more evidences of student learning in pronunciation, listening and speaking become visible through potential assessment activities and assessment snapshots.

#### *Reflection*

It is found that reflections on lessons taught are of profound importance in a way that led the teachers to define both their strength and weaknesses which they saw as necessary for the act of teaching/assessing children in their daily teaching. One focus of the teachers' self-evaluation and reflection relates to their setting learning goals. For most of the time, the teachers indicated that they had achieved their

goals, at least to some degree. In this regard, it is interesting to note that almost every student who was called to contribute their ideas rarely made a mistake. It implies that the input may be easier than the student's current knowledge, which indicates no learning taking place - or that the teacher, in fear of taking time re-teaching and modeling, may call only the best students. Another focus, constantly mentioned to the researcher, was the lack of full participation from all students in most of the assessment activities (other than tests/worksheets). Although the three teachers were all aware of the fact that the number of students who have their work or performance checked/monitored represents a small percentage of the whole class, they appeared to accept this as a 'status quo'. When being asked in what ways the teacher can check/monitor every student learning, teachers B and C replied "...only tests do" as "... I need to write from five to ten questions for whole class, and I can check different things about their understanding" or "... I find [tests/ exercises] useful. There are some times when I forget to emphasize some key points in the lesson, then tests/exercises can help to reinforce these. Children just learn patterns mechanically, when being tested they have to consciously realize there are more things to be noticed"

The final focus is on the way the three teachers demonstrated how the assessment of the learning outcomes in each lesson informed the planning of their next lessons. Thus, the focus of the lesson evaluation was the follow-up action from the previous lesson/activity to see how the action points for learning that were identified to be adapted and developed. Generally, the three teachers effectively used the information they collected from single activity/lesson to adapt and modify the next

steps. This explains why some activities in the lesson plans were not carried out in their actual classrooms. It is interesting to note that the revision session at the beginning of each lesson was normally used for the amendment of the ineffective activities in the previous lessons. However, a number of unsuccessful activities were not recycled in the lessons to follow. When asked about this problem, the three teachers replied they had noted the problems and planned for the remedies in a more appropriate time, which is, for example, in two or three weeks' time. When further exploring their implication, it turns out that the problem is partly due to the organization of the textbook where a new set of vocabulary/a pattern of language is not recycled until the review unit which is a fortnight or a month apart.

*Indicators of formative elements*

*Creating a child-friendly learning/assessment environment*

It can be concluded that the teachers have attempted to partly create a learning/assessing environment where children can have fun and feel safe and confident in the classroom. Most of the activities were sequenced from easy to more difficult under teacher's guidance. Fun and physical activities were developed through games, owing to which the teachers engage children and help them feel secure and confident in the classroom environment. The three teachers sometimes gave children time to discuss answers in pairs or in groups prior to being called upon in front of the class. This, to some extent, helps children reduce risks and dare to show what they are able to do.

*Employing a range of FA techniques for whole class teaching*

In spite of the narrow focus and traditional ways of collecting evidence of student learning,

the following actions are seen as potential formative techniques employed in whole class teaching.

- Follow a similar format for classes – beginning with a starter activity, followed by exploring and extending children's understanding (three teachers)
- Attempt to set context with concern for meaning (with use of pictures, role play...) (teacher C, D)
- Emphasize on choral and whole class drilling with corrections of pronunciation (three teachers)
- Create interesting and meaningful reasons for children to do activities (teacher D, 2 times)
- Demonstrate the task then asks children to do the same (three teachers)
- Design graded tasks focusing on practice of the language pattern through classwork or game-like boardwork (three teachers)
- Engage children in a way that encourages spontaneous responses and creates a positive classroom climate for comments and feedback (teacher D, sometimes)
- Align feedback on student performance in relation to learning objectives/ learning outcomes with specific criteria (teacher D, once)
- Provide children with hint rather than answers, so that children have to seek for the answer for themselves (three teachers)
- Provide feedback while students are doing a task, as well as later (three teachers)
- Ask children open-ended questions (why, how) so that children can develop the skills of self-evaluation and self-correction (teacher B, once; teacher D, sometimes)

- Review homework/marking class tests with children, correcting mistakes and guiding children toward the practice of self-correction and self-reflection (teacher C)

*Providing feedback and comments through class tests and homework / Create a link with parents*

The main source of collecting evidence of student learning, though, was via annual tests and class tests and worksheets. The correction of class work and home work were the most common ways of collecting information whereas the practices related to record keeping and reporting were merely restricted to quantified achievement record. It was also common for the three teachers to mark, correct and write comments on the children' exercise books and test papers. It was positive, however, that the teachers then asked children to revisit and improve this checked work. Other common practices were class discussion once the work was returned to the children, and sending work home with parents' signatures to ensure that parents were informed of children progress and achievement, therefore, parents could provide sufficient guidance on children work at home (Anh, [37])

*Threats to FA*

*Teachers' misconceptions of FA*

The three teachers B,C, and D seemed to clearly understand the purposes of assessment at primary level and agreed that assessment should motivate children learning, which should take account of children's cognitive, physical and psychological development. However, their FAP in classroom appeared to separate assessment from teaching, coinciding FA with an accumulation of periodical assessments, and they perceived class tests, worksheets and exercises for homework as the

most appropriate modes for collecting evidence of student learning. They also considered "assessment is seen as something that happens once learning has finished, rather than during the learning process" (Harris & McCann, [38], p. 2). Even when the teachers emphasized the importance of FA in children learning process, they still considered the time appropriate for formative assessment was either at the end of the lesson (to check what has just been taught) or at the beginning of the next lesson (to check what was taught from previous lesson).

Regarding the philosophy underpinning their teaching and assessment practice, the teachers all explicitly favoured the communicative approach where students can have fun with English and have a true desire to communicate. In spite of that, teachers still adopted the role of knowledge provider, exercising, for example full control of student learning during instructions. The teachers supposed what they teach must be learnt by the students and that as the teacher; they have to control this process. In this sense, mistakes were seen as barriers to learning. This obviously contradicts FA theory, which sees mistakes as evidence of learning.

*Assessment activities revealed little evidence of student learning*

The three teachers seemed to have difficulties in the ways they set learning objectives, identified student prior knowledge essentials for new learning, and design activities so as to make student learning visible. In most lessons, the teaching aims were not divided into measurable and achievable objectives, which led to a vague expectation of learning outcomes. For example in one lesson, teacher C stated the aim as "Telling the name of the rooms in the house, introducing the rooms in the house"; the objectives as "by the end of

the lesson the children will be able to remember the name of the rooms in the house; and read, talk and write the sentences about the house". However, she did not mention the level of content and context – nor indicated level of cognitive process and other differences among children which might affect the outcome. Similarly, it was ambiguous with teachers setting objectives which aimed at nowhere: "by the end of the lesson, children will be able to practice 4 skills to introduce the school, the library and the classroom". Almost all of the learning objectives merely limited to low level of thinking- that is "remember" while the knowledge set at factual. Such objective as "by the end of the lesson, students will be able to *remember* how to give commands" was found in a number of the lesson plans by the three teachers.

As a consequence of unmanageable, immeasurable objectives, most activities did not indicate the learning experience children received or the extent to which the learning outcome was achieved. For example, in one lesson the aim was to present and practice the pattern "This is..." with five classroom items, in which three out of the four main learning activities dealt with the way to teach a vocabulary set of classroom objects, separately from the pattern. While these three activities all focused on recognizing the meaning and sound of the five classroom items, the activity in the consolidation stage required children to write sentences introducing the classroom items.

Moreover, although each lesson started with a warm-up activity with the purpose to revise the previous lesson, there still lacked evidence of the link between what was to be learnt with what had been learnt. The teachers seemed to mechanically follow a revision of the latest taught lesson rather than sought for the natural and appropriate connection. For

example, in a lesson, the warm-up activity reviewed the way how to ask about the other's age whereas the new input was introducing rooms in a house. It seemed that the teachers failed to identify what the children already knew, therefore, without that knowledge, couldnot extend student current knowledge and understanding.

In regard to collecting evidence of student learning toward the learning goals, there was little evidence of instructional alignment between the intended learning outcomes for the children and the tasks that facilitate them. Moreover, the number of students who had their work checked/monitored limited to a few. Therefore, the act of teacher's assessment of the learning or achievement seemed to be rather superficial.

*Not enough attention was paid to student active role in learning/assessment*

The current assessment practices did not succeed in helping children to become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and to learn to monitor their own progress. The process of self-assessment was not emphasized, therefore, children did not involve in the learning process and might have negative attitude to teacher's feedback. This indicated that the teachers tended to underestimate the roles of students in the assessment process (Anh, [37]) An example is that teachers valued/counted merely students' work which was checked or marked by the teacher as the only source of evidence of children's learning.

## **5. Principles of CFAPF**

In the context of Vietnam, since English is an optional subject in the primary classrooms, and both teachers and children are able to spend

more time on informal teaching-assessment activities than on formal tests – it is possible to make a strong case for the development of a CFAPF. Based on major findings from the case study, it is necessary to take into consideration of three principles, namely particularity, practicality and promotion of learning.

#### *Particularity*

In Vietnamese context when implementing FA, it is necessary to take account of the realities of the classroom where students may not be active and rely on teachers' corrective feedback with heavy guidance in order to be able to self-assess. Teachers are faced with large classes so that access to individual monitoring and scaffolding is limited. They also have little time and few facilities, and so, without additional support and guidance, may feel that they cannot make detailed records of every child's progress on the daily basis.

Apart from such practical aspects, there is also the influence of teachers' own beliefs and attitudes about FA on the way they interpret this approach and internalize it into their assessment practices. This article has mentioned in the preceding section that most teachers in Vietnam misconceive FA as the accumulation of tests or worksheets that measure constituent parts of language as an on-going assessment or FA – and such beliefs will implicitly impact on any attempt to take forward/implement a framework for such assessment.

Therefore, it is very important to take account of both the practical realities of particular local classrooms and teachers' attitudes and beliefs when trying to implement new approaches of assessment.

#### *Practicality*

Practicality relates to the relationship between theory and practice, which entails a

teacher-generated theory of practice. “*It recognizes that no theory of practice can be fully useful and usable unless it is generated through practice.*” (Kumaravadivelu, [39], p. 35)

Regarding the assessment framework, practicality can be seen through time management, classroom management, and organization of learning/assessment activities. Given that the lesson duration is just 35-40 minutes, primary teachers need to work with whole class while avoiding spending too much time on a few individuals [11]. In terms of classroom management, FA requires planning and record keeping in order to ensure that all students are helped in such a strategic way over the course of a term or session, but a more practical way for primary teachers to make this procedure manageable is to quantify the evidence rather than make it qualitative [11]. Similarly, creating learning conditions is required in a lesson in order to incorporate questioning, direct feedback, redirect the learning, and facilitate self- assessment and peer-assessment in appropriate manner.

#### *Promotion of learning*

In order for FA to promote learning, the case study suggests that (1) teachers should be more reflective and thoughtful in the act of setting learning goals and seeking ways to measure how students achieve these, and (2) students should be encouraged to be active learners. Day-to-day assessment should be focused on the learning needs of students. Each student should feel secure and willing to take risk, knowing that their teacher supports them in achieving their learning goals. All children can experience a sense of success (Vale, [40]) and should be given the opportunities to show what they know, understand and can do as well

as what they do not know, misunderstand and cannot do ([12]; Georgiou & Pavlou, [41]). Students need to be provided with experiment in language, where they can play with language and learn from the mistakes (Halliwell, [42]; Moon, [43];). In this sense, 'wrong answer' is a good opportunity to take learning forward in a supportive way [11]. FAF is all about helping children to improve their learning behavior as a result of achieving success in their learning ([1]; [2]; [10]; Cameron, [44]) It is the act of 'closing the gap' between their current performance and the desired goals [1]; [7]; [10]. This implies clear planning and teaching for understanding on the part of the teacher, accompanied with active engagement and effort on the part of the student. The role of teacher is, therefore, to design a valid learning/assessing activity which reveals both student's understanding and misunderstanding, from that knowledge providing feedback and scaffolding within the student's zone of proximal development [12]; [44] in order to help students close that gap [9]; [10]; [11].

## 6. Conclusion

This article has reviewed studies related to teacher assessment practices. It has described the methodology and major findings from the case study which help to shape the principles for developing the contextualized formative assessment practice framework. Here are the key points of the framework:

First, the framework is used for the daily process in which daily lesson planning incorporates assessment with clear setting learning goals and ways to measure these.

Second, the framework simultaneously focuses on the three components of FA,

namely, (1) the validity of the teaching-assessing activity that reveals student learning, (2) feedback and scaffolding techniques from the teacher, which help to teach within the student's zone of proximal development, and (3) self-assessment and self-regulation from student that helps develop active learning.

Third, the framework takes account of poor-facility learning conditions, time management and classroom management. It provides teachers with such effective techniques as effective whole class teaching, accelerated self- and peer-assessment, and manageable procedure of recording evidence of learning

## References

- [1] P. Black & D. William, Assessment and classroom learning, *Assessment in Education* 5 (1) (1998) 7.
- [2] S. M. Brookhart & C. M. Moss, *Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom*, The USA, ASCD, 2009.
- [3] D. Carless, Prospects for the implementation of assessment for learning. *Assessment in Education*, 12(1), (2005) 39.
- [4] Bachman. L.F. & Palmer A.S. (1996). *Language Testing in Practice*. Oxford University Press.
- [5] C Colby-Kelly & C. E. Turner, AFL Research in the L2 Classroom and Evidence of Usefulness: Taking Formative Assessment to the Next Level, *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 64 (1), (2007), 9.
- [6] W. Harlen & J. Winter, The Development of Assessment for Learning: Learning from the Case of Science and Mathematics, *Language Testing*, 21 (3), (2004) 390.
- [7] D. R. Sadler, Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. *Instructional Science*, 18, (1989) 119.
- [8] P. Black & J. Jones, Formative Assessment and the Learning and Teaching of MFL: Sharing the Language Learning Road Map with the Learners, *Language Learning Journal*, 34 (Winter), (2006), 4.

- [9] D. Lambert & D. Lines, *Understanding assessment*, The USA, Routledge Falmer, 2000.
- [10] K. M. Cauley & J. M. McMillan, *Formative Assessment Techniques to Support Student Motivation and Achievement*, The Clearing House 83. 1 (2010) 1.
- [11] W. J. Popham, *Transformative Assessment*, The USA: ASCD, 2008.
- [12] P. Harris, *Employing formative assessment in the classroom*, *Improving School*, 10, Sage Club, (2007) 249.
- [13] Cohen. A. (1994). *Assessing Language Ability in the Classroom*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- [14] P. Rea-Dickins, *Mirror, mirror on the wall: Identifying processes of classroom assessment*. *Language Testing*, 18(4), (2001) 429.
- [15] F. Gatullo, *Formative assessment in ELT primary (elementary) classrooms: an Italian case study*. *Language Testing* 17(2), (2000) 278.
- [16] P. McKay, *Assessing Young Language Learners*, The UK, CUP, 2006.
- [17] P. Rea-Dickins & S. Gardner, *Snares and silver bullets: Disentangling the construct of formative assessment*. *Language Testing*, 17(2), (2000) 217.
- [18] J. Abedi, *Research and recommendation for formative assessment with English language learners*. In Andrade & Cizek (Eds). *Handbook of Formative Assessment*. New York & London: Routledge, 2010.
- [19] H. Torrance & J. Pryor, *Investigating Formative Assessment*, The USA, Open University Press, 1998.
- [20] P. Rea-Dickins, *Classroom-based Assessment: Possibilities and Pitfalls*, *International Handbook of English Language Teaching*, *International Handbooks of Education*, Springer (15), (2007) 505.
- [21] *Primary English Language Curriculum (Chương trình Tiếng Anh tiểu học)*, Bộ GD & ĐT, 2010.
- [22] *National Foreign Languages 2020 Project (Đề án dạy và học ngoại ngữ trong hệ thống giáo dục quốc dân 2008-2012)*, Bộ GD & ĐT, 2008.
- [23] *Primary English Teacher Competency Framework*, NIES + BC (Viện nghiên cứu khoa học giáo dục và Hội đồng Anh hợp tác), 2011.
- [24] L. Cohen, L. Manion & K. R. B.Morrison, *Research Methods in Education (sixth edition)*. London: Routledge, 2007.
- [25] C. Lankshear & M. Knobel, *A Handbook for Teacher Research*, The UK: Open University Press, 2004.
- [26] D. Nunan, *Understanding Language Classrooms*, The UK: Prentice Hall International Ltd, 1989.
- [27] S. Stoyhoff, *Case study in TESOL practice*, *ELT Journal* Volume 58/4 October, (2004) 379.
- [28] M. Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, The UK: OUP, 2003.
- [29] S. B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001.
- [30] R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, SAGE, 2009.
- [31] [31] C. Gipps, E. Hargreaves & B. McCallum, *What Makes a Good Primary School Teacher?: Expert Classroom Strategies*, Routledge, 2000.
- [32] P. A. Duff, *Case Study Research in Applied Linguistics*. The USA: LEA, 2008.
- [33] R. E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research*, CA: Sage, 1995.
- [34] E. S Lincoln & E. G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, SAGE, 1985.
- [35] D. Silverman, *Doing Qualitative Research: A Comprehensive Guide*, SAGE, 2008.
- [36] A. Campbell, O. McNamara & P. Gilroy, *Practitioner Research and Professional Development in Education*, SAGE, 2004.
- [37] P. L. Anh, *Formative Assessment in Primary English Classrooms in Vietnam*, in Davies P.P. (Ed.). *New Directions: Assessment and Evaluation*. The UK: British Council, (2011) 33.
- [38] M. Harris & P. McCann, *Assessment*, The UK: MacMillan, 1994.
- [39] B. Kumaravivelu, *Beyond Methods*, The USA, Yale University Press, 2003.
- [40] D. Vale & A. Feunteun, *Teaching Children English*, The UK, CUP, 1995.
- [41] S. I. Georgiou & P. Pavlou, *Assessing Young Learners*, The UK, OUP, 2003.
- [42] S. Halliwell, *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom*, The USA, Longman, 1992.
- [43] J. Moon, *Children Learning English*, MacMillan Press Ltd, 2000.
- [44] L. Cameron, *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. The UK, CUP, 2001.

# Nghiên cứu thực trạng kiểm tra đánh giá trên lớp của giáo viên tiếng Anh tại ba trường tiểu học ở Hà Nội: Đề xuất khung kiểm tra đánh giá thường xuyên phù hợp bối cảnh thực tế

Phạm Lan Anh

Khoa Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Giáo dục  
Đường Dương Quảng Hàm, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam

**Tóm tắt:** Kiểm tra đánh giá thường xuyên (KTĐGTX) được xem là đòn bẩy tác động mạnh mẽ đến việc nâng cao chất lượng của quá trình dạy và học. Tuy nhiên, trong các hoàn cảnh cụ thể, việc tiến hành KTĐGTX không đạt được hiệu quả như mong muốn do thiếu một khung KTĐGTX phù hợp để định hướng nhằm đạt kết quả tối ưu. Qua việc nghiên cứu thực trạng giáo viên Tiếng Anh tiến hành kiểm tra đánh giá trong quá trình giảng dạy trên lớp tại ba trường tiểu học ở Hà Nội, bài báo đề xuất một số nguyên tắc xây dựng khung KTĐGTX phù hợp bối cảnh thực tế. Trước tiên, tác giả điếm qua một số nghiên cứu thực trạng kiểm tra đánh giá tại các quốc gia Phương Tây và Hồng Kông, sau đó lý giải vì sao cần phải có khung KTĐGTX phù hợp bối cảnh thực tế tại các lớp học được chọn nghiên cứu ở Hà Nội. Tiếp theo, bài báo mô tả phương pháp luận nghiên cứu của đề tài. Dựa trên những phát hiện chính chất lọc từ quan sát quy trình kiểm tra, từ các minh chứng KTĐGTX nằm ngay trong các giáo án dạy hàng ngày và các yếu tố cản trở KTĐGTX, các nguyên tắc ‘*đặc thù*’, ‘*thực tế*’ và ‘*thúc đẩy học tập*’ được đề xuất để xây dựng khung KTĐGTX phù hợp bối cảnh thực tế. Cuối cùng, trong phần kết luận, bài báo nhấn mạnh một số điểm mấu chốt được coi là điều kiện cần và đủ để áp dụng thành công khung KTĐGTX phù hợp bối cảnh thực tế như: phải chú trọng đến việc soạn giáo án cho từng tiết dạy, phải đồng thời quan tâm đến cả ba thành tố của KTĐGTX, và phải tính đến các điều kiện dạy và học đặc thù trong từng hoàn cảnh thực tế.

**Từ khóa:** kiểm tra đánh giá, kiểm tra đánh giá phục vụ học tập, kiểm tra đánh giá thường xuyên, giảng dạy Tiếng Anh cho trẻ em, giảng dạy Tiếng Anh.