

The Application of Formative Assessment in Senior High School English Classroom Teaching

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Abstract

Formative assessment is a core evaluation method proposed in the 2025 Edition of General High School English Curriculum Standards, which highlights the integration of teaching, learning and assessment and takes the cultivation of students' English core competencies as the fundamental goal. Traditional senior high school English teaching overemphasizes summative assessment represented by examinations, ignores the tracking of students' learning process, and fails to give timely and targeted guidance to students' learning difficulties. Based on the theories of second language acquisition and formative evaluation, this paper sorts out the connotation, functional value and implementation principles of formative assessment in English teaching, constructs a multi-dimensional implementation strategy system covering listening, speaking, reading and writing modules, and puts forward feasible optimization paths for the popularization of formative assessment in senior high school English classrooms. The research aims to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for teachers to carry out process-oriented evaluation and promote the all-round development of students' language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability.

Keywords

Senior High School English; Formative Assessment; Integration of Teaching, Learning and Assessment; English Core Competencies

1. Introduction

Evaluation is an indispensable link in foreign language teaching, which bears the dual functions of diagnosing learning effects and adjusting teaching behaviors. For a long time, senior high school English teaching has relied excessively on summative assessment such as monthly examinations and mid-term and final examinations. This single evaluation mode only focuses on students' final scores, neglects individual differences in learning processes, and cannot capture students' progress, confusion and growth in daily classroom practice.

With the release of the 2025 Edition of General High School English Curriculum

Standards, the integration of teaching, learning and assessment has become a guiding idea for English teaching reform. The curriculum standards clearly require teachers to implement formative assessment throughout the whole teaching process, take students' all-round competency development as the orientation, and realize the organic unity of evaluation, teaching and learning. Formative assessment focuses on collecting diversified learning information in classroom interaction, homework completion, oral expression and group cooperation, so as to feed back students' learning status in a timely manner.

Domestic and foreign scholars have carried out rich research on formative assessment. Black & Wiliam (1998) proved through empirical research that formative assessment can significantly improve students' learning efficiency and learning confidence. Domestic scholars Wang Lifei & Chen Gong (2023) systematically combed the theoretical system and practical operation of formative assessment in foreign language teaching, but most existing research either stays at the theoretical level or only discusses single-module teaching, lacking a systematic operation framework adapted to the whole process of senior high school English listening, speaking, reading and writing teaching.

In view of the above research gaps and practical pain points, this paper first defines the core connotation and multiple functions of formative assessment, summarizes the basic implementation principles suitable for senior high school English classrooms, constructs targeted formative assessment strategies for different teaching modules, and finally proposes multi-dimensional optimization paths from the perspectives of teaching concepts, teacher literacy, evaluation system and classroom environment, so as to promote the effective landing of formative assessment in daily English teaching.

2. Theoretical Basis and Core Connotation of Formative Assessment in English Teaching

2.1. Theoretical Support of Formative Assessment

2.1.1. Second Language Acquisition Theory

Selinker's interlanguage theory (1972) holds that learners' language learning is a gradual construction process from interlanguage to target language, and errors and progress in the learning process are valuable signals reflecting learners' cognitive status. Formative assessment continuously records learners' interlanguage development track through process tracking, helping teachers accurately grasp students' learning obstacles caused by native language negative transfer, overgeneralization of target language rules and other factors, and adjust teaching content in a targeted manner.

2.1.2. Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivism believes that learning is an active meaning construction activity of

learners rather than passive acceptance of knowledge. Formative assessment breaks the one-way evaluation mode dominated by teachers, introduces self-assessment and peer assessment, encourages students to reflect on their own learning gains and deficiencies, and stimulates students' subjective initiative in knowledge construction, which is consistent with the student-centered teaching concept advocated by the new curriculum standards.

2.1.3. Theory of Integration of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The 2025 Edition of General High School English Curriculum Standards puts forward the integrated logic of teaching, learning and assessment: teaching sets learning goals, learning reflects teaching effects, and assessment feeds back teaching and learning to realize circular optimization. Formative assessment is the core carrier of this integration mechanism, which embeds evaluation links into every teaching session, making evaluation serve teaching and learning rather than exist independently after teaching.

2.2. Concept Definition and Core Functions of Formative Assessment

Formative assessment refers to a continuous, diversified and developmental evaluation activity carried out by teachers in the whole process of English teaching, which collects students' learning performance through classroom observation, task performance, homework feedback, group cooperation display and other ways, feeds back evaluation information in a timely manner, guides students to adjust learning strategies, and supports teachers to optimize teaching design. Different from summative assessment that focuses on final results, it takes promoting students' growth as the core orientation and has four major functional values:

First, diagnostic function. It can accurately identify students' weak points in language knowledge, pragmatic application and thinking ability, distinguish common learning difficulties and individual personalized problems, and provide a basis for differentiated teaching.

Second, motivational function. Timely positive feedback and phased progress recording can reduce students' foreign language anxiety, enhance learning self-confidence, and stimulate internal learning motivation.

Third, developmental function. Through self-reflection and peer evaluation, students can develop autonomous learning ability, critical thinking and cooperative communication literacy, realizing the comprehensive cultivation of English core competencies.

Fourth, teaching adjustment function. Massive process evaluation data help teachers reflect on the rationality of teaching objectives, activity design and exercise arrangement, and realize dynamic adjustment of classroom teaching.

2.3. Distinction between Formative Assessment and Summative Assessment

There are essential differences between formative assessment and traditional summative assessment in evaluation time, evaluation content, main body, purpose and feedback mode, as shown in the following comparison:

(1) Evaluation timing: Formative assessment runs through the whole learning process; summative assessment is carried out after a unit, stage or semester learning.

(2) Evaluation content: Formative assessment covers classroom performance, oral tasks, group cooperation, homework, learning portfolios and other multi-dimensional contents; summative assessment mainly examines knowledge mastery through written test papers.

(3) Evaluation subjects: Formative assessment includes teachers, students themselves, peers and even parents; summative assessment is dominated by teachers as examiners.

(4) Core purpose: Formative assessment focuses on discovering problems and promoting progress; summative assessment focuses on grading and screening learning results.

(5) Feedback mode: Formative assessment adopts timely, detailed and suggestive feedback; summative assessment only provides scores and simple error analysis.

Confusing the two evaluation methods will lead to two extreme phenomena: either over-reliance on examinations and ignoring process growth, or excessive trivial process evaluation increasing the teaching burden of teachers and students. Only by combining the two organically can we build a complete English evaluation system.

3. Basic Implementation Principles of Formative Assessment in Senior High School English

3.1. Core Competency-Oriented Principle

Formative assessment should not only examine students' mastery of vocabulary, grammar and other linguistic knowledge, but also take the four dimensions of English core competencies (language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality, learning ability) as the evaluation framework. When evaluating oral and written tasks, teachers should pay attention to students' cross-cultural communication awareness, logical expression thinking and autonomous learning strategies, instead of only taking language accuracy as the single evaluation standard.

3.2. Student-Centered Developmental Principle

All evaluation activities should respect students' individual differences and take promoting students' long-term development as the starting point. Evaluation standards should focus on students' self-progress comparison rather than horizontal ranking among classmates. More self-assessment and peer assessment links should be designed to let students become the main body of evaluation and master the ability to reflect on learning independently.

3.3. Diversified Evaluation Principle

The diversification is reflected in three dimensions: diversified evaluation subjects (teacher evaluation, self-evaluation, peer evaluation, parent evaluation), diversified evaluation forms (classroom observation records, learning portfolios, oral task scoring, group performance evaluation, homework comment cards), and diversified evaluation standards (differentiated scoring criteria for students with different language proficiency). Single written evaluation should be completely abandoned.

3.4. Timely and Suggestive Feedback Principle

The value of formative assessment lies in timely feedback. After each classroom task, unit activity and homework, teachers should give feedback as soon as possible. Feedback should avoid simple scoring, and put forward targeted optimization suggestions for students' specific problems, guide students to clarify improvement directions, and realize the closed loop of "evaluation-feedback-improvement".

3.5. Moderate Burden Principle

The design of formative assessment tasks and recording forms should be concise and operable, avoiding complicated and repetitive evaluation records that occupy a great deal of teachers' and students' spare time. Teachers can classify and simplify evaluation indicators according to teaching modules, and realize efficient process evaluation with the help of simple scoring tables and electronic learning portfolios.

4. Multi-dimensional Implementation Strategies of Formative Assessment for English Teaching Modules

4.1. Formative Assessment Strategy for Oral English Teaching

Oral teaching takes cultivating students' communicative fluency and pragmatic awareness as the goal, and formative assessment focuses on classroom dialogue, group discussion, speech presentation and role-play tasks:

- (1) Classroom real-time observation record: Design simple oral evaluation indicators including pronunciation and intonation, fluency, content logic, active participation and polite pragmatic expression, and record students' performance in daily dialogue at any time.
- (2) Phased oral task evaluation: Take a unit as a cycle, arrange group role-play or theme speech, adopt the joint evaluation mode of teacher scoring + peer scoring, and give targeted feedback on fluency blocking and pragmatic errors.
- (3) Oral progress portfolio: Encourage students to record their own oral presentation audio every week, compare the audio of different stages, complete self-assessment forms, and record their own progress and pronunciation problems.

4.2. Formative Assessment Strategy for Writing Teaching

Writing teaching balances language accuracy, structural coherence and ideological

expression, and builds a multi-round formative evaluation system of “draft feedback-revision re-evaluation-final portfolio”:

- (1) Draft stage: Teachers mark errors in vocabulary, grammar and logic with indirect feedback symbols, put forward revision suggestions for text structure, and guide students to complete the first revision independently.
- (2) Peer revision stage: Design unified writing evaluation rubrics covering content, logic, language and coherence, let students exchange compositions for mutual evaluation, and write down peer modification suggestions.
- (3) Final evaluation and portfolio collection: Teachers comprehensively score the revised compositions, write developmental comments focusing on progress, and collect all drafts and revised versions into students’ writing portfolios as the main material of formative assessment.

4.3. Formative Assessment Strategy for Reading Teaching

Reading teaching focuses on the cultivation of information acquisition, logical reasoning and cross-cultural interpretation ability, and formative assessment is embedded in pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading links:

- (1) Pre-reading evaluation: Evaluate students’ activation of background knowledge and prediction ability through questioning and brainstorming, and record students’ participation status.
- (2) While-reading process tracking: Observe students’ ability to locate key information, infer author’s attitude and analyze text logic, and record common reading strategy deficiencies.
- (3) Post-reading task evaluation: Take mind-map drawing, text retelling, viewpoint discussion and reading reflection logs as evaluation carriers, assess students’ text comprehension and critical thinking level, and give phased reading ability feedback every unit.

4.4. Formative Assessment Strategy for Listening Teaching

Listening teaching focuses on capturing key information and listening strategy application, and formative assessment breaks the single post-listening test mode:

- (1) Real-time listening segment feedback: After completing short listening exercises in class, replay difficult segments, record students’ error types such as phonetic recognition deviation and key information missing, and give targeted strategy guidance.
- (2) Weekly listening task evaluation: Assign graded listening materials suitable for students’ different levels, check listening notes and key information extraction records, and evaluate students’ persistence and strategy mastery.
- (3) Listening progress tracking table: Record the change of students’ listening accuracy rate in unit tests, compare their own historical data, and affirm phased progress to reduce listening anxiety.

4.5. Closed-loop Formative Assessment Strategy Based on Integration of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Construct a complete closed-loop evaluation chain of “teaching design-process evaluation-feedback guidance-learning improvement”:

- (1) Pre-teaching link: Clarify formative evaluation indicators matching unit teaching objectives, predict possible learning difficulties, and design supporting evaluation tasks in advance.
- (2) In-teaching link: Collect diversified learning information through classroom observation, task performance and group interaction, and implement real-time formative evaluation.
- (3) Post-teaching feedback link: Summarize common problems and individual deficiencies through evaluation data, give classified feedback to the whole class and individuals respectively, and put forward targeted improvement tasks.
- (4) Recycle improvement link: Arrange targeted consolidation exercises according to feedback results, carry out secondary evaluation of students’ improvement effect, and adjust the next unit’s teaching design based on the overall evaluation data.

5. Optimization Paths to Promote the Effective Implementation of Formative Assessment

5.1. Renew Teaching Concepts and Establish Developmental Evaluation Awareness

First, teachers should abandon the single score-oriented evaluation concept, take the cultivation of core competencies as the fundamental orientation, and regard process evaluation as an indispensable part of teaching rather than an additional task. Second, schools should organize special training on the 2025 Edition English Curriculum Standards, help teachers deeply understand the connotation of integration of teaching, learning and assessment, and establish a developmental evaluation view focusing on students’ growth process. Third, teachers should change the dominant evaluation identity, fully respect students’ subject status, and actively promote self-assessment and peer assessment to realize two-way interactive evaluation.

5.2. Strengthen Teachers’ Professional Literacy of Formative Assessment

Schools should carry out multi-dimensional teaching and research activities to improve teachers’ evaluation ability: organize open demonstration lessons of formative assessment, let excellent teachers share operable evaluation rubrics and portfolio cases; carry out special research on formative assessment in teaching and research groups, and jointly solve practical difficulties such as indicator design and burden reduction; invite university foreign language education experts to give lectures on formative evaluation theories, laying a theoretical foundation for

teachers' evaluation practice. At the same time, teachers should take the initiative to learn second language acquisition and evaluation theories, and continuously optimize their own evaluation operation ability through classroom reflection.

5.3. Improve the Diversified and Complete Evaluation System

First, integrate formative assessment and summative assessment reasonably, clarify the proportion of formative results in the overall semester evaluation, and ensure the process evaluation has sufficient weight to arouse the attention of teachers, students and parents. Second, build a multi-subject evaluation system including teacher evaluation, student self-evaluation, peer evaluation and parent evaluation, and give full play to the joint evaluation role of all subjects. Third, enrich diversified evaluation carriers: popularize electronic learning portfolios to reduce manual sorting burden; design standardized and simplified evaluation rubrics for listening, speaking, reading and writing modules; adopt situational task evaluation instead of single written testing.

5.4. Build an Inclusive Classroom and Home-School Collaborative Evaluation Environment

First, create a relaxed and inclusive classroom evaluation atmosphere. Teachers should adopt more encouraging feedback language in formative assessment, focus on affirming students' progress, reduce the sense of frustration brought by evaluation, and relieve students' foreign language anxiety. Second, make full use of information technology tools such as online learning platforms to record students' oral audio, writing drafts and classroom performance, realize digital and efficient tracking of formative data. Third, strengthen home-school communication, popularize the developmental value of formative assessment to parents, guide parents to pay attention to their children's daily learning progress rather than only exam scores, and form a joint educational force of home and school to promote students' continuous growth.

6. Conclusion

Formative assessment is a key reform measure to implement the requirements of integration of teaching, learning and assessment in the 2025 Edition of General High School English Curriculum Standards, which makes up for the defects of traditional summative assessment that only focuses on results. Based on second language acquisition and constructivist theories, this paper sorts out the connotation, functional value and five basic implementation principles of formative assessment, constructs targeted formative assessment strategies adapted to listening, speaking, reading and writing teaching modules, and builds a closed-loop evaluation system integrating teaching, learning and assessment. In view of the practical difficulties in classroom implementation, four optimization paths are proposed from the

dimensions of teaching concepts, teachers' professional ability, evaluation system and home-school environment.

The effective implementation of formative assessment requires teachers to adhere to the competency-oriented and student-centered concepts, design diversified, moderate and developmental evaluation tasks according to the characteristics of different teaching modules, and embed evaluation into every link of daily teaching to realize the mutual promotion of evaluation, teaching and learning.

Future research can carry out long-term empirical tracking research, explore the specific influence of different formative assessment tools on students' four core competencies; combine artificial intelligence and big data technology to develop intelligent formative evaluation platforms, reduce teachers' manual evaluation burden, and provide more scientific and operable practical schemes for senior high school English teaching evaluation reform.

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