

The role of formative assessment in improving junior high school students' English learning motivation and performance

Lifang CAI

Guangzhou Junjing Middle School, Guangzhou 510665, China

Abstract: Formative assessment differs from result-oriented summative assessment in that it is conducted around the process of students' performance. This kind of evaluation runs through the entire process of students' classroom interaction, after-class tasks, and phased learning reflection. Paying attention to students' knowledge construction level and thinking development can more sensitively capture the potential problems they encounter in the learning process, analyze their strengths and potential, understand their development needs, and thus provide teachers with a more personalized basis for judging students' learning situations.

Keywords: formative evaluation; English teaching; learning motivation

1 Introduction

The junior high school stage is a critical period for English learning, and learning motivation is closely related to learning outcomes. Currently, traditional summative assessment focuses on results and is difficult to promptly identify students' learning problems. It also tends to cause anxiety and weaken their learning initiative. Formative assessment, in contrast, is based on the learning process and runs through classroom interactions, after-class tasks, and other links, enabling dynamic tracking of learning situations. This article centers on its core connotation, analyzes the incentive mechanism for junior high school students' English learning motivation, and explores through teaching cases to provide references for improving English teaching quality and students' learning outcomes.

2 The core connotation of formative assessment

The core features of formative assessment lie in timeliness and interactivity: timeliness should emphasize prompt and accurate feedback. Through various means such as classroom observation of students, homework correction, oral questioning, and learning archives, students' behaviors are promptly fed back, and feedback is output within a short period of time [1]. Teachers should point out the specific problems that students encounter in the application of knowledge understanding and skills, help students quickly adjust their cognitive strategies, and avoid the accumulation of mistakes. Interactivity refers to the fact that during the evaluation process, teachers should break the situation where they are the sole evaluator, allowing students to participate in the teaching evaluation, giving students the initiative to reflect on learning through evaluation, guiding students to summarize their own learning process, and expressing it through forms such as group discussions and peer feedback. It stimulates students' awareness of active evaluation, enabling them to recognize their dominant position in the learning process and actively think about how to learn and how well they learn.

3 The incentive mechanism of formative assessment on junior high school students' motivation for English learning

Learning motivation is the core driving force for students to engage in learning activities. For junior high school students, they are in a critical period of language learning. Enhancing learning motivation can significantly improve the continuity and depth of students' learning. Formative assessment focuses on the learning process of students, emphasizing the interaction between students and teachers as well as other students [2]. It can build an internal incentive mechanism, thereby awakening students' willingness to learn actively.

On the one hand, formative assessment can provide students with precise feedback, alleviate their anxiety during the learning process, help them recognize the problems existing in their learning process, and thereby guide students to form a positive cognition and evaluation of their own abilities, reducing the uncertainty in students' learning process and relieving their stress. Students and teachers can delve into the details of the learning process through interaction, allowing students to break down knowledge understanding, skill application, thinking patterns and other aspects one by one. By doing so, they can identify clear areas for improvement, track their own progress, and form a belief that "I can enhance my ability through effort". This process ultimately fosters a clear sense of self-efficacy and makes students more willing to be proactive when encountering problems and more likely to maintain resilience when facing difficulties.

On the other hand, formative assessment can alleviate students' anxiety, avoid the high risks and high pressure brought by the "result-oriented" approach in traditional assessment, and enable students to build their sense of belief through continuous trial and error, feeling that the assessment is a form of support for them rather than a judgment, which can reduce the evasive behavior caused by negative evaluations and maintain a stable learning motivation. This can effectively reduce the negative emotions of students in junior high school who are in a sensitive period and enhance their sense of participation [3].

4 Case analysis of formative assessment in stimulating students' motivation for English learning

Taking Module 3 Unit 5 "Visiting the Moon" as an example, the teaching evaluation objectives are divided into three levels, namely:

Phase 1: Pre-class preview and evaluation - Activate background knowledge and position the starting point of learning

Task: Draw the "Lunar Travel Vocabulary Map"

Operation: Students read the first three paragraphs of the text independently, use mind maps to sort out the vocabulary related to "lunar travel", and mark the known words (★) and unfamiliar words (?), and speculate on its meaning.

Evaluation tool: Teachers design the "Preview Vocabulary Evaluation Form", scoring from three aspects: "clarity of vocabulary classification", "rationality of speculation", and "expansiveness" (using a three-level evaluation system of "★/△/○", where ★= excellent, △= needs improvement, and ○ = needs to be strengthened).

Feedback method: Five minutes before class, the students exchange their mind maps within the group, mark the "highlight words" and "words to be discussed" of each other with colored pens. The teacher selects typical cases for projection comments, focuses on explaining high-frequency and unfamiliar words, and records common problems in the "Class Reading Problem List".

Phase 2: In-class reading evaluation - Focus on process interaction to deepen text understanding

Task 1: "Information Treasure Hunt" Group Cooperation (15 minutes)

Operation: Split the text into four segments: "Travel Preparation → Space Experience → Lunar Activities → Return

to Earth". Each group will draw one segment and complete the "Information Extraction Task Sheet" by scanning and reading. The division of labor among group members is as follows: one person records key sentences, two individuals verify the accuracy of the information, and one member represents the group to report.

Evaluation tool

Group Mutual Evaluation Form: Non-competing groups will conduct mutual evaluations from the aspects of "information completeness", "cooperation efficiency", and "language accuracy", and fill in "+1 (Merit)" and "△ (Suggestion)".

Teacher's observation form: Record students' performance in tasks, such as "quickly locating key words" or "needs to enhance the ability to break down long sentences", with a focus on the participation of students with learning difficulties.

Task 2: In-depth understanding of "Opinion Debate" (10 minutes)

Operation: Based on the "pros and cons of Lunar travel" in the text, students are divided into the affirmative and negative sides and use "I think..., because...". When expressing viewpoints in sentence patterns, details from the text should be cited as evidence.

Evaluation method: Teachers provide immediate feedback, focusing on "relevance of evidence" and "logical coherence". Use "star stickers" (★★★= excellent, ★★= good, ★= need to work hard) to stick on the corresponding pages of students' textbooks. After class, they can be pasted in the "Growth File folder".

Based on the above steps, the teaching adjustment can be completed. If the error rate of scientific terms such as "gravity" and "weightless" in the pre-class vocabulary preview is high, teachers can add a "picture matching" warm-up activity before the next class. If the "information extraction is incomplete" in the group task, the subsequent reading class will strengthen the special training of "keyword positioning".

5 Conclusion

Formative assessment has obvious value in stimulating students' initiative in English learning. When teachers adopt non-quantitative methods in the assessment process, it can reduce students' educational emotions. Students can compare their performance throughout the entire learning process and directly observe their progress. Each link includes interaction between teachers and students as well as among students. Students can learn to evaluate and be evaluated in the process of learning and doing, fully demonstrating the core value of evaluation promoting learning.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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About the Author

Lifang Cai (born June 1983), Female; Han ethnicity; Hometown: Nanning, Guangxi; Educational level: Master; Title: Lecturer; Research direction: English teaching.