

Literature Review on the Construction of Formative Assessment System in College English Reading Teaching

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Abstract

This paper reviews the previous researches home and abroad on the construction of formative assessment system in foreign language teaching, especially the teaching of reading for English majors, which aims to point out the problems of the present course assessment methods used in the reading course for English majors, and highlight the necessity of building an assessment system with the characteristics of English reading course. The author hopes the present study can promote the teaching reform of English reading course, and furthermore improve the quality of talent training for English majors as well as translation majors.

Key words: Formative assessment; English reading; Teaching reform

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept “formative assessment” was first put forward by the Scriven, philosopher of the University of Chicago, in 1967 when he mentioned curriculum reforms. It refers to the evaluating students’ performance, academic achievements, the development of their emotions, attitudes, strategies and other aspects reflected in their daily learning process. Its purpose is to encourage students to learn, help students effectively control their learning

process, enable students to gain a sense of success, enhance their self-confidence, and cultivate their spirit of cooperation (Zhou, Xie, 2005). Formative assessment is also called classroom assessment, school assessment or achievement portfolio assessment.

In recent decades, scholars at home and abroad have explored the concept, characteristics, connotation, necessity and the role of formative assessment in teaching from different perspectives. Compared with summative assessment, formative assessment refers to the assessment of the performance of students in their daily learning process and the development of their emotions, attitudes, strategies and other aspects. It occurs in the process of teaching and learning and is an integral part of teaching and learning. Its ultimate purpose is not only to improve students’ academic performance, but also to help students achieve self-regulation in their learning, thus stimulating their learning motivation so that they can get a sense of achievement, promote their self-confidence in learning, making learning full of motivation, and making students transfer from passive acceptance of assessment into the subject and active participant of assessment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Researches Abroad

In 1967, the American philosopher, Scriven, first put forward the term “formative assessment”. Then in 1969, American educator Bloom introduced the concept of “formative assessment” into the field of education assessment, and proposed that in the formative stage of students’ learning, that is, in the learning process, students’ learning should be tracked and evaluated so that students can solve their problems in the learning process through timely adjustment. Summative assessment alone will have a negative impact on students’ learning interest and learning attitude. In the 1980s, Brooks and Sadler put forward the term “formative assessment”, believing that

students should be given practical opportunities to use knowledge and skills they have acquired, and get teachers' timely feedback on their performance.

Many scholars began to study the differences between formative assessment and summative assessment. Compared with formative assessment, summative assessment is the assessment of students' learning results after they have completed their learning of the course, and cannot play a guiding role in the learning process of students and the teaching process of teachers. Black and William (1998) proposed that formative assessment refers to evaluating students' performance, academic achievements, the development of their emotions, attitudes, strategies and other aspects reflected in their daily learning process. The purpose is to encourage students to learn, help students effectively control their learning process, enable students to obtain a sense of achievement, enhance their self-confidence, and cultivate the spirit of cooperation.

Keig (2000) conducted a survey in various colleges of the University of Liberal Arts in order to investigate their attitudes towards the four methods of formative assessment (classroom observation, classroom video, assessment on textbook materials and students' learning materials). Gill (2004) used interviews, questionnaires, diaries and other forms to investigate students' attitudes towards formative assessment and the impact of formative assessment on students' learning, and the results were quite positive.

McMillan (2007) summarized the ten differences between formative assessment and summative assessment, and concluded that formative assessment has the characteristics of immediacy, flexibility and informality, with the purpose of providing timely feedback for teaching, enhancing students' learning, and prompting teachers to make timely adjustment on their teaching. Meanwhile, the summative assessment is a phased, fixed and formal assessment which aims to record the phased results of students' learning and teachers' teaching.

G. Gizek (2010) proposed the criteria for distinguishing the two assessment methods, and believed that as long as the assessment is conducted after a certain teaching stage, and the assessment method aimed at recording the performance of students and teacher's teaching, it is the summative assessment. In contrast, formative assessment is conducted in the process of teaching or learning, and its purpose is to diagnose students' learning, judge their strengths and weaknesses, and provide forward-looking guidance for teachers' teaching.

Some scholars also recognized the unity of the two assessments. P. Black (2004) pointed out that if summative assessment can make students find problems in their learning and promote their self-reflection, it can also play a certain role of formative assessment. If the understanding of formative assessment is wrong, the assessment

methods used cannot promote students' learning that is not true formative assessment. Therefore, we should treat the relationship between the two dialectically. The purpose of distinguishing the two is to better understand the different roles they play in the process of teaching and learning, and better serve teachers' teaching and students' learning.

2.2 Researches at Home

The researches on formative assessment in China began in the mid-1980s, mainly explaining the importance of formative assessment and discussing the necessity and feasibility of implementing formative assessment in the field of education. At the beginning of this century, many Chinese experts and scholars in the field of foreign language teaching began to study the application of formative assessment in language learning and teaching. Some scholars have done a lot of exploration and made certain achievements. Qin (2005), Chen (2005), Lin and Song (2006), Zhao (2006) and many other scholars discussed in detail the application of formative assessment in higher vocational English teaching and college English teaching. Wei (2005) and Wang (2007) discussed the feasibility and necessity of formative assessment in oral English class. Wang and Ma (2006) conducted a study on the application of formative assessment in college English reading teaching. Liu (2007) and Zeng (2007) believed that formative assessment should be properly applied to the teaching practice of college English writing class. Wang (2007) and Liu (2007) introduced the formative assessment into the teaching of comprehensive English for English majors. The study found that students' awareness of autonomous learning had been enhanced and their ability of autonomous learning was greatly improved. Cai (2009) did some survey in the reading class practice and found that formative evaluation can enhance students' motivation and learning autonomy in extracurricular reading. Yang and Zhou (2013) adopted the "reading and writing teaching model" based on Bloom's educational goal classification system among English majors, focusing on the effective mechanism of formative evaluation, which has played a very good role in diagnosing, promoting and guiding the 'teaching' of teachers and the 'learning' of students. Bydran and Yu (2015) sorted out the development process of formative assessment, elaborated the basic concept of formative assessment, and analyzed the reasons for the difficulties in the effective implementation of formative assessment. Han (2017), Zou (2017), He (2017), Chen (2017) have studied the application of formative assessment in college English teaching. Wang (2017), Zhang (2017), Wang (2018), Xiao (2018), and Wang (2018) had specific discussions on the application of formative assessment in the courses for English majors. However, in the teaching of reading course for English majors, a complete set of formative evaluation system that can reflect the characteristics of reading course needs further study. Zhang (2020)

discussed the problems in college English evaluation and proposed that a more complete evaluation system should be built based on modern information technology.

To sum up, formative assessment has become a hot research topic for scholars at home and abroad, and the number of relevant studies is increasing. But on the whole, there are some problems in these studies: there are few theoretical innovation studies; the research methods are stereotyped; there is a serious problem of repeated researches; the breadth and depth of the researches need to be improved, and the research subjects are quite narrow and imbalanced. Some scholars and university teachers have studied the implementation of formative assessment in university courses, but the courses involved are mainly output skills courses, such as writing, translation and oral English; the researches on courses which involve input skills mainly focus on the comprehensive English course, while the researches on English reading are relatively rare. Huang (2019) reviewed the researches on formative evaluation of foreign language education in China and analyzed the reasons for the present situation, the tendency of emphasizing output skills and neglecting input skills is a common phenomenon in the formative evaluation research in language education, especially in the formative evaluation research of foreign language education in China. The reason for this phenomenon may be that compared with input skills, output skills are easier to develop and preserve tangible learning results, which makes it easier to collect and analyze the evidence of students' learning, and to carry out formative evaluation practice and research.

3. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ASSESSMENT FORMS IN ENGLISH READING COURSE

English reading course is a compulsory course for English and translation majors in Chinese universities, the general objective of which is to cultivate students' ability to read and understand English texts as well as critical thinking ability. By taking the reading course, students should be able to master the following basic skills: having a good mastery of English language and certain social and cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries; being proficient in using basic English reading strategies; distinguishing facts from opinions; understanding the literal meaning and inferring implied meaning of new words according to the context; summarizing the main idea of the given paragraph and passage; analyzing the style, structure, rhetoric and writing techniques of the text; analyzing and evaluating the author's emotions, attitudes and intentions; comparing and analyzing different discourses of the same or related topics. In order to achieve the above objectives, the teaching activities of reading course should mainly

focus on reading strategy training, knowledge learning and ability cultivating. In addition to the training of basic language skills, the English reading course also aims to strengthen the training of students' thinking ability and innovation ability, train students' ability to analyze and integrate materials, analyze problems from multiple perspectives, and innovate in finding and solving problems. Students should be able to correctly handle the relationship between language skill training and innovation ability training. Meanwhile, it also focuses on cultivating students' intercultural communication ability, improving their sensitivity and acceptance to cultural differences, as well as their competence to deal with cultural differences.

Besides, the English reading course should guide students to establish correct outlooks on life, world and values through a large number of extracurricular reading and in-class explanation, discussion and idea-sharing; cultivate students' ability of critical thinking, establish their awareness of the overall situation, and enhance their sense of family, patriotism, responsibility and mission in the new era.

At present, the teaching of reading courses for English majors is mostly based on textbooks. The university where the author is working selects the *English Extensive Reading* written by Liu Naiyin as textbook, which selects a wide range of reading materials, covering social, geographical, historical, cultural, economic, literary and other aspects, and can provide students with a wide range of language and cultural materials to cultivate their reading comprehension ability. Through learning the materials of the textbook, students can expand their cognitive vocabulary, improve their reading speed, enhance their reading comprehension, increase their cultural background knowledge, and cultivate their logical thinking abilities such as observation, analysis and induction, hypothesis judgment, reasoning and argumentation. They can correctly understand the main idea and theme of each unit of the text, correctly infer the author's true intention, grasp the main plot or argument, and conduct reasoning and analysis according to the materials. The students are required to grasp the main points on the basis of understanding, and be able to use the correct perspective to evaluate the reading materials.

However, from the perspective of style, the materials selected in this textbook are mostly narrative articles, which cannot meet the diverse learning needs of English major students. However, relying on the reading materials and exercises provided in the textbooks, students cannot effectively and truly master the reading skills they have learned, nor can they really improve their reading competence. In addition, English reading course takes up a few class hours, and classroom teaching cannot meet students' reading needs at all. Therefore, students must be guided to actively carry out extracurricular

reading. However, there are some problems in students' autonomous reading. For example, students would choose reading materials based on their own interests and hobbies, and the scope is quite narrow; the selected materials are mostly from the network, and their quality cannot be guaranteed. How to standardize students' independent reading after class and how to assess the effectiveness of their reading activities are urgent problems to be solved.

In the university the author is working now, the English reading course is a compulsory course for English and translation majors. It is offered for four semesters in the freshman and sophomore academic years, with a total number of 130 class hours, each of which lasts 40 minutes. The number of class hours is far from being enough, and the class time is very limited. If the students aim to use the limited time in class to improve their reading ability, it certainly cannot meet the requirements to improve their reading ability. Therefore, extracurricular autonomous reading has become particularly important. In order to know better about the students' classroom learning and extracurricular reading for the reading class, the author conducted a survey and interview with 206 students of English majors in her university. The investigation shows that there are many problems in students' reading.

First of all, 90% of students are aware of the importance of reading and are willing to spend time and energy on independent reading after class. But they feel confused and unsure about what reading materials to choose and how to read. Secondly, the instructor will give students extracurricular reading assignments, but due to the relatively simple assessment method, the students' reading effect is not satisfactory. Some students are not interested in the materials given by the teacher. They submit their homework for the purpose of completing the task, and extracurricular reading is a mere formality. Some students said that the materials given by the teacher exceeded their reading comprehension ability, which made it difficult to read. They could persist in their reading at first, but they would give up gradually since the reading materials are beyond their understanding. Moreover, the students do not have a good mastery of the reading methods and skills, and their reading speed cannot be improved, resulting in less reading every day, so that they gradually lose interest and confidence. For example, some students cannot distinguish between intensive reading and extensive reading, and have formed the reading habit of looking up every new word they encounter when they are reading; some students like lip reading and underline, which will affect their reading speed. Finally, with regard to classroom teaching, teachers mostly organize classroom activities based on textbooks, involving the introduction of cultural background knowledge, text analysis, explanation of language points, learning of reading skills and processing of after-class exercises. It is still a traditional teacher-based teaching mode. The students' autonomous

learning ability has not been trained and improved. The students are not active in classroom participation, and their harvest of reading class is relatively small.

The traditional assessment form of the reading course is the final standardized examination, which is the traditional question type examination based on reading comprehension. To deal with this traditional form of assessment, students often do not work hard at their daily study, and they can cope with it after temporary cramming for a week or two. The traditional examination only focuses on the results of students' learning, not the process. Therefore, it ignores the process assessment and lacks the guidance of assessment, which greatly dampens the enthusiasm and initiative of students in reading, and is not conducive to cultivating students' self-motivation and monitoring ability. Therefore, the traditional assessment method of English reading course can no longer reflect and serve the goal of English reading course, and can not adapt to the pace of education reform of English and translation majors and the requirements of the society for the training of English and translation professional talents. Based on the above analysis, the author of this essay tries to reform the course assessment form of the English reading course and incorporate extracurricular reading into a comprehensive assessment system so as to improve the status of extracurricular reading and arouse great attention to its importance.

4. THE APPLICATION OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT INTO ENGLISH READING COURSE

In China, scholars in the field of foreign language teaching have begun to study formative assessment since the beginning of this century. After the term "formative assessment" was put forward in the "College English Curriculum Teaching Requirements" issued in 2004, experts and teachers in the field of foreign language teaching have launched relevant researches on formative assessment, some of which involve teaching evaluation of college English reading courses. Wang and Ma (2006) applied formative assessment to the teaching of college English reading and conducted the research with experimental methods. The research results show that formative assessment can greatly improve students' reading comprehension ability and promote students to adjust their learning strategies. Sun (2010) selected English majors from a university as the research subjects to study the teaching effects after the formative assessment was incorporated into the extensive reading course assessment model. The research shows that applying formative assessment to extensive reading teaching can effectively stimulate students' learning motivation. Pi (2012) also carried out research on the

application of formative assessment in college English reading teaching. The results show that this approach can help students to clarify their learning tasks and objectives and choose the correct learning strategies. The teacher's task is to give timely feedback on students' problems, help students solve problems in time, and finally complete the learning objectives. Yang and Zhou (2013), based on Bloom's classification system of educational objectives, proposed to adopt the teaching mode of reading and writing in the teaching process of reading classes for English majors to achieve the teaching effect of "reading and writing promote each other". Jian (2018) found through her research that the application of formative assessment can fully mobilize students' initiative and develop their metacognition level. Li (2020) proposed that in the teaching of English reading, we should make full use of the advantages of formative evaluation system to comprehensively analyze students' English reading problems.

The common feature of these studies is that they all believe that it is necessary to implement formative assessment in English reading courses. Most of the studies are empirical studies, and some involve the construction of the evaluation system of English reading courses and specific implementation plans, but they are not systematic enough. On the basis of previous studies, the author of this essay will try to improve the model of summative evaluation, introduce formative evaluation into the evaluation system of English reading course, aiming to build a more comprehensive and effective evaluation system.

5. CONCLUSION

In addition to the function of assessing, diagnosing and feed-backing students' learning, the course assessment should also encourage and guide students to internalize their knowledge into skills and assess their practical application ability. Therefore, it is imperative to build a scientific formative evaluation system. The change of course assessment method will play a certain role in promoting the reform of teaching methods and teaching content, and can change the current situation of backward teaching methods, limited teaching content, and students' negative response. The implementation of diversified, phased and multi-type formative course assessment methods in the English reading course teaching of English and translation majors in universities can feed back effective information for teaching, thus greatly promote the reading teaching, enhance the teaching reform of English reading courses for English and translation majors, and improve the quality of talent training for English majors and translation majors.

In the following research, the author would explore how to improve the traditional summative assessment

system and establish a comprehensive formative assessment system with English reading course characteristics. By building such an assessment system, the author hopes to change the current situation of English reading teaching which only pays attention to students' learning results and ignores students' learning process. The new assessment system can mobilize students' enthusiasm and initiative in reading, and cultivate students' self-motivation and monitoring ability.

In the relationship among examination, assessment and foreign language teaching, teaching should be put on the first place while examination and assessment should center on teaching and serve teaching. Scientific assessment methods can guarantee that teaching develop towards the right direction. Only by organically unifying the three aspects of teaching, learning and assessment to form a virtuous circle can we meet the needs of training English majors in universities in the new era. The author strongly believes that if a relatively comprehensive formative assessment system for English reading course is constructed, it will play a great positive backwash role in English reading teaching for English and translation majors. Students will benefit greatly from the teaching of English reading course. Students would be active in reading and the amount of their reading would increase significantly, and their reading ability would be improved greatly.

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