

Research on the Application of Formative Evaluation in Teaching Foreign Language in Colleges and Universities

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Abstract: Formative evaluation is relatively more scientific and accurate as compared to traditional teaching evaluation. Formative evaluation is a method of professional evaluation of students' learning process, which is very important in the entire course of teaching. In the actual teaching process, formative evaluation can better help teachers understand the situation of students, and take effective improvement measures to address the problems existing in the process of learning. As a contribution to the teaching of foreign languages in the colleges and universities, this paper will start with an introduction of formative evaluation, and then the application of formative evaluation in teaching.

Keywords: Formative evaluation, Foreign language teaching, Specific application

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1 An overview of formative evaluation

1.1 The concept of formative evaluation

The purpose of formative evaluation is to improve the quality of education and teaching. The basis for this form of assessment is the feedback and learning outcomes of students in the learning process. Therefore, the formative evaluation focuses more on the process of learning, and relies on the needs of the evaluator and the subjects or students who were being evaluated in the assessment. The students can feedback the experience and effects during the learning process, thus helping the teachers to improve the teaching methods

and improve the quality of education. Communication in the evaluation process is very crucial. The formative evaluation does not only judge the student's performance, but also assess the quality of the learning process. Formative evaluation should be carried out during the learning process, and an instant evaluation should be carried out to help teachers understand the actual teaching quality and deficiencies in the teaching process. This is to allow the teachers to make adjustments in real time, so that students can figure out the methods and objectives of learning in the process. With this, both students and teachers will have a full understanding of their own situation, thereby promoting student learning. Therefore, formative evaluation is a useful evaluation method that aims to improve the teacher's teaching process and improve students' learning ability.

1.2 The difference between formative evaluation and summative evaluation

Formative evaluation is a relatively new evaluation method. Compared with the traditional summative evaluation, the summative evaluation is a method that determines the teaching effect based on the score. This method is usually performed after the teaching process, and the student achievement is taken into consideration. Therefore, the use of summative evaluation is generally used to evaluate the teaching objectives within a certain period of time, in order to help students understand their own situation in the learning process. The difference between the two assessment methods is relatively significant. Relatively speaking, the formative evaluation can directly reflect the teaching effect in the teaching process, while the summative evaluation

focuses more on the student's learning outcome to reflect the teaching effect, or the student's academic achievement in the process of making decision in

addressing the learning problems. The differences between specific formative and summative evaluations are shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Differences between formative evaluation and summative evaluation

| | Formative evaluation | Summative evaluation |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Purpose | To address the problems of teaching | To assess teaching achievements |
| Time | During the learning and teaching process | After the teaching process |
| Environment of evaluation | Every aspects and stages of the learning and teaching process | After the teaching process |
| Focus | Teaching development | Outcome and efficacy of teaching |
| Participants | School, students, teachers | School, students, teachers |
| Form of outcome release | Language, bi-directional communication | Examination results |
| Means of result announcement | Anonymous | Open, formal |
| Influence | Evaluation produces positive effects | Evaluation has advantages and disadvantages |

In view of the above, the formative evaluation emphasizes on the learning and teaching process, and the summative evaluation which does not take the student's learning process into account pays more attention to the final result.

1.3 Principles underlying the formative evaluation process

1.3.1 Development

The purpose of the evaluation is not to distinguish the superior students from those who are weak in their academic performances, nor to judge whether their answers in tests or assignments are correct or not. The gist of formative evaluation is to ensure teachers to master and control the teaching quality and the learning effects of the students in the teaching process. The focus of this mode of evaluation is the continuous improvement of in development capabilities of the students.

1.3.2 Process

Formative evaluation is aimed to upgrade and improve teaching process in every aspects, in particular, teaching methods and teaching requirements. Therefore, the evaluation runs through the entire teaching process. In this process, the details of each aspect are analyzed. Every aspect of the teaching activities in which the students are participating is included in the evaluation.

1.3.3 Diversity

The main subjects of formative evaluation involve

the students, parents, school classmates, and teachers. The scope of this evaluation method is very diverse. Similarly, the subjects of evaluation are diverse. Therefore, the main features of formative evaluation process are multi-angle, multi-subject, and many other important characteristics of communication.

1.3.4 Motivation

The starting point of formative evaluation should be to stimulate students' interest in learning. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that evaluation is not to distinguish the students whether they are good performers or not in exams. The purpose of formative evaluation is to stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning, spark the students' learning motivation, and let students receive the comments of evaluation in the teaching process, so as to provide feedback and communication to encourage students, thus fundamentally enhance students' interest in learning and confidence in learning.

1.3.5 Feasibility

According to the actual situation in the teaching process, the formative evaluation should be simple and clear. The time dedicated for teaching purpose should be short and flexible. Secondly, the basis of the operation of formative evaluation must be scientific, feasible and practical.

1.4 Characteristics of formative evaluation

Formative evaluation permeates the whole process

of teaching. Therefore, the presentation of formative evaluation also appears in the teaching process and teaching activities. Owing to the characteristics of college students, the actual implementation of foreign language teaching in colleges and universities should have the following characteristics.

1.4.1 Self-directed learning (autonomy)

Cultivating students' ability in self-directed learning is one of the teaching goals in college teaching. To achieve this goal, the first thing to do in foreign language teaching is to cultivate students' interest in the foreign languages and to inculcate a desire for knowledge. Along with that, the teachers also need to focus on and discern the differences between the students. In this way, students will be encouraged to participate independently in the learning process and the teaching activities.

1.4.2 Practicality

The formative evaluation in teaching especially pays more attention to putting the students into practice. With that, the students are encouraged to be unified with the actual, real life situations. Also, practicality can better encourage the students' participation and spark learning enthusiasm. Putting the students into practice is an effective way to test their knowledge so that the students can apply the knowledge they have learned in the process of learning knowledge in real life, which will greatly improve both learning and teaching outcomes.

1.4.3 Openness

In the process of teaching, the students need not only ample time, but also effective communication with teachers. Therefore, the communication between teachers and students should be harmonious during the teaching process. The content of communication should be open and should not be constrained by teaching and its topics. Apart from that, the teaching activities should happen in a united, tense, lively, serious atmosphere.

1.5 The operation of formative evaluation

Throughout the development of China's education system, the evaluation methods constantly emphasize evaluation from another party, but always neglect self-evaluation. Simple evaluation which is not comprehensive enough cannot contribute much to instill learning interest in the students. Instead, students' interests in learning will be greatly diminished due to immense pressures resulted from the apparent

identification of superior students and weak students. The aim of formative evaluation is to address the drawbacks of the summative evaluation under this education system. Students are not the only subjects to be evaluated, and their academic performance is not the only basis for evaluation. The formative evaluation also takes the form of mutual evaluation among the students, teacher evaluation, cooperation evaluation, and so on.

1.5.1 Self-evaluation and mutual evaluation among the students

While conducting some learning activities, the students can take self-evaluation and mutual evaluation when an evaluation of student's character is considered. Self-evaluation can help to adjust students' self-awareness. Mutual evaluation can help students to fully understand themselves and also help students understand their own psychological state when they are on the receiving end of others' evaluation comments. Teachers should help students in the self-evaluation stage not only to complete the self-evaluation task, but also to make a practical analysis of their own situation. In the evaluation stage, they must learn and master the methods of evaluating others (their school mates), aiming at cultivating students' sense of responsibility and cognitive ability at learning. Through the discussion and mutual evaluation, the relationship between students can be harmonized, promoting the learning atmosphere of the entire class.

1.5.2 Teacher evaluation

Teacher evaluation is still the core of formative evaluation, but care has to be taken that not every teacher evaluation is serious and fair. Teachers should also evaluate the self-evaluation and mutual evaluation among the students in the teaching process, or give some comments and opinions. As part of the formative evaluation, the teachers should record all aspects of the student's performance in the learning process, including learning methods used by the students, grades in tests, interests, level of participation, and other qualities of the students, etc. before commencing the evaluation. The teachers can also conduct the interactive evaluations with the students, such as setting evaluation criteria together, so that students can participate in the evaluation process personally. During the evaluation, students who participate in the evaluation should be guided. In the process, even the self-evaluation and mutual evaluation can be added. After the evaluation, feedback and a summary will be given. Of course, in

the teaching activities, different students should be sorted to help students establish independent learning systems and learning methods to enhance students' enthusiasm for learning.

1.5.3 Evaluation on cooperation

Evaluation on student-teacher cooperation rating can be used to feedback the students' needs according to the evaluation opinions and methods put forward by the students. In this form of evaluation, there are a wide arrays of ways of cooperation between the teachers and students, in which the evaluation criteria are set out through their cooperation, and the evaluation results will be discussed in the end of teaching activities. These methods will not only enhance the interaction between teachers and students, but also enhance the students' participation.

1.5.4 Integrity of the teaching process

In the teaching process, the method of instruction is consistent with the content. In addition to the emphasis on teaching outcomes of each individual students and focus on the integrity of teaching outcomes in a traditional sense, the overall teaching goals should emphasize on many fields such as cognition, skills and emotional attitudes of the students.

1.5.5 Creativity of the teaching process

In the teaching process, the content of the topics during teaching must be innovative. The teaching methods and guiding methods of the teachers are effective tools for cultivating creativity in the students. In addition to the cultivation of innovative abilities, it is necessary to pay attention to cultivating students' abilities, such as change and transformation during teaching. The teachers should also actively encourage students to express their unique insights and novel ways of thinking, and encourage students to dare to innovate, dare to question, and unleash their imagination. This will make the teaching process more creative, rendering more effective teaching and learning.

1.5.6 Educational teaching process

The process of teaching should be lively, serious, earnest and educational. This is to enable students to experience and treasure unity, friendship, team spirit and cooperation awareness of the harmonious civilization throughout the teaching process. In addition, the lessons in classrooms should let students naturally integrate into the whole teaching process of students in terms of learning, communication, life and

survival.

2 Research on the practical application of formative evaluation

Formative evaluation is a product of an advanced cognitive and constructivist learning theory, in which the essence of this evaluation refers to the rational use of different methods to scientifically assess the actual learning situation of students in the process of teaching. Furthermore, in formative evaluation, teaching is carried out based on the summarized diagnostic information, helping students improve self-directed learning and the quality of their comprehensive learning ability. In the colleges and universities, the foreign language teachers should address and solve the shortcomings of traditional teaching evaluation methods, and should not pay attention to the final results of students, as this would neglect the evaluation of students' learning process. Therefore, foreign language teachers in the higher learning institutions should fully make use of formative evaluation in teaching, effectively upgrade the teacher evaluation system and teaching strategies, and promote the steady and sustainable development of university foreign language teaching.

2.1 Application

The content of formative evaluation of foreign language teaching in colleges and universities is relatively diverse, because many aspects of students, such as foreign language learning ability of the students and specific situations during the learning process are examined. Therefore, the plan of formative evaluation should highlight the goals of teaching such as the improvement of the holistic ability and comprehensive quality. In the specific application of formative evaluation, in addition to paying attention to the mastery and application of knowledge in the teaching process, the ability to expand thinking can be improved. There are ways to enhance students' practical ability. For example, in the foreign language classroom of the university, according to the content of the course, the students can perform role-playing, perform the interpretation of the course content, conduct dialogues, etc. This can stimulate students' interest in learning, and let students participate more actively in learning. On the other hand, this can improve the classroom atmosphere and ambience and assess the students' abilities in mastering the vocabulary and grammar of the foreign language that they are learning. After all, one of the effective ways to improve

language learning is through communication. The comprehensive evaluation method of this interactive form of teaching can better evaluate the content and accurately achieve the goals of the evaluation, and have a dynamic feedback on the specific learning situation of the students.

2.2 Main subjects of application

Students are the main subjects of the teaching activities. Similarly, the teachers also play the main role of participants in the formative evaluation. The students who study and learn the foreign languages in colleges and universities are the subjects of evaluation. Teachers should also play the role in the evaluation. In the process of formative evaluation, the university foreign language teacher cannot rely solely on his or her own evaluation of the students. Thus, it is inevitable that the time and energy invested by the teachers will not be able to exert the desired effect. Also, with only the results of evaluation on the students of the foreign language, the feedback obtained will not be comprehensive and accurate. This might produce some inaccurate or incorrect evaluation results. Therefore, in the formative evaluation of university foreign languages, the principle of pluralism of formative evaluation should be followed. Formal evaluation should be carried out in schools, students, parents and teachers to ensure that the results produced by the evaluation are scientifically correct and that the feedback generated will not have a negative impact on the students. Aside from that, this will fully make the students more initiative in learning foreign languages. This evaluation system also let teachers understand the specific situation of students and the learning needs of the foreign language subjects, so that the teachers will set the teaching goals and improve the teaching methods according to the feedback of the subjects being evaluated, i.e. the students. Therefore, in the formative evaluation of the foreign languages in colleges and universities, it is necessary to make the subjects to play the necessary roles.

2.3 The methods of application

In the foreign language teaching of colleges and universities, the form of formative evaluation that can be used is diverse. Reasonable use of these methods can not only guarantee the objectivity of teaching evaluation, but also help students improve their interest in foreign language learning, improve learning, and ultimately achieve the goals of foreign language

teaching and the comprehensive development of foreign languages of students. First of all, teachers should play the role in teacher evaluation to evaluate students' foreign language learning situation and foreign language usage on a daily basis, and stimulate students' initiative according to the objectives of the tasks carried out by the students, stipulate corresponding time for evaluation, and help students plan their the direction and goals of learning foreign languages, in order to establish a correct learning concept. Moreover, it is important to strengthen the application of students' self-evaluation and mutual evaluation, help students to recognize themselves and their own deficiencies and advantages through the evaluation processes, and strengthen students through evaluation results. Inter-communication and understanding among the students will let them to learn from each other. Finally, using a comprehensive evaluation method, the students can be comprehensively evaluated in every aspect, achieving the ultimate goal of full mastery of foreign language in the learning process.

3 Conclusion

Taken together, the underlying principle of formative evaluation in the foreign language teaching in higher learning institutions such as colleges and universities should be based on evaluation of multiple parties, whereby the students' role as the main subject in the evaluation should be given emphasis, teacher evaluation should be used, along with student self-evaluation and evaluation from others, forming a comprehensive evaluation in the process of formative evaluation. In comparison to traditional evaluation in concept analysis, this paper has carried out in-depth research on formative evaluation, and analyzed the key points of formative evaluation in specific applications, with the hopes to improve foreign language teaching in colleges and universities.

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