THE INFLUENCES OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND LEVELS OF EDUCATION ON ESP INSTRUCTORS' PERCEPTIONS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT AT DANANG UNIVERSITY

ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA KINH NGHIỆM VÀ BẰNG CẤP CHUYÊN MÔN ĐỐI VỚI ĐÁNH GIÁ HÌNH THÀNH CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN DẠY TIẾNG ANH CHUYÊN NGÀNH TẠI ĐẠI HỌC ĐÀ NẴNG

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Abstract - This research investigates the perception of formative assessment of language instructors of non-English major students at Danang University. The population of this study includes lecturers of the English for Specific Purpose (ESP) Department, at the University Of Foreign Language Studies of Danang University. The investigator uses questionnaire administered through Google Docs. The study also investigates the relationship between teachers' year of experience and level of education, and their perception toward formative assessment. Generally, ESP lecturers hold positive attitudes toward formative assessment and there are correlative relationship between teachers' years of experience and levels of education and their perception of formative assessment.

Key words - formative assessment; perception; ESP department; level of education; year of experience

Tóm tắt - Nghiên cứu này nhằm khảo sát mức độ nhận thức về đánh giá hình thành của giảng viên dạy tiếng Anh chuyên ngành tại đại học Đà Nẵng. Đối tượng nghiên cứu bao gồm các giảng viên tại Khoa tiếng Anh chuyên ngành tại Đại học Ngoại Ngữ, Đại học Đà Nẵng. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện nhờ bản câu hỏi trắc nghiệm. Bản câu được gởi đến đối tượng khảo sát nhờ chương trình Google Docs. Bên cạnh đó, nghiên cứu còn khảo sát sự ảnh hưởng của bằng cấp chuyên môn và năm kinh nghiệm đối với nhận thức về đánh giá hình thành. Nhìn chung, giảng viên tại khoa tiếng Anh chuyên ngành có đánh giá tốt về đánh giá hình thành trong giảng dạy, và năm kinh nghiệm cùng với bằng cấp chuyên môn cũng có sự ảnh hưởng đến cách nhận thức của giảng viên đối với đánh giá hình thành.

Từ khóa - đánh giá hình thành, nhận thức, khoa tiếng Anh chuyên ngành, bằng cấp chuyên môn, năm kinh nghiệm.

1. Introduction

Assessment of not only language but also many other subjects in Vietnam has traditionally been viewed as summative, or the way to measure and summarize what students have acquired, which usually takes place at the end of a learning course (Brown, 2004). As opposed to summative assessment, formative assessment, the assessment for learning, has recently gained considerable recognition in educational field. Many studies have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of this form of assessment on teaching-learning quality (Leahy, Lylon, Thompson & Wiliam, 2005; Shepard, 2000). Most of the studies show that formative assessment results in positive effects on the learning outcomes. In their article, Black and Williams (1998b) acknowledged formative assessment as one of the best ways to raise students' achievement in classroom. Formative assessment in Vietnam, unfortunately, has not been perceived as an effective method to raise teaching-learning standard.

Most language educators in Vietnam, when being asked about assessment, often give their immediate responses involving testing and grading. Formative assessment, therefore, seems to be an unpopular form of assessment in the Vietnamese education system.

Weighing the great effect that formative assessment could lay on teaching and learning, this research aims to investigate the current implementation of formative assessment of language educators in Vietnam. To be more specific, the research will elicit information of teachers' understanding of formative assessment, the frequency of formative assessment in classroom, activities performed while using formative assessment, and factors causing the differences in how teachers perceive the importance of formative assessment.

1.1. Research Question

1. What are ESP instructors' perceptions of formative assessment in Vietnam?
2. What is the relationship between the instructors' teaching experience and level of education, and their implementation of formative assessment?

1.2. Objectives

The main objective of this research is to investigate what ESP educators' beliefs of formative assessment are and how they implement formative assessment in their practice. In doing so, this study will seek:

- To investigate the understanding of formative assessment of language educators at ESP Department.
- To explore how language educators value the importance of formative assessment in teaching and learning.
- To study how professional identities (teaching experience, level of education) influence their assessment practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Formative Assessment

There are two common ways of assessing in classroom, namely assessment of learning and assessment for learning.

"Assessment of learning (often described as summative assessment) aims to provide a well-founded, clear and up-to-date picture of a student's current capabilities or attitudes, progress over time or further growth needs and potential. Assessment for learning (often described as formative assessment) is focused on enhancing student development, and often involves relatively unstructured interactions between student and student or teacher and student rather than a planned formal assessment event." (Crooks, 2002, p.241).

Formative assessment is also known as classroom assessment or informal assessment. The term 'formative assessment' was first coined from an article written by Scriven in the American Educational Research Association in 1967 (Cizek, 2010). In the article, Scriven first coined the termed 'formative evaluation', from which formative assessment was expanded and developed to its current use nowadays.

The main purpose of this form of assessment mainly focuses on students' ongoing development "during the process of forming their competencies and skills" (Brown, 2004, p.6.). Besides, in the book of *Classroom Assessment,* Angelo and Cross (2006) regarded formative assessment as the assessment to enhance the quality of learning, which does not stand as an evidence to evaluate or grade students.

Formative assessment is gaining its popularity in educational field. Many studies have been conducted to prove its effectiveness in learning and teaching. In an extensive research, Black and William (1998b) reviewed 250 journal articles and book chapters to determine whether formative assessment raised learning achievement. This research showed positive results, which concluded that formative assessment could positively enhance learning in general and especially helpful for low-achieving students.

According to Heritage (2004), formative assessment is an ongoing process of evaluating students' performance with an aim to adjust lessons for students to achieve the learning goals. He also noted that this form of assessment, if implemented properly, would result in better learning outcomes. Agreed with this notion, Dinh, L. (2008) proposes that formative assessment aims at improving teaching and learning standard, figuring out what needs improving in teaching and learning rather than grading students.

Macmillan (2006) also expanded formative assessment to a different perspective, which asserted that formative assessment placed positive influences on students' motivation and attitudes.

2.2. Strategies of Formative Assessment

Formative assessment differs from other forms of assessment as it is used to modify teaching to meet students' needs and study's goals (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). According to Heritage (2006, p.241), formative assessment can be sorted into three different types:

- *On-the-fly* assessment takes place spontaneously in the course of a lesson.

- *Planned-for interaction* is prepared before lessons as a strategy to elicit students' understanding.

- *Curriculum-embedded assessments* - where teacher wants to elicit feedback at certain points as part of ongoing classroom activity.

In the article *Inside the Black Box, Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment* Black and William (1998b) suggest using questioning and classroom discussion, through which formative assessment is initiated, to provide students with opportunities to develop their understanding. However, they maintain that teachers should ensure thoughtful and reflective questions instead of factual one be provided and give students adequate time to think and respond. To get everyone involved, they propose some strategies as below:

- Inviting students to discuss their thoughts about a question in pairs or small groups, then a representative of each group will share their thoughts to the larger class.

- Asking students to vote on all possible answers to a question.

- Asking all students to write down their answers and selecting a few to read out loud to the class.

Angelo and Cross (1993) propose several classroom assessment techniques involved in three different aspects of assessment, namely course-related knowledge and skills; learners' attitudes, values and self-awareness; and learners' reaction to instruction. They maintain that classroom assessment is a 'systematic approach to formative evaluation' (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p.25), which includes three phases: planning, implementing, and responding to the results. Each phase is divided into smaller specific tasks as follow:

"Phase I: Planning

- Choose the focus class

- Focus on an assessable goal or question

- Plan a classroom assessment project focused on that goal or question

Phase II: Implementation

- Teach the target lesson related to that goal or question

- Assess student learning: collect feedback data

- Analyze student feedback

Phase III: Responding

- Interpreting the results and formulating an appropriate response to improve learning

- Communicate results

- Evaluate this project's effect on teaching and learning." (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p.34)

3. Research Design

This is an exploratory non-experimental research, which employed a quantitative approach to describe the current perception of non-English major language educators at Da Nang University.

3.1. Population and Sampling

The target population of this research included all academic staff of the ESP Department, consisting of 49 lecturers. Of all 49 faculty members in the survey, 28 responded, achieving 57.1 % rate of returns.

The participants include 6 bachelors, 18 masters, 3 post graduates, and 1 doctor. With regard to teaching experience, there are 4 participants whose years of experience are less than 4, 8 from 4 to 10 years of experience, 11 from 11 to 20 years of experience, and 5 with more than 20 years of experience.

Highest Degree	Number N = 28	Rate
Bachelor	6	21,4%
Post Graduate	3	10,7%
Master	18	64,2%
Doctor	1	3,5%

Table 1. *Distribution of Highest Degree in ESP Department*

Years of Experience	Number N = 28	Rate
Less than 4	4	14,2%
4 to 10	8	28,6%
11 to 20	11	39,2%
More than 20	5	17,8%

Table 2. *Distribution of Years of Experience in ESP Department*

3.2. Instrument

The researcher used questionnaires to evaluate language instructors' perception of formative assessment. The questionnaire   was administered through Google Docs which is an online survey software program.

The questionnaire includes two parts. The first part is used to elicit background information of lecturers (gender, age, teaching experience, level of education). The second part is comprised of sixteen Likert-type statements scored on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = of no value, 2= of little value, 3 = no strong view, 4 = valuable, 5 = very valuable), which addresses instructors' beliefs of formative assessment. The questionnaire was adopted and adapted from the Report on Teachers' Perception of Formative Assessment by Neesom (2000).

3.3. Data Analysis

Research question 1 was analyzed through descriptive statistics such as means, and standard deviation. These data reflected the reported levels of perception of formative assessment of lecturers at ESP department.

Research question 2 was analyzed though inferential statistics, utilizing Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson Correlation Coefficient. These analyses described the differences between influences the years of experience and level of education on perception of formative assessment.

4. Results

The questionnaire result of 16 statements indicates how instructors value each strategies of formative assessment. M running from 3.53 to 4.14 indicates participant hold positive attitude toward formative assessment on average with not much disagreement (SD from .49 to .90). Level 3 means the participants have no strong view toward the statement, while level 4 refers to a more positive attitude of 'valuable,' and level 5 'very valuable.'

Strategies	M	SD
1. Telling your students what you hope they will learn and sometimes why they are learning it.	3.60	.79
2. Setting up tasks designed to enable students to 'get on' by themselves.	3.64	.49
3. Getting students to collaborate in groups on a joint outcome.	3.53	.70
4. Getting students to help each others.	3.53	.70
5. Choosing and showing students' examples of students' work for learning purposes.	3.67	.55
6. Getting a student to show you how s/he has gone about something so you can diagnose error.	3.60	.73
7. Getting a student to suggest ways something can be improved	3.60	.57
8. Providing formats and structures for writing or recording findings	3.68	.86
9. Analyzed completed work or work out why a student has or has not achieved.	3.85	.70
10. Expressing approval when achievement is satisfactory.	3.68	.90

11. Telling students what they have achieved with specific reference to their learning.	3.60	.69
12. Specifying a between/different way of doing something.	3.82	.61
13. Getting student to suggest ways they can improve.	3.89	.50
14. Negotiating a route to improve something	3.75	.59
15. Helping students to understand their achievements and know what they need to do next to make progress.	4.14	.59
16. Providing opportunities for pupils to assess their own and one another's work and give feedback to one another.	4.00	.67

Table 4.2. Questionnaire Result

Strategies	F *	Sig*	F **	Sig**
Item 1	3.3	.036	2.6	.069
Item 2	5.4	*.005*	3.5	.030
Item 3	10.4	*.000*	2.3	.103
Item 4	5.6	*.005*	1.5	.237
Item 5	2.9	.055	4.5	.011
Item 6	5.8	*.004*	4.1	.018
Item 7	1.7	.181	1.9	.150
Item 8	3.4	.031	1.4	.237
Item 9	1.4	.245	1.9	.149
Item 10	3.2	.041	3.8	.022
Item 11	7.6	*.001*	10.6	*.000*
Item 12	6.7	*.002*	6.2	*.003*
Item 13	4.8	.009	3.0	.047
Item 14	3.1	0.46	1.2	.308
Item 15	3.0	0.49	.381	.571
Item 16	5.8	*.004*	2.159	.119

* Level of Education

**Years of Experience

Table 4.3 *ANOVA result of Formative Assessment Strategies toward Years of Experience and Level of Education*

With regard to level of education, there are 6 formative assessment strategies with significant levels under .005

level and 2 questions has significant value under .005 concerning years of experience. These items are statistic significant, showing that there are differences in the perception of formative assessment by people with different levels of education and experience. The rest of the ANOVA table presents p value exceeding .005 level, meaning that experience and level of education do not have strong impact on perception of participants towards these strategies.

Instructors marked items 3 and 4 the lowest among the five scales ($M = 3.53$). These items are two of the four strategies (item 1 to 4) to get students involved in their learning based on formative assessment strategies. In contrast, item 15 received the highest score ($M=4.14$), which is a strategy to enable students to self-assess themselves.

The value of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient between years of experience and perception of formative assessment is 0.68, which is a moderate positive correlation, indicating a tendency for high years of experience go with high level of perception. In a similar vein, the value of Pearson's Correlation Coefficient value between the highest degree of participants and their perception of formative assessment is 0.81, a strong positive correlation accompanied by a very small p value (0.000) compared with level 0.05, which means that the higher degree one obtains, the higher s/he value formative assessment.

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient	P value	N
0.68	0.000	28

Figure 4.2 *Correlation between Years of Experience and Perception Levels*

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient	P value	N
0.81	0.000	28

Figure 4.3 *Correlation between Level of Education and Perception Levels*

The two scatter plots below show the correlational relationship between years of experience and highest degree, and perception of formative assessment respectively.
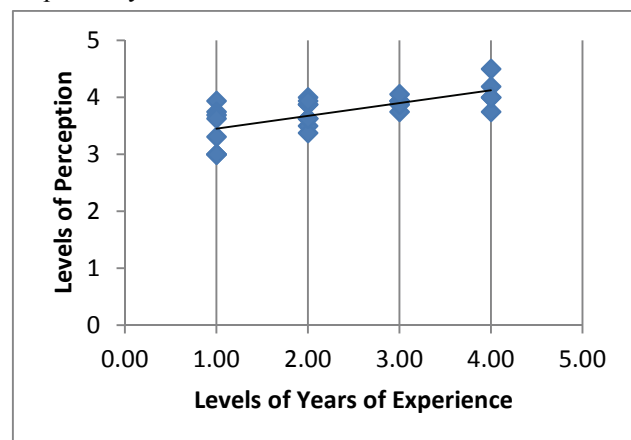
Figure 4.1 *Relationship between Years of Experience and*
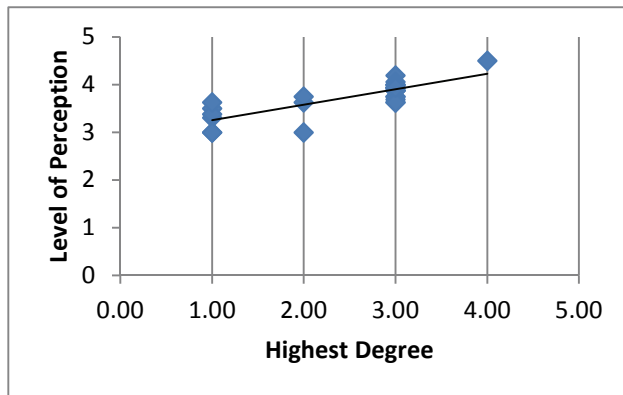
Perception of Formative Assessment

Figure 4.2. *Relationship between Highest Degree and Level of Perception*

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The study shows that in general language instructors at the English for Specific Purposes Department hold positive attitudes towards formative assessment. However, the moderate average number on a five point scale indicating level of perception (*M=3.74)* shows that formative assessment is still not a widely popular form of assessment at the English for Specific Purposes Department, Da Nang University.

Even though both years of experience and level of education influence instructors' perception of formative assessment, they have different levels of impact on instructors' perception of formative assessment. As seen by the correlation coefficient value of the level of education and years of experience, and perception, the former has a smaller influence compared to the latter's.

5.1. Implication

From the result of this study, it can be inferred that the higher degree one obtain, the higher s/he values the importance of formative assessment. In addition, in comparision with teaching experience, level of education has a smaller impact on instructors' perception of formative assessment.

5.2. Suggestion for Further Study

Exploring the influence of formative assessment on learners.

Measuring the gap between teachers' perception of formative assessment and their performance in practice.

Finding the way how perception influences implementation of formative assessment on teaching subjects other than English.

5.3. Limitation

The study framework is small, focusing at Danang University. Thus, this study should be extended to more universities for a more a reliable assessment.

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