The Impact of the Students' Formative and Summative Assessment on Professional Development of Iranian EFL Instructors at Universities: Case of Islamic Azad University-South Tehran Branch-Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine the impact of *formative* and *summative* assessment in the professional development of Iranian EFL Instructors at universities. Moreover, an attempt was made to figure out whether the formative assessment is more effective than the summative assessment. Since the present work is qualitative/quantitative research in nature, it was conducted within the ethnography of Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch. To do so, two M.A classes were chosen and the data were collected via observations, field notes, interviews, stimulated recalls, questionnaires and through audio-video recordings. The findings of this study suggest that the formative and summative assessment enhance the practices of teaching by university instructors and that the formative assessment is more effective and beneficial.

Keywords: Formative assessment, Summative assessment, Professional development, Evaluation, SETs

INTRODUCTION

Many aspects of second language teacher education are changing and in this regard assessment is no exception. There are a number factors involved in the process of change, but two most important ones are (a) our understanding of the work of teaching in general and language teaching in particular, and (b) the role of teachers' knowledge in teaching. Moreover, the features related to identity and practice are also of great importance (Freeman, Orzulak & Morrissey, 2009, p.77).

In fact, it deals with the idea of who teachers are and what they are expected to teach. Although it seems simple and straightforward to document what teacher know as language teacher, in reality it is a very complicated notion. When the teachers' knowledge of language equates with their knowledge of language as a unitary aspect and includes knowing its *grammar*, *form*, and *uses* then it would be very easy and straightforward to assess the teachers'

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knowledge as it is a matter of testing their knowledge of *content*. However, language teaching by itself is such a complex phenomenon that considering the knowledge of content as one's competence seems unacceptable (Freeman, Orzulak & Morrissey, 2009, p.77).

The problem here is that teachers use language to teach language which means knowledge in language teaching is really a dual procedure. This knowledge should link content and process in and through language. "Language is the basis of the lesson−what the teacher is teaching- and it is the means of teaching it−how the teacher teaches the lesson" (Freeman, Orzulak & Morrissey, 2009, p.79).

What makes the assessment process even more complicated is assessing teaching as an activity; to document its processes (what the teacher is doing), its results (what the students have learned), or a kind of combination of both. Moreover, the collection of information is questionable; whether the documentation is done externally by administrators or internally by the teacher as a self-assessment (Freeman, Orzulak & Morrissey, 2009, p.80).

In sum, it can be concluded that the basic question of how to document what language teachers know and do in relation to their own and their students' learning are changing over time which is called the *arc of assessment* (Freeman, Orzulak & Morrissey, 2009, p.80).

The parameters of assessment in second language teacher education is changing in terms of its *focus,* what is to be assessed, and the *manner,* or how it is to be assessed. It was suggested that the two parameters of what and how are, to some extent, mutually defining because of the fact that the career is likely to assess *what* we could find out *how* to assess. However, the complicated question of knowledge-in-use or in-action is a process in which the synergy between focus and manner is moving into a new trend (Moss, Girad, Haniford, 2009, p.78).

There are three phases in the development of the *focus* of assessment in second language teacher education; the *conventional view, elabo-*

rated view and *emerging view*. The first one, the conventional view, refers to testing knowledge about language as **content** which provides a proxy for teaching knowledge. The elaborated view, however, "distinguishes proficiency in the language as a medium of instruction from knowledge about that language as content". The emerging view, on the other hand, "acknowledges that language functions as both the medium and the content of lessons through pedagogy" (Freeman, Orzulak & Morrissey, 2009, p.79).

Moss (2009, p.254) refers to the above-mentioned emerging view as '*assessment practices*', and "…people's understanding of what is important to learn, what learning is, and who learners are".

> "These three phases-the conventional, the elaborated, and the emerging-reorient the *manner* in which the teacher knowledge in second language teaching has been assessed. By *manner,* we refer to the choices made about how to document what language teachers know and do, either directly, as through observation for example, or indirectly, as with self-assessment, portfolio, or a paper-and-pencil test´ (Freeman, Orzulak & Morrissey, 2009, p.79).

Research Questions

The present study intended to answer the following research questions:

1) How does the students' *formative* assessment affect the professional development of Iranian university EFL instructors?

2) In what ways can the students' *summative* assessment affect the professional development of Iranian university EFL instructors?

3) To what extend is the instructor's reaction toward formative assessment different from the instructor's reaction toward summative assessment?

4) Is the students' formative assessment more effective than summative assessment inenhancing the practices of teaching by Iranian EFL instructors?

METHODOLOGY

Evaluation is an inseparable part of teaching /learning process. There are a number of approaches toward evaluation, among which are formative and summative evaluations. Moreover, due to the dominant qualitative nature of this study an attempt was made to use a variety of measurement instruments. The participants of this study were of two types, students and university instructors. Students carried out both formative and summative assessment of their instructors' teaching procedures during a university semester.

Participants

Two M.A university classes were chosen; one of them consisted of 21 students (the formative group) and the other one 23 (the summative group).Students were all in the first year of their education studying EFL. The classes were divided into two groups. In the first group the students performed a formative assessment of their teachers' performances and the second group in which the students carried out a summative evaluation of their teachers' performances. The instructor of the above-mentioned classes was also included as the participant. He was involved in the feedback sessions and filled in the questionnaires to assess his developmental progress regarding formative and summative assessments.

Instrumentation

1. In order for the first group to perform a *formative* assessment of the teachers' performances in the class the following instruments were used:

(1) A 25-item likert questionnaire was administered among the students every three sessions (5 times altogether).

(2) The class was audio taped.

(3) There were cases of video tape recording in the classes.

(4) The researcher took part in the class as an observer.

(5) There was a feedback session with the teacher based on the data collected from the students' questionnaires before the next class session.

(6) A 20-item likert questionnaire was given to the teacher at the end of the semester to evaluate the effectiveness of the research on his professional development.

(7) Two cases of stimulated recalls were used.

(8) Field note was also used.

(9) Ten cases of informal interviews with the students plus follow-ups were performed.

2. The second group carried out their summative assessment by making use of the following instruments:

(1) A 25-item likert questionnaire was delivered among the students at the end of the term (once only).

(2) The class was audio taped.

(3) There were cases of video tape recording in the classes.

(4) The researcher took part in the class as an observer.

(5) There was a feedback session with the teacher based on the data collected from the students' questionnaires at the end of the term.

(6) A 20-item likert questionnaire was given to the teacher at the end of the semester to evaluate the effectiveness of the research on the professional development of the teacher.

(7) Two cases of stimulated recalls were used.

(8) Field notes were also used.

(9) Ten cases of informal interviews with the students plus follow-ups were performed.

Procedures

(1) The course was held for a university semester (16 sessions), one session a week where each session lasted for an hour and a half.

(2) In the very first session prior to start of the course the students in the first group were informed about the procedure and the questionnaires were delivered among them. They were required to read the questionnaires before attending the class each session in order to remember the items.

(3) After the class was over they were to fill in the questionnaires and handed them

to the researcher the following session.

(4) The teacher was provided with the data collected from students' questionnaires be fore each class session.

(5) Accordingly, there was a feedback session to discuss the data over with the teacher and the researcher. The teacher was provided with the audio and video tapes recorded if necessary.

(6) The teacher was required to fill out a 20- item likert questionnaire to evaluate the effectiveness of the research on his professional development at the end of the term.

(7) One questionnaire was delivered among the students in the second group at the end of the course in order to perform the summative assessment only.

(8) There was only one feedback session at the end of the term with the teacher and he was required to fill out a 20- item likert questionnaire to evaluate the effectiveness of the research on his professional development as well.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION
The Quantitative Phase
This part offers the results and discussion about the current study which was an attempt to explore the possible effect of students' formative assessment on the professional development of Iranian university EFL instructors. To obtain this goal, the researcher tested the null hypothesis stated on the basis of the research question.

Investigating Research Question Number One
The first step to answer the research question was to calculate the descriptive statistics for the dependent variable, teaching performance. And the second step was to submit the data to SPSS Software Version (19.0) in order to run Independent Sample T-test comparing the teaching performance scores obtained by two experimental and control groups.

The first research question of this study asked whether the students' formative assessment is more effective than summative assessment in enhancing the practices of teaching by Iranian EFL instructors. In order to answer this research question, Independent Sample Test was used. Table 1 displays the group statistics of the formative and summative groups. The table shows that the formative group ($M = 84.33$, $SD = 7.71$) exceeded the summative group ($M = 76.57$, $SD = 7.16$).

Table 1
Group Statistics of Teaching Performance Scores Acquired on Teacher Observation Questionnaire

| Group	N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Formative	21	25	71	96	84.33	86.00	89	7.71
Summative	23	23	66	89	76.57	75.00	73	7.16

Figure 1 below graphically demonstrates the teaching performance scores and their frequencies gained in formative group on a normal curve.

Figure 1 **Histogram of teaching performance scores and their frequencies in formative group**
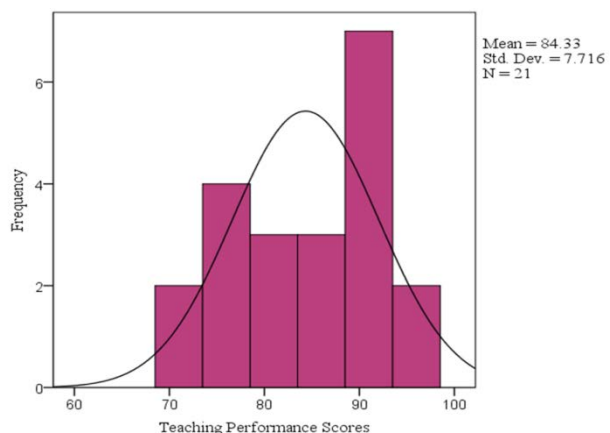
The teaching performance scores and their frequencies in summative group are displayed on a normal curve in Figure 2.

Figure 2 **Histogram of teaching performance scores and their frequencies in summative group**
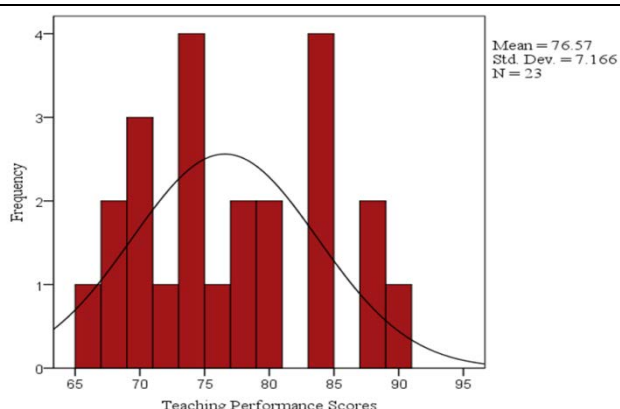
One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality Test results (see Table 2) was not significant for teaching performance scores in both formative group ($p = .67$, $Z = .719$, $p > .05$) and in summative group ($p = .86, Z = .601$, $p > .05$) showing normal distribution of the scores. Therefore Independent Sample Test which is parametric was used to compare the two sets of scores; otherwise Mann Whitney U Test which is nonparametric could be applied.

Table 2
One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality for Two Groups' Teaching Performance

Group	N	Mean	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	Sig.
Formative	25	84.33	.719	.679
Summative	25	76.57	.601	.863

Table 3 represents the results of Independent Sample Test to compare the teaching performance scores of the two groups. Levene's Test in the table reveals that variances are equal ($F = .306, p = .58, p > .05$).

Table 3
Independent Samples Test to Compare Formative and Summative Groups' Teaching Performance Scores

	Levene's Test for Variances		T-test for Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variance assumed	.306	.583	3.463	42	.001	7.768

Independent Samples Test results in Table 3 indicates that T-test for the difference in teaching performance scores between the two formative and summative groups was significant ($t = 3.46, p = .001, p< .05$), in which p value, .001 was less than the selected level of significance, .05, and t value, 3.46 was well above t critical, 2.02; as a result, the null hypothesis of the present study **as** the students' formative assessment is not more effective than summative assessment in the professional development of Iranian university EFL instructors **is rejected**, and it can be claimed that the students' formative assessment is more effectivethan summative assessment in the professional development of Iranian university EFL instructors.

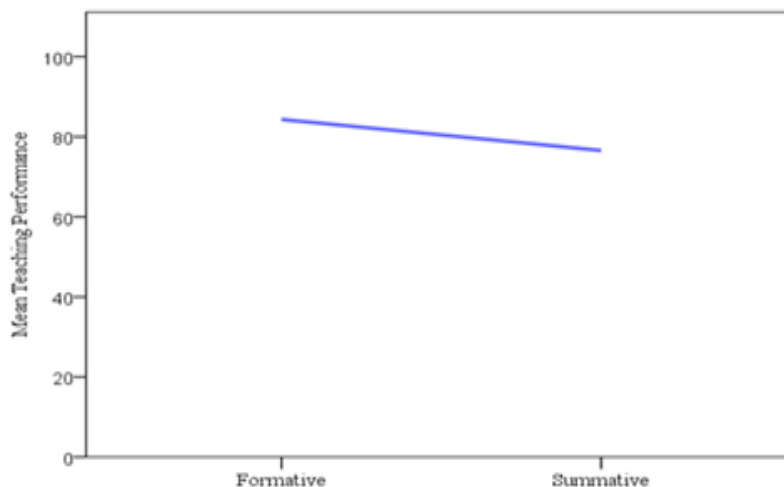Figure 3 below graphically illustrates the results as appeared in Table 1.

Figure 3 **Mean teaching performance scores of two groups**

The Qualitative Phase

Qualitative methods are concerned with studying human behavior within the context in which that behavior would take place naturally and in which the role of the researcher would not affect the normal behavior of the subjects. Moreover, the data are often collected by means of a number of procedures used simultaneously with one data leading to the next. The aims of these methods are, then, to present the data from the perspectives of the subjects or observed groups so that any form of biases from the researcher would not distort the collection, interpretation, or presentation of data (Jacob, 1987, as cited in Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p. 118).

According to Carter and Nunan (2002, p. 227) **triangulation** is an ethnographic processes of verification which give us confidence in our observations. There are four different typ of triangulation: *data triangulation*, in which different sources of data (teacher, student, parents, etc.) contribute to an investigation; *theory triangulation*, when various theories are brought to bear in a study; *researcher triangulation,* in which more than one researcher contributes to the investigation; and *methods triangulation,* which entails the use of multiple methods (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observations, tests, field notes, etc.) to collect data.

In the present study the **data triangulation** (student, teacher) and **method triangulation** (observations, interviews, questionnaires, field notes, stimulated recalls, and audio-video recordings) were used and the data collected via the above-mentioned sources led the researcher to the following conclusions.

Investigating Research Question Number Two

The second research question of the current study inquired to what extend the instructor's reaction toward formative assessment is different from the instructor's reaction toward summative assessment. In order to answer this research question, the instructors' responses to the 20 items of Teacher Reaction Questionnaire about the impact of formative assessment and summative assessment were assessed and as a result the teacher's reaction to formative assessment in almost all 20 items of the questionnaire is better than the teacher's reaction to summative assessment.

The bar graph to illustrate the difference between the teachers' reaction to formative assessment and summative assessment is shown in Figure 4 below. A quick glance at the figure reveals that the teacher's reaction to formative assessment (Sum = 53) is considerably greater than summative assessment (Sum = 40). That means the teacher in formative group had a more positive attitude toward formative assessment in comparison to summative assessment in developing EFL professional teaching.
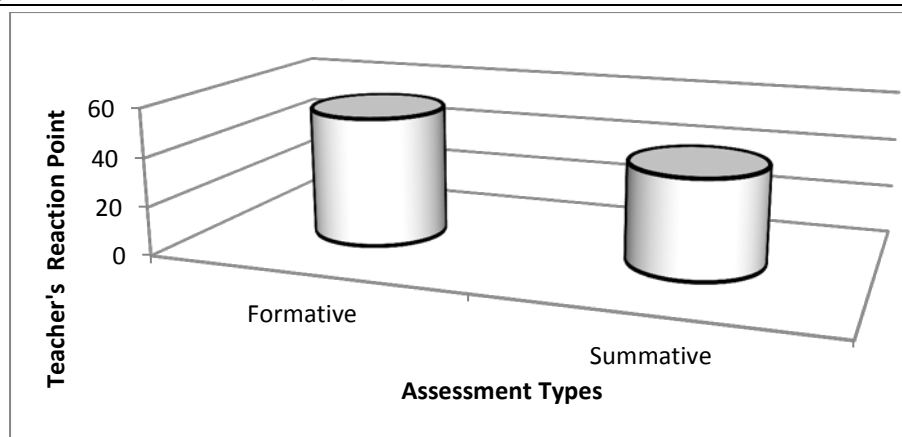
Figure 4 **Teachers' reaction to formative and summative assessment**

Investigating Research Question Number Three

How does the students' formative assessment affect the professional development of Iranian university EFL instructors?

Based on the data collected from the questionnaires distributed every three sessions among the students in the *formative* group, the teacher was informed about every single item in the questionnaire in the feedback sessions with the re-searcher. Whenever any miscomprehension arose the audio or, in case, the video recordings came into play. Moreover, the researcher conducted informal, unstructured interviews with the students plus fol-low ups which were really helpful to inform the teacher about every single detail of the procedures of the classroom. The presence of the researcher as an insider or participant observer (i.e. participating in the very act that they are describing) were also helpful to untie any necessary knots in the process of data collection.

The following results were drawn from the above-mentioned sources of information:

1. The teacher becomes aware of hidden advantages/disadvantages of his/her teaching methodologies.
2. The teacher observes how effective his/her scoring system is regarding students' point of view.
3. The teacher understands about students' reac-tion toward his/her appearance-personality qualifications.
4. The teacher becomes aware of students'

reaction about usefulness of books introduced for the course.
5. The teacher becomes aware of any possible discrimination (gender, race, religion, etc.) in the class and tries to eliminate it.
6. The teacher feels more responsible to be punctual.
7. The teacher feels more responsible to be well-prepared and well-organized.
8. The audiovisual aids or other supplementary materials are used more effectively to enhance the lesson.
9. The teacher gets a proper feedback from students about the assignment/ projects given to them.
10. The teacher is provided with a number of suggestions from students during the forma-tive evaluation which may be helpful to enhance the practices of teaching for this or following semester.

The above-mentioned items all prompt the teacher to employ more useful and effective methodologies, strategies, techniques, and mannerism which result in his/her professional development.

Investigating Research Question Number Four

In what ways the students' formative assessment affect the professional development of Iranian university EFL instructors?

The questionnaire was administered once in the summative group and only one feedback session was held with the researcher. The data

collected from the observations, field notes, interviews, stimulated recalls, and audio-video recordings came into play when needed and the following results are drawn:

1. The teacher is provided with a sense of summary to the whole process of teaching.
2. The teacher is provided with more realistic information since the course is not running and students feel free to answer more critically to the questionnaires.
3. The final satisfaction or dissatisfaction of students along with the reasons is revealed by the summative evaluation and for the teacher.
4. The teacher can make a judgment about his/her performance (self-assessment) based on the given data.

The items mentioned just above all were effective in enhancing the practices of teaching by Iranian EFL university instructors.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the impact of *formative* and *summative* assessment on the professional development of Iranian university EFL instructors and that which one of the assessments is more effective in enhancing the practices of teaching by Iranian university EFL instructors. To have a more comprehensive discussion, it is reasonable to restate the null hypothesis of the study here and then discuss the results.

H0: The students' *formative* assessment is not more effective then *summative* assessment in enhancing the practices of teaching by Iranian university EFL instructors.

The obtained data from the two formative and summative groups was analyzed and based on the findings, the null hypothesis was rejected. The two groups scored differently in the questionnaires and the difference was statistically significant.

By rejecting the null hypothesis, the researcher can claim that the students' *formative* assessment is not more effective then *summative* assessment in enhancing the practices of teaching by Iranian

university EFL instructors.

However, the following conclusions are reached by the researcher based on the obtained data of the qualitative phase of the study:

The Formative Assessment

1. The formative assessment helped the teacher to improve, modify or amend his/her teaching methods.
2. The formative assessment helped the teacher figure out the shortcomings and pitfalls of his/her teaching as well as the strong points and the advantages.
3. The formative assessment satisfied the teacher to modify or change his/her choices of course books as well as the supplementary materials during the semester.
4. Teacher's expectations of course objectives differed from those of his/her students revealed by the formative assessment in some cases.
5. The formative assessment had effects on the teacher's choices of homework, assignments and projects.
6. The formative assessment influenced the way the teacher had chosen to give his/her quizzes, tests, assessments and evaluations.
7. The formative assessment satisfied the teacher to change or modify his/her scoring system.
8. The existence of the formative assessment made the teacher for a better preparation.
9. The formative assessment helped the teacher keep updated.
10. The formative assessment affected the teacher's course syllabus within the semester.

The Summative Assessment

1. The teacher was provided with the relevant data to summarize the whole process of teaching/learning.
2. The teacher was provided with more realistic information since the course was not running and students felt free to answer more critically to the questionnaires.
3. The teacher became aware of the final satisfaction or dissatisfaction of students about

the course in general.

4. The teacher could perform a self-assessment and compare it to those of students based on the obtained data.

Students' Evaluations of Teaching Effectiveness

According to the findings of this study the following general conclusions on the basis of both students' formative and summative evaluations are reached:

The process of students' evaluation of the teachers' work:

- was useful, necessary and was not conducted for paperwork formalities and regulations.
- was not more or less "looking for errors".
- was democratic rather than authoritative.
- included sharing mutual responsibilities and participation between the teacher and the students as evaluators.
- was done with the aim of improvement, rather than control and destruction.
- was collaborative rather than an inspection process.
- did not focus only on the teacher but on the student and course as well.
- guided the teacher in needs-analysis problem-solving.
- provided educational materials and assisted in the course.
- increased both the students' and teachers' motivation and morale.
- made contribution to the teachers' professional growth.
- enhanced the teachers' teaching skills and practice.
- helped the teacher discover his/her shortcomings and strengths.
- helped the teacher overcome instructional problems.

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