

Formative Assessment Management through Vietnamese English Majored Students' Lenses and Ways to Improve Student Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the view on formative assessment management from students' lenses in order to help adjust teaching/learning methods and curriculums. Contrasting to summative assessment, formative assessment has been considered an informal assessment of student's results. However, its contribution to the innovation of teaching and learning is relatively important. Appropriate use of this form of assessment leads to a successful teaching and learning process, and a much better result and quality of training. A questionnaire and interviews were used to investigate 228 students to find out the reality of formative assessment practice for English majored students and its management by different stakeholders. The results of the investigation show a significant shortage of awareness of students about formative assessment nature and strengths. These results also suggest innovative solutions to improve student motivation based on formative assessment practice.

Keywords

Formative assessment; Formative assessment management; Student motivation; Teaching and learning

Introduction

Formative assessment connects curriculum, learning outcomes, and teaching methodology. The practices of formative assessment contribute to the adjustments of teaching/learning methods and the improvement of curriculum pursuant to expected learning outcomes. The formative assessment is not a formal assessment but plays a very important role in enhancing training quality. The goal of formative assessment is not to grade student's work, otherwise, it evaluates student's achievement at a certain stage of training and provides relevant proofs for teachers and students to adjust their teaching/learning process and methods. Due to its importance, the management of formative assessment should be carefully implemented by different stakeholders including teachers, educational managers, and students themselves.

To investigate the reality of formative assessment through English majored students' lenses and suggest solutions to improve student motivation in learning, we conduct a survey of English students on their awareness of formative assessment and related factors. The results serve as practical evidence of formative assessment implemented in Vietnam and measures should be followed in order to optimize the advantages of formative assessment in teaching English to pedagogical students in Vietnam.

Literature Review

Formative assessment

The formative assessment has been defined by many researchers who focused on its nature and purposes. Kathleen M. Cauley and James H. McMillan from Virginia Commonwealth University recognized formative assessment as a process through which assessment-elicited evidence of student learning is gathered and instruction is modified in response to feedback. Nguyen Cong Khanh in his book "Syllabus on competency-based assessment and testing in education" defined that formative assessment aims at finding mistakes, providing feedback, promoting learning process, orientating/instructing students to study as well as orientating/instructing teachers to teach. Formative assessment also helps monitor and improve education quality.

The definition of formative assessment is diverse, however, researchers agree that formative assessment, like other assessments, happens in the training process and is recognized as an informal assessment to measure the performance of students at a certain period of the training process. The goals of formative assessment are to improve teaching and learning activities and to help students and other stakeholders adjust their activities to meet the learning outcomes of training programs and ameliorate training quality.

Management of formative assessment

The management of formative assessment is an essential factor to maintain effective implementation of the measurement of student’s performance at a predefined period of the training process. Sue Bloxham and Pete Boyd (2007) stated that Assessment is a complex enterprise involving students, tutors, managers, administrators and employers, each with a role to play in developing an effective assessment system. Many Vietnamese researchers recognized that faculty members, students, and educational managers are important factors to the assessment, the role of each is to collect feedback from the assessment to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Bui Minh Hien, Nguyen Vu Minh Hien, 2019; Nguyen Huu Loc, Phan Thi Mai Ha, 2018). The management of formative assessment is conducted through five main contents known as the goal of assessment, learning objectives, assessment time, evidence collection method, and assessors (Bui Minh Hien et al., 2019; Tran Thi Tuyet Oanh, 2016). The main objects of formative assessment consist of teachers, students, and educational managers, however, teachers and students play an essential role. The latter collect feedback and adjust teaching/learning activities on a daily basis during the teaching and learning process. Mantz Yorke (1998) raised three requirements of an effective formative assessment at higher education institutions: a clear definition of the purpose (s) to be served, a strategy designed to lead to the fulfilment of purpose(s), and an operationalization that “works”.

In short, the management of formative assessment is an intended impaction of managing subjects (school directorate, training department, relevant

administrative department, section, lecturer and student) on managing objects (student, curriculum) through regulatory documents which instruct assessment procedures, dispose of assessing resources (human, financial and material resources) in order to support, lead and guide assessment managers to implement the assessment and achieve expected learning outcomes.

Motivation

Motivation is the set of needs which make an individual act so as to satisfy his or her previously made goals. The individual has to mobilize internal and external forces to accomplish his goals. Alain Lieury and Fabien Fenouillet in “Motivation and school success” recognized motivation as The whole of biological and psychological mechanisms which allow launching of orientation action (toward a goal or contrarily to avoid it) and finally that of intensity and persistence: more we are motivated, more the activity is great and persistent (Lieury and Fenouillet, 1997). According Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, motivation concerns energy, persistence and equifinality – all aspect of activation and intention (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Motivation is produced by the interaction between an individual and his or her environment. It greatly affects people’s mental state and their working results. The motivation is regulated by cognitive engagement and perseverance as results of the source of motivation including the perceptions of value of the activity, competence and controllability (Viau, 1994) (figure 1). These indicators of motivation were also stated by Viau so as to contribute to the improvement of motivation at work in general and at university in particular.

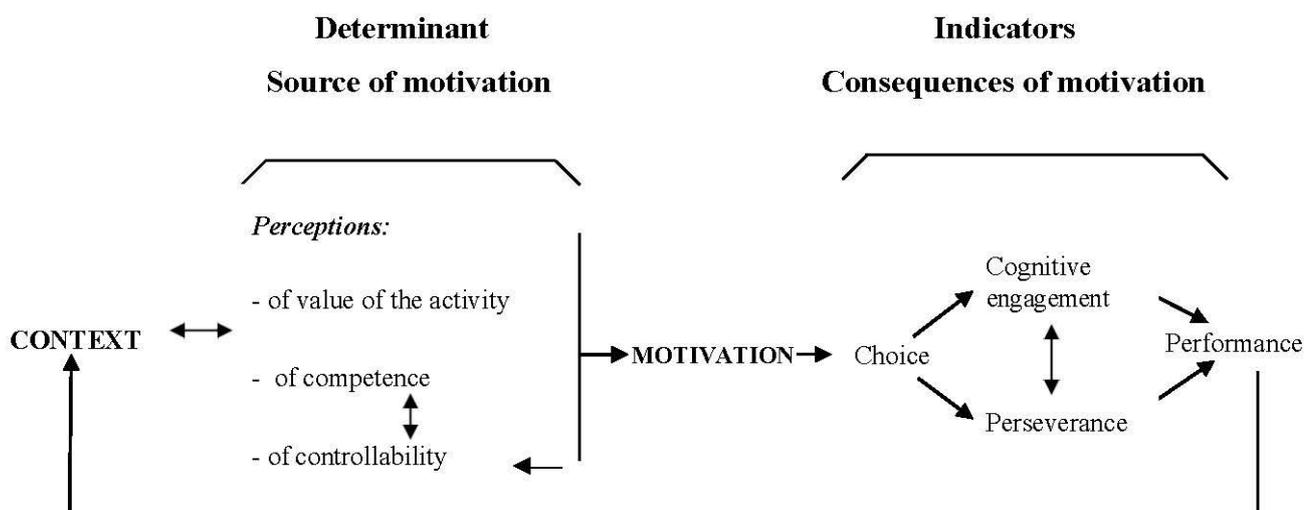


Figure 1. The indicators of motivation (Viau, 1994, p.73)

Methods

In this research, we use a questionnaire to investigate the reality of formative assessment and its management awareness by English majored students. The questionnaire includes five questions covering 34 items that investigate the awareness of formative assessment, characteristics, goals, content implementation, assessment methods, and impacts of formative assessment to teaching English at pedagogical universities. The questionnaire is given to 228 students from three pedagogical universities known as Vinh University, Ha Noi National University of Education and Ho Chi Minh-City Pedagogical University. The results are analyzed by means of SPSS software to clarify how formative assessment management is applied, how different it is implemented in Vietnam from what it is done worldwide, and what should be adjusted to optimize the advantages of formative assessment during the teaching/learning process. All answers to the questionnaire are completed by interviews of randomly selected students to understand more profoundly the issues in question.

The study investigated the awareness of students about formative assessment and formative assessment application management at Vinh University, Ha Noi National University of

Education and Ho Chi Minh-City Pedagogical University (in Vietnam). Five issues were raised and

feedbacks from students showed interesting views on formative assessment and formative assessment management.

Results

The characteristics of formative assessment

Five items related to the awareness of students about formative assessment characteristics were successively asked. These five items represent five essential features of formative assessment: feedback to students, feedback to teachers, mutual impact, adjustment of teaching and learning, and informal assessment. Most of students did not recognize those five typical representations of formative assessment at 93%, 87.3%, 88.1%, 91.2% and 31.6% respectively. An interesting figure that showed a low level of cognition about formative assessment is its informality. Theoretically, formative assessment is informal because it is not used to mark students, but to measure their performance at a certain time of the training process and to serve as evidence for adjustment and improvement. In fact, through the investigation, most students admitted that formative assessment is formal, which means it is used to mark students. This reflects correctly the reality of formative assessment implementation in Vietnam (Decision No 43/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT dated August 15, 2007 by the Ministry of Education and Training).

Table 1: Student's awareness of formative assessment characteristics

<i>Characteristics of FA</i>	<i>Agree (3)</i>	<i>Confuse (2)</i>	<i>Do not agree (1)</i>	<i>Total of students</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>\bar{X}</i>	<i>Order</i>
1 . Feedback to students	3	13	212	228	.321	1.08	1
2 . Feedback to teachers	3	26	199	228	.384	1.14	3
3 . Mutual impact	4	23	201	228	.391	1.13	3
4 . Adjustment of teaching and learning	6	14	208	228	.393	1.11	2
5 . Informal assessment	49	107	72	228	.772	1.90	5

By this table, it is seen that most students do not distinguish formative assessment from other forms of assessment such as summative assessment, norm-referenced assessment, criterion-referenced

assessment, performance assessment, etc. This may be caused by the marking of student's results. Looking at the table 1, it is noticed that the application of formative assessment at Vietnamese higher education

institutions is very different from that in other countries and international experience. Furthermore, the standard deviation showed that the answers to the four first questions experienced the same tendency, which means students had the same viewpoint about formative assessment, otherwise, the fifth answer

indicated a large variation in students' awareness. The lowest point goes for feedback to students, the fact that they get little feedback from their teachers and other stakeholders, which is demonstrated by a large number of students who did not agree with feedback provision (212/228).

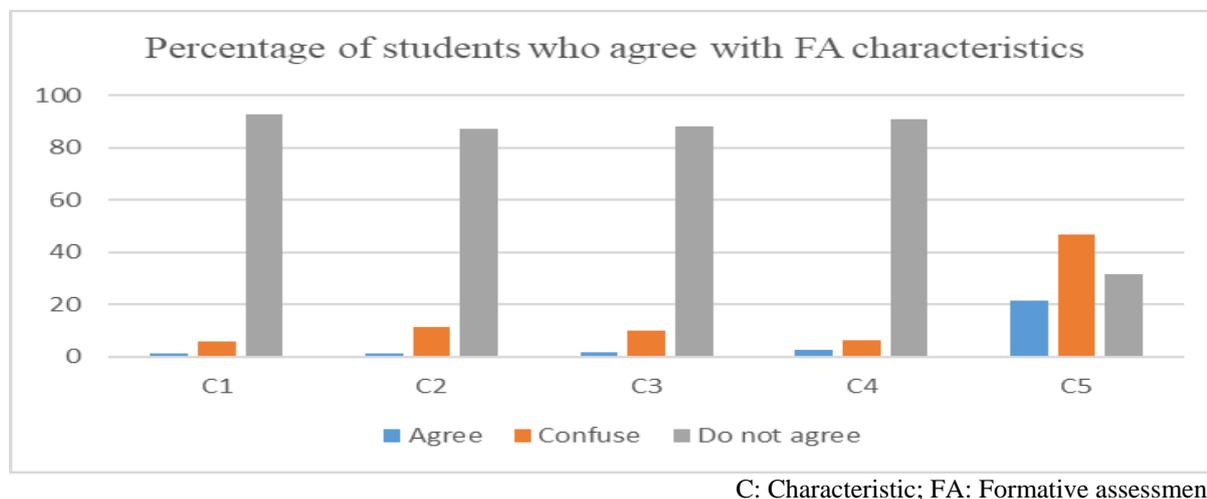


Figure 2. Percentage of students who agree with FA characteristics

Instead of providing students with feedback to improve their learning activity, formative assessment, in this study, does not play its role, because 93% of students did not agree that they got feedback from teachers. In the same situation

with three other characteristics Feedback to teachers, Mutual impact, and Adjustment of teaching and learning, students did not recognize these three features at 87.3 %, 88.1%, and 91.2% respectively. A difference in the response to the fifth question related to their awareness about the informality of formative assessment, although the number of students who decided that formative assessment is informal is greater at 21.5%, that of two other options represent a majority at 46.9% and 31.6% respectively. This

indicates that students considered formative assessment rather formal.

Formative assessment goals

The next five items questioned students about their evaluation of the importance of formative assessment goals (Table 2). It is commonly seen that the majority of students recognized the main goals of formative assessment at 57.2% to 68.86%. The standard deviation is acceptable (at .500 and less), which illustrates an overall student's consent on what they choose (mostly very important scale). Among these goals, improvement of student performance and reduction of student gaps was rated the lowest at 57.02% with an average point of 2.54 for Very important level.

Table 2: Student's evaluation of FA goals

FA goals	Level						Total of students	SD	\bar{X}	Order
	Very important (3)		Important (2)		Not important (1)					
	#	%	#	%	#	%				
1. Focus on student learning process and internal values instead of score and rewards	133	58.33	94	41.23	1	0.44	228	.504	2.58	3

2. Encouragement of student strength in place of highlighting their weakness	133	58.33	91	39.91	4	1.75	228	.531	2.57	2
3. Encouragement of student responsibility for their educational development by making them understand their real need, strength and motivation	157	68.86	67	29.39	4	1.75	228	.507	2.67	4
4. Provision of accurate detailed information to students	152	66.67	76	33.33	0	0.00	228	.472	2.67	4
5. improvement of student performance and reduction of student gaps	130	57.02	91	39.91	7	3.07	228	.558	2.54	1

The data shows that these five goals were recognized as important factors which affect student’s learning goal pursuit. The most obvious appreciation refers to the third goal Encouragement of student responsibility for their educational development by making them understand their real need, strength, and motivation at 68.86%. Formative assessment contributes to motivating students to be more responsible for their educational advancement. In contrast, the percentage of students who depreciated formative assessment goals is relatively low for these five goals at 0.44%, 1.75 %, 1.75%, 0%, and 3.07% respectively.

Content of formative assessment

The content of formative assessment includes three main factors *Knowledge, Skills,* and *Attitude* on which the questions were asked to investigate comprehensively the evaluation by students.

- Knowledge assessment content

Formative assessment has been conducted regularly at higher education institutions and contributed to the

improvement of student’s performance. Four questions were asked to students and the results reflected the level of implementation of this form of assessment during the training process. The results show that the majority of students admitted a regular introduction of formative assessment to English classes at from 54.82% to 65.35% (Table 3). Although some students doubted the effectiveness of Formative assessment to their achievement at 5.70%, those who appreciated a great impact of formative assessment on their academic performance; 54.82% of students agreed that the content of formative assessment successfully measured their achievement at different times. The variation between answers was in an acceptable limit from .498 to .605, which means that there is a similarity in students’ answers which favour la value of formative assessment in strengthening student’s achievement. Another figure that demonstrates the continuity of assessment content improvement from teachers is the order of these four contents of which the update of formative assessment content conformable to the development of training process was rated first for its implementation.

Table 3: Implementation level of knowledge assessment content

Knowledge assessment content	Level of implementation						Total of students	SD	X̄	Order
	Regularly (3)		Sometimes (2)		Never (1)					
	#	%	#	%	#	%				
1. Criteria of Knowledge assessment was built based on learning outcome	143	62.72	83	36.40	2	0.88	228	.505	2.62	2

2. The content of FA was updated along with the training process	149	65.35	77	33.77	2	0.88	228	.498	2.64	1
3. The content of FA covered all knowledge taught	137	60.09	88	38.60	3	1.32	228	.519	2.59	3
4. The content of FA successfully measured student's achievement at the time of assessment	125	54.82	90	39.47	13	5.70	228	.605	2.49	4

- Skills assessment contents

The construction of skills for students through formative assessment was appreciated by students. As can be seen from the table (Table 4), four contents were raised for the survey and the results collected are positive with a significant percentage of surveyed students who recognised a regular implementation of skills assessment contents. Among

all skill assessment contents, teamwork has been the most frequently implemented at 83.77% and less go for the skill of knowledge application to the reality at only 51.32%. In addition, the average point shows the first position for team work skill assessment at 2.82. Although the percentage of students who found that the assessment of the skill of knowledge application to the reality is a little bit low, the admission of this content implementation is significant at 93.43%.

Table 4: Implementation level of skills assessment contents

Skills assessment content	Level of implementation						Total of students	SD	\bar{X}	Order
	Regularly (3)		Sometimes (2)		Never (1)					
	#	%	#	%	#	%				
1. Skill of knowledge application to the reality	117	51.32	96	42.11	15	6.58	228	.617	2.45	4
2. Team work skill	191	83.77	33	14.47	4	1.75	228	.428	2.82	1
3. Problem solving skill	144	63.16	80	35.09	4	1.75	228	.523	2.61	2
4. Answer construction skill in the assessment	131	57.46	87	38.16	10	4.39	228	.582	2.53	3

- Attitude assessment content

There is a variation in the feedback from students through the survey. The standard deviation of two contents related to student perception and behaviour indicates a slight difference between them and the remaining content of emotion from .612 to .650 which are a little above .500 (acceptable scale) compared to .574 (emotion). This difference demonstrates a diversity in student's perception of

assessment contents. In addition, the percentage of students who found that all three attitude assessment contents were regularly implemented by teachers is more than a half from 51.75% to 64.04% which represents a majority of answers. Although the percentage of students who did not recognise the regular or occasional implementation of assessment contents at from 4.82% to 8.77% (Table 5), the value of attitude assessment content is not adequately transferred to all students, which leads to student confusion.

Table 5: Implementation level of Attitude assessment content

Attitude assessment content	Level of implementation						Total of students	SD	\bar{X}
	Regularly (3)		Sometimes (2)		Never (1)				
	#	%	#	%	#	%			

1. Learning perception represented through student's attitude toward content, value, benefits... of learning	146	64.04	71	31.14	11	4.82	228	.574	2.6
2. Student emotion about subjects	118	51.75	90	39.47	20	8.77	228	.650	2.43
3. Student's behaviour represented through his aspirations, enthusiasm about their learning	123	53.95	91	39.91	14	6.14	228	.612	2.48

Methods and tools for formative assessment

Assessment methods and tools are important factors for an accurate and relevant collection of formative assessment data. According to the results in the tables 6 and 7, methods and tools of assessment have been regularly conducted at above 45% according to the rate by students. However, for some contents, the percentage of students who are confused between regular and occasional use of the methods and tools.

- Methods of formative assessment

Four methods of assessment are commonly used during the training process including questions and answers (Q&A), teacher's feedback, peer assessment and self-assessment. The results show a very good appreciation from students of Q&A and teacher's

feedback at 85.09% and 76.75% respectively and the variation between answers is slight at .389 and .449, lower than .500 for acceptable scale (Table 6). This confirms that these two methods of assessment are helpful and have promoted their strength. Otherwise, although the percentage of students who rated for not necessary level is low, those rated for the *confuse* category is nearly equal to the first category *Very necessary* at 46.93% and 47.37% for peer assessment and self-assessment, which represents low student's awareness about the importance of these assessment methods. Concerning the last method *Self-assessment*, the rate for *not necessary* level and variation make it an acceptance in the assessment set. Thus students underestimated self-assessment, which is considered as an essential method for new approaches of training.

Table 6: Methods of formative assessment necessity

Methods of assessment	Level of necessity						Total of students	SD	X̄
	Very necessary (3)		Necessary (2)		Not necessary (1)				
	#	%	#	%	#	%			
1. Questions and answers (Q&A)	194	85.09	32	14.04	2	0.88	228	.389	2.84
2. Teacher's feedback	175	76.75	51	22.37	2	0.88	228	.449	2.76
3. Peer assessment	111	48.68	107	46.93	10	4.39	228	.580	2.44
4. Self-assessment	104	45.61	108	47.37	16	7.02	228	.616	2.39

- Tools of formative assessment.

The importance of assessment tools was appreciated by the majority of students at above 56%. Four tools are currently used to assess student's achievements during their study process: Open questions based on criterion and standards of formative assessment; Class observations, assignments, student projects, discussions, student profile and quiz & test; Mutual assessment of student productions and comments; and Self-comparison of student production with published criterion and standards. The gap between the

percentage of students who admitted the importance of these tools and that of students who deny it is big over 56% compared to over 2%. According to the results in the table 7, the most necessary tool is *Class observations, assignments, student projects, discussions, student profile and quiz & test* at 67.98% of positive answers compared to 56.14% of agreed feedback for the first and the third tools. Apart from the fourth tool which is classified out of the tool set, the standard deviation of all other three tools are in acceptable variation at .582, .510 and .542 respectively.

Table 7: Tools of formative assessment necessity

Tools of assessment	Level of necessity						Total of students	SD	\bar{X}
	Very necessary (3)		Necessary (2)		Not necessary (1)				
	#	%	#	%	#	%			
1. Open questions based on criterion and standards of formative assessment.	128	56.14	90	39.47	10	4.39	228	.582	2.52
2. Class observations, assignments, student projects, discussions, student profile and quiz&test.	155	67.98	69	30.26	4	1.75	228	.510	2.66
3. Mutual assessment of student productions and comments	128	56.14	95	41.67	5	2.19	228	.542	2.54
4. Self-comparison of student production with published criterion and standards.	131	57.46	83	36.40	14	6.14	228	.612	2.51

A glance at the graph below shows a big gap between high level of necessity of the four tools and low level of necessity. Most students agreed with tools to be used to measure their achievements and performance during their study process.

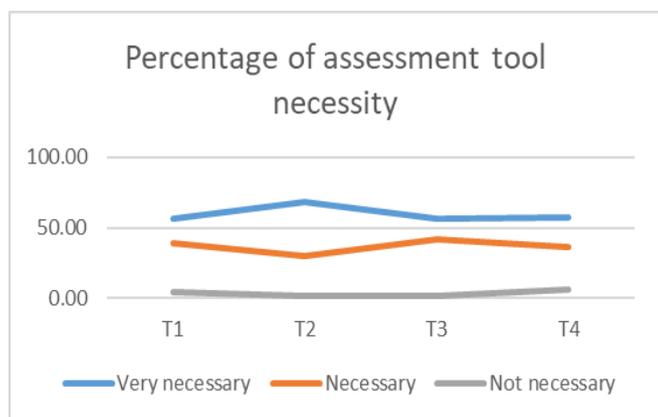


Figure 3. Tools of formative assessment necessity

Impacts of formative assessment on student's achievement

The investigation shows that most students recognised formative assessment's impact on student's

achievement. Five factors directly influencing their learning were posed to get student's evaluation (Table 8). The results indicate that almost all students highly agreed with the impacts of formative assessment on their study pursuit at 70.61% to 85.53%. Just a very limited rate of students who do not think that formative assessment affected their studies at 1.32% to 2.63%. Furthermore, the index of standards deviation fluctuates in acceptable levels from .442 to .511, which shows the reliability of data collected and student's answers reflected correctly the reality. Different data indexes illustrate the level of formative assessment impacts on student's learning and motivation. It is obvious that formative assessment contributes to improving student's performance in different ways.

Among the impacts investigated, formative assessment is recognised to promote their strengths and control their weaknesses at the highest level at 85.53%. This justifies the success of formative assessment implementation by teachers in promoting student's management of themselves. Comprehension of inner value is one of the impacts was rated at the lowest level, but represented a very high percentage compared to many other items previously studied at 70.61%.

Table 8. Impacts of formative assessment on student's achievement

Impacts of FA on student's achievement	Agree (3)		Confuse (2)		Do not agree (1)		Total of students	SD	\bar{X}
	#	%	#	%	#	%			
1. Helps students understand their inner values.	161	70.61	62	27.19	5	2.19	228	.511	2.68
2. Assists students in promoting their strengths and controlling their weaknesses.	195	85.53	27	11.84	6	2.63	228	.442	2.83
3. Helps students be more responsible for their educational advancement.	173	75.88	52	22.81	3	1.32	228	.466	2.75
4. Supports student adjusting their learning activities with accurate, detailed and useful feedbacks.	168	73.68	55	24.12	5	2.19	228	.499	2.71
5. Facilitates student improvement of study achievements and shortening the gaps between real results and expected outcomes.	169	74.12	54	23.68	5	2.19	228	.497	2.72

Suggestions to improve student motivation

In the competence-based programmed, motivation of students to learn and improvement of their achievements (knowledge, skills and attitude) are essential to ensure the quality and the completion of a training process. Solutions raised rely on the research on the reality of formative assessment

implementation at higher education institutions in Vietnam. Starting with the awareness of students about formative assessment, they make their study plan to meet all the requirements of formative assessment and then pursuit their goals adequately as described in the graph below.

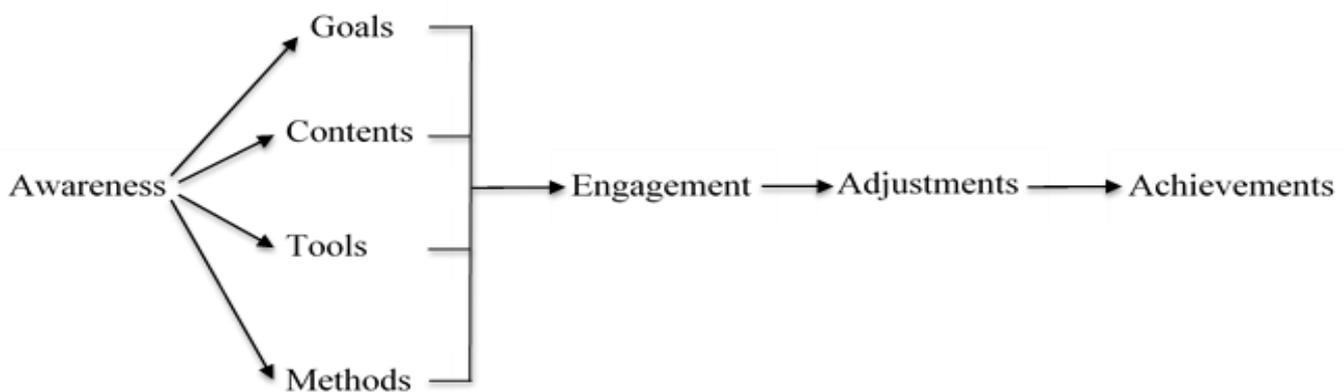


Figure 4. Suggestions to improve student motivation

1. Enhancement of student awareness about the values and characteristics of formative assessment

One of the most important factors affecting formative assessment is student awareness about its

characteristics and values before conducting an assessment. Five main features of formative assessment should be communicated to students at the beginning of the training process. The clearer the formative assessment's features and values are, the better students engage in learning because they can see what they have to do to reach their goals. As students

understand the strengths of formative assessment, they will cooperate with teachers to involve in the assessment process, persevere their goals, and make necessary adjustments to meet these goals. In fact, this assessment is not a burden for them, but a “helper” for the enhancement of their academic performance and supporter for appropriate plan making.

2. Clarification of the role and goals of formative assessment

The role and goals of formative assessment should be clear, showing that it contributes to ensuring learning outcomes. Among five goals, two should be more strengthened related to student inner value promotion, academic performance, and gap reduction. In this matter, all stakeholders must not reward or mark students, all feedbacks are essential for students to look back at what they have done and achieved, then based on their revision, they will make necessary modifications of their plan and strategies.

Teachers and concerned people should introduce all formative assessment goals at the beginning of the programme so that students and involved individuals understand its importance and purposes and make their own plan.

3. Regular implementation of formative assessment based on the curriculums and training process

Formative assessment can be conducted at different time spans during the training process, a regular implementation supports gradual progress in student’s work and gives students a good habit of improving their learning activity conformably to expected learning outcomes. As it is an informal assessment and does not require teachers to mark students at any time, teachers should intensify formative assessment in order to provide much-needed feedback. The shortage of feedbacks results in insufficient adjustments which help students make progress. If teachers can use it frequently, formative assessment can strengthen its values and become very helpful to students.

4. Promotion of peer assessment and self-assessment

Methods of assessment also contribute to the success of the assessment process, thus the choice of a suitable method is vital for teachers to carry out the measurement of student’s achievements. Peer assessment and self-assessment have been known as important factors to develop student’s autonomy, self-determination, and self-responsibility. This stimulates students to recognise their values, strengths, and

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weaknesses and motivates students to learn and make progress. These assessments should be strengthened and applied more largely and frequently in classrooms.

5. Strengthening the use of assessment tools

To make formative assessment useful and meaningful, tools should be adequately used. Teachers have utilised many tools such as Q&A, class observation, assignments, projects, student mutual assessment, and student self-assessment based on criteria and standards previously set. Albeit with the flexibility and skills of tool application, the development of self-assessment tool is negligent. To motivate students extrinsically and intrinsically to study and persevere with their goals, teachers are to give priority to student self-assessment. Their productions should be checked by themselves according to evaluation grids given by teachers and they create a to-do list to improve their studies and make progress conformably to the learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Formative assessment is not the only effective assessment form, but one of the most important assessment forms to promote student learning engagement and motivation. By the analysis of the survey results and theoretical study, we found that there exist some shortcomings in formative assessment application at Vietnamese higher education institutions, notably in the field of teacher education. Despite the use of any training approach, educators should focus on periodical progress evaluation to discover student’s deviation, tardiness, or errors to promptly adjust these inaccuracies and get them in the right way and speed. Formative assessment can cover this mission. Anyway, the use of formative assessment requires teachers to analyse the reality of the training process, scheme, and learning outcomes to apply it flexibly, effectively, and timely. Studies showed that students are more motivated, perseverant and progressive when they are formatively assessed and given enough feedback about their study results.

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