

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT: THE PAPER FOCUSES ON FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES WHICH CAN BE USED IN UNIVERSITY FOREIGN LANGUAGES TEACHING PRACTICE AS WELL AS FOR EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS ASSESSMENT. DESPITE BEING IN HIGH DEMAND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT HAS A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE IT BECOMES AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL TOOL. A PROBLEMATIC FIELD IS ALSO OUTLINED.

KEY WORDS: FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT, EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS, FOREIGN LANGUAGES TEACHING

The Bologna declaration signed by Russia and some European countries defines graduate employability as one of the main cornerstones of the Bologna process. Being still a vague and controversial issue employability is agreed to be defined now as a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy [1]. Employability skills are viewed as an integral component of this concept; there are different lists of the skills, the most commonly used includes: teamwork, communication, planning and organizing, initiative and enterprise, self-management, problem solving, learning and technology. Almost all of them are included in Russian latest educational standards which define most of these skills as general or common professional competences.

Enhancing these skills in academic environment is considered to be rather problematic, their assessment is even more of a challenge due to their complex nature. But scholars agree that formative assessment can help solve the problem. Formative assessment is defined as «any task or activity which promotes shared learning goals, effective questioning/feedback, dialogic interaction and learner autonomy». Students must have the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work during actual production [2]. Aimed at individual achievements of a person, it does not imply any comparison or reporting process as in summative assessment.

The main difference between summative and formative assessment is immediate feedback all the participants receive: teachers make use of formative assessment to make instruction more effective, while students feel that the process of learning is truly student-centered. The advantages of the formative assessment are obvious: learners share the responsibility for their education, acquire self and peer assessment skills. Only by formative assessment can students evaluate and develop their general or common professional skills which employability skills belong to. That is why it is essential to make classroom teaching and assessment as formative as possible.

Russian modern educational standards require the implementation of formative assessment in teaching process: point rating systems are widely introduced; syllabuses contain

evaluation criteria, which are discussed and relied upon both by professors and students; different assessment rubrics to reflect learning and student achievements are worked out.

Foreign languages teaching is a large stage opened for enhancing and assessing such skills. Scholars report that teaching and assessment methods can be the same which only proves formative character of the latter. Below is the list of some assessment techniques which are widely used in Kemerovo university practice for students of foreign languages for those who specialize in *Theory and practice of translation and interpretation* and *Foreign philology* to practise different speech and language skills as well as to enhance and assess employability skills. The skills are presented with facets as given in [3]:

Techniques used formatively	Language skills in focus	Employability skills (with facets)
Mini-group discussions	Speaking, reading	Teamwork (working as an individual and as a member of a team), communication (being assertive. Sharing information, listening and understanding. Speaking clearly and directly), problem solving (developing creative solutions).
Concept map building Brainstorming	Speaking, vocabulary	Self-management (articulating own ideas and vision); Technology (using IT to organize data).
Student-developed Rubrics	Speaking, writing	Technology (if done, e.g., with the help of Google docs) Communication
Student-developed tests and questions	Writing, grammar	Planning and organizing (collecting, analyzing and organizing information) Technology (if done, e.g., with the help of Google docs)
Dramatizing	Speaking, listening	Initiative and enterprise (translating ideas into action)
Finding mistakes in the text	Writing, grammar	Problem solving (showing independence and initiative in identifying problems and solving them)
Essay writing	Writing	Communication (empathizing, persuading effectively, writing to the needs of the audience)
Webquests	Any and all	Communication (listening and understanding, speaking clearly and directly, reading independently, persuading effectively, establishing and using networks, sharing information) Teamwork (applying teamwork to a range of situations, coaching and mentoring skills, including giving feedback) Technology (having knowledge to apply technology) Initiative and enterprise (being creative, identifying opportunities not obvious to others, generating a range of options)
Role – play	Speaking, reading	Communication Teamwork Initiative and enterprise (with facets mentioned above)

Present educational standards require teaching and competence formation to be closely linked with professional standards. Thus the given facets can be altered in accordance with specific job requirements and be included in formative assessment criteria. Further articulation of the outcomes is essential: students should be aware of what progress they made and what is even more important – how the skills are related to their future professional career.

In spite of being highly in demand, formative assessment is still a problematic subject both for teachers and students: teachers tend to convert sporadic formative assessment

practices into summative, while students do not always agree with evaluation criteria or rubrics even if they were discussed properly. Or they do not seem to take such assessment seriously, especially it is true for 1st-2nd year students: schools have not made formative assessment of frequent use yet.

One of the ways to solve the problem is an engagement of perspective employers. Despite being “employers in the making” in many respects (when their requirements are too different and affected by immediate profit gain), they can help draw students’ attention to what skills are in high demand on the labour market depending on the specifics of the trade. Another way is to make use of formative assessment on a regular basis as student should feel it to be an integral part of the teaching and learning process. For this reason it might be essential to include formative assessment tools in syllabuses which are supposed to be widely available to students.

As it can be seen, almost any technique which is used in teaching foreign languages can be formative – if it provides two-way feedback – and can be good for enhancing students’ employability skills especially if it is stressed upon afterwards. But group activities such as web-quests, case-study, role-plays allow forming and assessing employability skills holistically and “seamlessly” which is said to be most effective [4]. Beside getting feedback on language aspect learning, students enhance and can assess their employability skills, which promotes better articulation of the acquired skills, achievements whereby increasing chances of being successfully employed in future.

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