

ASSESSING STUDENT WRITING IN EFL CLASSES BY USING AFL

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Abstract: *This article deals with the issue of assessing student writing in EFL classes by using assessment for learning (Afl) and reflect writing teachers' assessment.*

Key words: *assessment, assessing student writing, assessment for learning (Afl), strategies of AfL.*

Introduction

In modern language teaching classrooms there appeared a new term AfL (Assessment for learning). Lee (2007) defined the term as way of assessing by involving different tasks and assessing continuously not only in one paper-based test. In classroom this term is interchangeably used with the term formative assessment. The key strategies of AfL are using peer-feedback, teacher-student conference, portfolio writings, process writing, self-evaluation and etc. Using AfL is considered in many educational policies in different countries. In Uzbekistan there was a PreSETT project which reflected most of the English language teacher education specialties' curriculum. Nearly all the tasks of the curriculum it asks students to perform during the semesters and at the end to reflect their learning's. This shows that in our context we are using AfL strategies in different ways. For instance in writing classes of this curriculum students are asked to write portfolios and before handing them to the teacher they are usually asked to get feedback from their peers, then self check the works. For many times these portfolios are corresponded by teacher and students conferences. These are the effective ways of

formative assessment and encourage learners to fulfill their tasks on time and improve their writing skills too. We have effective assessment strategies in our curriculum, but what about implementing them into real-classroom. Many teachers of the higher education institutes are not enough trained to assess students writings appropriately. In this article we will discuss and try to reflect writing teachers' assessment.

Main part

According to Weigle (2012) teaching writing seems very simple. Just giving topic to the students and asking them to write appear very simple task. However, when it comes to assess students it is not easy to assess fairly and consistently. As a teacher we have difficulties in giving feedback or commenting students' works. This is a main concern we usually think on teaching writing in our classes.

Weigle (2012) states that "In lower levels of instruction, and in many foreign language contexts, writing is often seen as a support skill for practicing the structures and vocabulary taught in class". This point is true in most EFL classes in Uzbekistan. It may be described as mostly our writing tasks are designed according to the area we teach in actual classes. Here the main focus of assessment is on evaluating students' ability of constructing sentences and the usage of vocabulary in a context. This leads to that we do not score the writing skills itself; usually we score the understanding of the structure we taught in class.

If we speak about giving feedback to learners' writings it is crucial to point that getting feedback from their teachers is very important for students. As Crusan (2014) says that in most contexts students work positively and their motivation is increased when they get feedback for their work orally or in written form. From our own experience we may state that most of our students wait for teachers'

feedback rather than their peers'. They think and believe that teachers' constructive feedback helps them improve their writing skills more and they prefer to receive written notes of teachers rather than from their partners. Writing involves individual work, thus students are more confident when they get feedback from their teachers. Teachers' constructive feedback gives opportunity for learners' progress. At the beginning of the writing course it is important to teach learners how to work with correction of their work and work with their peers to get help in different misunderstandings. However, this doesn't mean that students do not like to get peer feedback. They are eager to know about their partner's opinion on the topic too. It is the right way to combine peer feedback with teacher's feedback in the classroom. Some of our students, whose English level is lower, prefer to get feedback from their peers. They think before handing the work to the teacher it is more comfortable for them to work with their partners and get some feedback from them. Sometimes in EFL classes most students may have same problems in writing, then teachers should try to present the topic again to the whole class and discuss about the problems of students together with them. This gives them more confidence on learning and improves their not only writing skills, but other main aspects of the language too.

Another concern on assessing writing skills is to train teachers of English how to assess correctly and train to give constructive feedback. Nearly all writing teachers state that the most difficult part in their teaching is giving constructive feedback and assessing learners' writings. In our context not all teachers use this strategy to help learners' development in writing. Traditionally teachers are used to work according to product-oriented process; the attention is given to the product itself, rather than working on the process. While assessing teacher gives short feedback without giving much attention to the development of writing product

itself. Assessing of writing is mostly used as checking the result work. Recent training of the teachers helped them to change their minds on teaching and assessing the writing skills in EFL classes.

Weigle (2007) suggested the important items teachers need to know in assessing students' works:

1. Understand classroom writing assessment methods;
2. Recognize what a good assessment is;
3. Comprehend the concepts of formative and summative assessment;
4. Grasp concepts of reliability, validity and practicality in test development;
5. Understand the best development process;
6. Understand goal and aims setting.

Conclusion

To sum up we want to state that teaching writing skills involve not only teaching the language skills or structures, it is as well as teaching assessing too. Not only teacher evaluation is involved in the process, however involving students themselves as reflector is the best way of improving learners' writing skills. AfL is not only assessing the writing, it is the way of teaching and motivating learners how to write effectively.

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