

A Narrative Review of the Use of Formative Assessment in China's University Education

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Abstract: Education is a key factor in the realization of self-worth and national progress. How to train and develop the young generation is the fundamental problem of education. Assessment is important to develop education, because it drives students learning. At present, terminal assessment has always been a key part of education system, which pays too much attention to the overall outcome but ignores the students' subjectivity and initiative in the learning process. This kind of assessment suppresses students' creativity. Therefore, it is necessary to explore a new assessment system more suitable for modern teaching. Formative assessment is an assessment conducted over a period of time. It means that students are evaluated during the learning process, not just after the learning process. It collects information on children with a view to using it from time to time to guide and shape their learning. Formative assessment, on the other hand, is an assessment method that involves using a variety of assessment tools to assess various components of learning, including not only thought processes but also behaviors, personality traits, and flexibility. Formative assessments are also conducted over time. This approach will be more comprehensive and representative of the learner as a whole. It begins with teachers and administrators making decisions about learners' year-end grades and promotions.

Keywords: formative assessment, university, education.

1. Introduction

Formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning, is a pedagogical approach that focuses on providing students with ongoing feedback to improve their learning outcomes. Rather than simply evaluating students' performance at the end of a course or semester, formative assessment contains the continuous monitoring of student progress throughout the learning process. By providing feedback that is timely, specific, and actionable, formative assessment can help students better understand their strengths and weaknesses, identify areas for improvement, and ultimately achieve greater success in their academic pursuits.

The importance of formative assessment is widely recognized in educational circles around the world. In China, for example, the government has placed a strong emphasis on improving the quality of university education in recent years, with a particular focus on developing students' thinking ability, innovation capability, and problem-solving skills. Formative assessment is seen as a key tool for

achieving these goals, as it can provide students with the support, they need to develop these important competencies.

Despite the growing interest in formative assessment in China's university education system, there is still much to be learned about its current state of practice and effectiveness. While some studies have explored the use of formative assessment in specific courses or programs, there has been little systematic research that examines its broader implementation across the university system. This narrative review aims to fill this gap by examining the existing literature on the use of formative assessment in China's university education, with a focus on identifying the challenges and opportunities that come with implementing such practices.

To conduct this review, the author conducted a comprehensive search of academic databases and online resources for relevant studies published in Chinese and English. The author included studies that examined the use of formative assessment in Chinese university education at any level (e.g., undergraduate, graduate), in any discipline, and using any form of assessment (e.g., written assignments, oral presentations, group projects). The author also considered studies that examined the impact of formative assessment on students' academic achievement, engagement, and motivation.

2. Formative Assessment: Definition and Function

Formative assessment is an essential tool for improving learning outcomes in education. Formative assessment can be defined as a process of gathering and using information about students' learning to improve teaching and learning [1]. Unlike summative assessment, which evaluates students' learning at the end of a unit or course, formative assessment is an ongoing process that occurs throughout instruction [1].

The function of formative assessment is to provide teachers with information about students' understanding of a particular concept or skill. This information can be used to adjust instruction and provide students with feedback that helps them improve their learning [2]. By identifying areas where students are struggling, teachers can provide targeted support and adjust their teaching strategies to meet students' needs.

Formative assessment also plays a critical role in promoting student engagement and motivation. By providing students with feedback on their progress, formative assessment can help students see the value of their efforts and feel a sense of ownership over their learning [3]. This can lead to increased motivation and a willingness to take risks and engage in deeper learning.

Moreover, formative assessment can promote student metacognition, or the ability to reflect on and regulate one's own learning [4]. By providing students with opportunities to reflect on their learning and receive feedback, formative assessment can help students develop a deeper understanding of their own learning processes and strategies.

In conclusion, formative assessment is a critical tool for improving learning outcomes in education. Its function is to provide teachers with information about students' learning and to promote student engagement, motivation, and metacognition. By using formative assessment practices effectively, teachers can help students achieve their learning goals and develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed.

3. China's University Education: Current Status and Sociocultural Factors

China's university education system has undergone significant transformations in recent years, reflecting the country's rapid economic and social development. China has a highly centralized education system, with the Ministry of Education (MOE) overseeing the management and funding of universities across the country [5]. Currently, there are over 2,800 higher education institutions in

China, including both universities and vocational schools [6]. The number of enrolled students has also increased dramatically, from 3.4 million in 1998 to over 41 million in 2019.

Despite these impressive numbers, there are significant challenges facing China's university education system. One of the key issues is the quality of education. While China has made significant investments in its education system, the quality of education remains a concern [5]. There is also a persistent problem of educational inequality, with students from wealthier families having greater access to high-quality education [7].

Sociocultural factors also play a significant role in shaping China's university education system. For example, there is a strong emphasis on academic achievement in Chinese culture, with students often feeling pressure to excel academically [8]. This can lead to high levels of stress and anxiety among students, which can negatively impact their mental health and well-being.

Moreover, there is a strong emphasis on traditional values and ideology in Chinese universities, which can limit academic freedom and intellectual diversity [9]. This can lead to a lack of critical thinking and creativity among students, which can limit their ability to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances.

In conclusion, China's university education system is facing significant challenges and opportunities. While the system has made impressive strides in terms of access and enrollment, quality and equity remain major concerns. Sociocultural factors such as academic pressure and a focus on traditional values also shape the system. Addressing these challenges will be critical for China to continue to develop a robust and innovative education system that prepares students for the demands of the 21st century.

4. Formative Assessment Practices in China's University Education: Teachers' Perceptions

Formative assessment is a course that involves collecting information about student learning in order to provide feedback and alter guidance to perfect student achievement. In China's university education system, teachers' perceptions of formative assessment practices are an important factor in the effective implementation of this approach.

Research has shown that formative assessment practices are not widely implemented in China's university education system. For example, one study found that while most teachers in China were familiar with the concept of formative assessment, few actually used it in their teaching [10]. This lack of implementation has different kinds of factors, including a lack of training and support, as well as cultural and institutional barriers [10].

In addition to these barriers, there are also cultural factors that can impact teachers' perceptions of formative assessment practices. For example, traditional Chinese culture places a strong emphasis on rote memorization and standardized testing, which can make it challenging for teachers to adopt a more flexible and student-centered approach to assessment [11]. Moreover, the hierarchical nature of Chinese society can make it difficult for teachers to challenge the status quo and advocate for change [12].

Despite these challenges, there are also promising examples of teachers successfully implementing formative assessment practices in China's university education system. For example, one study found that a group of English language teachers in China successfully incorporated formative assessment practices into their teaching, resulting in improved student outcomes [13]. These teachers cited the importance of training and support in their successful implementation of formative assessment practices.

In conclusion, teachers' perceptions of formative assessment practices play a critical role in the effective implementation of this approach in China's university education system. While there are significant barriers to adoption, including a lack of training and cultural factors, there are also promising examples of successful implementation. Addressing these barriers and providing training

and support for teachers will be critical in promoting the widespread adoption of formative assessment practices in China's university education system.

5. Formative Assessment in China's University Education: Students' Perceptions and Experiences

While research has primarily focused on teachers' perceptions of formative assessment practices in China's university education system, it is also important to consider students' perceptions and experiences.

Research has shown that students in China's university education system have mixed perceptions and experiences of formative assessment practices. For example, one study found that while many students were familiar with the concept of formative assessment, few had experienced it in practice [10].

Moreover, traditional Chinese culture places a strong emphasis on rote memorization and standardized testing, which can make it challenging for students to embrace a more flexible and student-centered approach to assessment [11]. Students may also feel pressure to conform to traditional assessment practices in order to succeed academically.

Despite these challenges, there are also promising examples of students who have embraced formative assessment practices in China's university education system. For example, one study found that a group of students in a computer science course responded positively to formative assessment practices, citing increased motivation and engagement [14]. These students emphasized the importance of feedback and the ability to monitor their own learning progress.

In conclusion, students' perceptions and experiences of formative assessment practices in China's university education system are mixed. While there are significant barriers to adoption, including a lack of implementation by teachers and cultural factors, there are also promising examples of students who have embraced formative assessment practices. Providing more opportunities for students to experience formative assessment and promoting a more student-centered approach to assessment in China's university education system will be critical in promoting widespread adoption of this approach.

6. Feedback in Education

Formative assessment is an approach to assessment that emphasizes the provision of feedback to students in order to improve their learning outcomes. Feedback is a critical component of formative assessment in China's university education system, but its implementation can be challenging due to cultural and institutional factors.

Research has shown that feedback is an important component of formative assessment in China's university education system. Feedback can take many forms, including verbal or written comments, grades or scores, and suggestions for improvement [15]. Effective feedback can help students identify their strengths and weaknesses, monitor their own learning progress, and improve their academic performance [16].

However, the provision of feedback in China's university education system is not without its challenges. One significant barrier is the cultural emphasis on face-saving, which can make it difficult for students to accept critical feedback [15]. Additionally, the traditional lecture-based teaching style in China's universities can limit opportunities for meaningful feedback, particularly in large classes [16].

To address these challenges, researchers and educators in China have been exploring innovative approaches to feedback in formative assessment. For example, one study found that peer feedback, where students provide feedback to each other, can be an effective way to overcome cultural barriers

to feedback [15]. Another study found that using technology, such as online forums and interactive quizzes, can provide students with more immediate and personalized feedback [16].

In conclusion, feedback is a critical component of formative assessment in China's university education system. However, cultural and institutional barriers can make the provision of effective feedback challenging. Innovative approaches, such as peer feedback and technology-enhanced feedback, can help overcome these barriers and promote more effective formative assessment practices.

7. Conclusions

This narrative review has highlighted the significance of formative assessment practices in China's university education system. While there are several challenges to the implementation of formative assessment, including a lack of understanding, limited training and support for instructors, and a focus on grades, there are also several opportunities for improvement.

The review has shown that formative assessment practices can enhance students' learning outcomes by promoting a culture of learning and enabling instructors to tailor their teaching methods to meet individual student needs. It has also revealed that there is a growing interest among university administrators and policymakers in supporting the implementation of formative assessment, which could lead to increased resources and support for instructors.

To ensure the effective implementation of formative assessment practices, there needs to be a concerted effort to promote a culture of learning through formative assessment, develop and implement effective formative assessment practices, and encourage collaboration and communication among stakeholders.

Promoting a culture of learning through formative assessment involves educating instructors and students about the benefits of formative assessment and providing opportunities for ongoing training and support. It also involves changing the perception of assessment from a tool for evaluation to a tool for learning.

Developing and implementing effective formative assessment practices can be achieved through the development of clear guidelines and standards for formative assessment, as well as the provision of resources and support for instructors. Additionally, there needs to be ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of formative assessment practices to identify areas for improvement and to ensure that they are achieving the desired learning outcomes.

Encouraging collaboration and communication among stakeholders involves collaboration between instructors, administrators, and policymakers to develop policies and initiatives that support the use of formative assessment, as well as collaboration between instructors and students to ensure that formative assessment practices are aligned with students' learning needs and goals.

In conclusion, the implementation of formative assessment practices in China's university education system has the potential to enhance students' learning outcomes and to promote a culture of learning. While there are challenges to overcome, there are also opportunities for improvement. By promoting a culture of learning through formative assessment, developing and implementing effective formative assessment practices, and encouraging collaboration and communication among stakeholders, people can ensure that China's university education system is providing students with the best possible education and preparing them for success in the future.

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