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INNOVATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT: PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCE OF EFL STUDENTS IN SIDOARJO

by

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Abstract.

In contemporary secondary EFL (English as a Foreign Language) education, formative assessments are critical in enhancing students' language proficiency. This research explores the perceptions and experiences of EFL students in Sidoarjo regarding formative assessment practices. The central research question focuses on how students' perceptions and experiences with formative assessments influence their engagement and language development. Employing a phenomenological approach, qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations with 25 secondary EFL students. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and themes, comprehensively understanding how these students perceive and experience formative assessment practices. Findings reveal that students perceive their experiences with interactive tools like Kahoot! and Quizizz as highly engaging and motivating, which they believe contributes to a more dynamic and participatory learning environment.

Additionally, students' experiences with timely and constructive feedback were pivotal in helping them recognize and correct mistakes, thereby improving their language skills. Peer assessment and self-reflection also fostered a more student-centered learning environment. However, some students encountered challenges in consistently understanding and applying these methods. These challenges underscore the need for better support and resources to ensure effective implementation. The research concludes that well-designed formative assessments can substantially improve engagement and language proficiency when aligned with students' perceptions and experiences. Recommendations include integrating interactive tools, emphasizing constructive feedback, and promoting peer assessment and self-reflection. The long-term effects of formative evaluations on EFL learning outcomes should be investigated in future studies. This study highlights the transforming power of formative evaluations in EFL instruction. It promotes ongoing assistance to improve their efficient application.

Keywords: EFL education; formative assessments; student engagement; interactive tools; peer assessment; self-reflection; language proficiency

Abstrak.

Dalam pendidikan EFL (Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing) menengah kontemporer, penilaian formatif sangat penting dalam meningkatkan kemahiran bahasa siswa. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi

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persepsi dan pengalaman mahasiswa EFL di Sidoarjo mengenai praktik asesmen formatif. Pertanyaan penelitian utama berfokus pada bagaimana persepsi dan pengalaman siswa dengan penilaian formatif memengaruhi keterlibatan dan perkembangan bahasa mereka. Menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis, data kualitatif dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi kelas dengan 25 siswa EFL menengah. Analisis tematik mengidentifikasi pola dan tema yang berulang, secara komprehensif memahami bagaimana siswa ini memandang dan mengalami praktik penilaian formatif. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa siswa memahami pengalaman mereka dengan alat interaktif seperti Kahoot! dan Quizizz sangat menarik dan memotivasi, yang mereka yakini berkontribusi pada lingkungan belajar yang lebih dinamis dan partisipatif. Selain itu, pengalaman siswa dengan umpan balik yang tepat waktu dan konstruktif sangat penting dalam membantu mereka mengenali dan memperbaiki kesalahan, sehingga meningkatkan keterampilan bahasa mereka. Penilaian teman sebaya dan refleksi diri juga menumbuhkan lingkungan belajar yang lebih berpusat pada siswa. Namun, beberapa siswa menghadapi tantangan dalam memahami dan menerapkan metode ini secara konsisten. Tantangan-tantangan ini menggarisbawahi perlunya dukungan dan sumber daya yang lebih baik untuk memastikan implementasi yang efektif. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa penilaian formatif yang dirancang dengan baik dapat secara substansial meningkatkan keterlibatan dan kemahiran bahasa bila diselaraskan dengan persepsi dan pengalaman siswa. Rekomendasi termasuk mengintegrasikan alat interaktif, menekankan umpan balik yang konstruktif, dan mempromosikan penilaian rekan sejawat dan refleksi diri. Efek jangka panjang dari evaluasi formatif pada hasil pembelajaran EFL harus diselidiki dalam studi mendatang. Studi ini menyoroti kekuatan transformasi evaluasi formatif dalam pengajaran EFL. Ini mempromosikan bantuan berkelanjutan untuk meningkatkan aplikasi mereka yang efisien.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan EFL; penilaian formatif; keterlibatan siswa; alat interaktif; teman sebaya penilaian; refleksi diri; Kemahiran bahasa

INTRODUCTION

Formative assessment (FA) has increasingly been recognized as a pivotal component in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, particularly in enhancing students' language proficiency. This study is motivated by the need to explore how FA influences student learning, especially from the learners' perspectives, which have been underrepresented in the literature. As educational practices evolve, understanding the impact of FA on learning processes and outcomes has become essential (Zeng & Huang, 2021).

While significant work has been done to explore the technical implementation of FA, including the challenges educators face (Rahman et al., 2021), there is a notable gap in the literature regarding how students perceive and experience FA, particularly concerning their language proficiency development. Empirical gaps include a lack of detailed investigations into the specific impacts of FA on EFL learners' skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Contextual gaps are evident in the limited research focusing on secondary EFL students, a group for whom language proficiency is crucially developed and refined (Baran-Łucarz, 2019).

Addressing these gaps is critical for advancing our understanding of how FA can be optimized to support EFL learners. This study prioritizes exploring students' experiences with FA, aiming to uncover how FA practices influence their language proficiency and overall learning experience. This research aims to provide insights into how FA impacts EFL learners' proficiency development, with detailed objectives to be articulated in the research questions.

This study fills a gap in the literature by providing a phenomenological investigation of EFL students' experiences with FA. This topic has not been well explored. The research offers important insights into how FA procedures might be improved to fulfill learners' requirements better and consequently improve language competence by focusing on the students' viewpoints. This work is significant because it can influence educational policies and practices, especially when creating more efficient, student-centered FA techniques for EFL instruction.

Previous studies, such as those by Black and Wiliam (2009), have focused on the impact of feedback in educational settings, underscoring the importance of timely and actionable feedback in shaping students' learning processes. Research by Ismail et al. (2022) and Ozan and Kıncal (2018) explored the effects of FA on motivation, attitudes, and self-regulation. However, they did not investigate how FA influences specific language skills in EFL contexts. These studies, typically involving teacher perceptions and broad assessments of student outcomes, have used various instruments like surveys and observational data. However, they often lack a deep exploration of students' lived experiences with FA, particularly in secondary EFL classrooms.

The theoretical framework guiding this study includes the Theory of Planned Behavior (Zeng & Huang, 2021) and the theory of self-regulated learning (Zeng & Huang, 2021), which provide a basis for understanding how students' beliefs, attitudes, and self-regulation influence their engagement with FA and their language proficiency development. This study investigates how these theories manifest in the context of FA by exploring students' perceptions of feedback, motivation, and the challenges they face. The research questions will focus on how FA practices impact students' language proficiency, motivation, and engagement, providing a clear direction for the study's inquiry.

In summary, this study aims to fill critical gaps in the literature by exploring EFL students' experiences with innovative FA practices. Through a phenomenological approach, the

research will offer a comprehensive understanding of how these practices affect students' learning experiences and outcomes, contributing to the development of more effective and student-centered FA strategies in EFL education.

METHOD

Design

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of secondary EFL learners with formative assessment practices, aiming to understand how these practices influence their proficiency development. The phenomenological method is well-suited for investigating students' lived experiences and subjective perspectives, offering indepth insights into their thoughts and feelings.

Participant

The study involved secondary EFL learners from grades 7 and 8 at an Islamic private full-day school in Sidoarjo, East Java. Participants aged 12 to 14 were selected using purposive sampling due to their direct involvement with formative assessment practices in their English language classes. The eligibility criteria required participants to be secondary EFL learners who had previously experienced formative assessments. Grade 9 students were excluded from the study because they were preoccupied with preparation for school exams, limiting the data collection scope from that grade. Informed consent was obtained from the students, who were fully informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study without any consequences. To uphold ethical standards, participants' identities were kept confidential, and all collected data were securely stored, with access restricted to the research team. This approach is aligned with ethical standards for research involving human participants (Guest et al., 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Instrument

This study employed in-depth interviews and classroom observations as primary instruments. The in-depth interviews were conducted in two phases. The first phase involved a written interview using Google Forms, which allowed participants to reflect on and articulate their experiences with formative assessments. The second phase consisted of face-to-face spoken interviews, enabling more nuanced exploration through verbal interaction and observation of non-verbal cues. The interviews featured open-ended questions designed to

gather comprehensive and detailed responses. The interview protocol was pilot-tested to ensure clarity and effectiveness, resulting in refined questions for the main study (Meyers, 1996; Snyder, 1996). All interviews were transcribed and supplemented with detailed notes on participants' responses and non-verbal communication (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Classroom observations provided insight into how formative assessments were implemented and perceived in real-time. An observation protocol, which was pre-tested for effectiveness, guided the documentation of teacher feedback, student reactions, and the application of assessment data (Carter et al., 2014; Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). The observations were systematically recorded and analyzed to capture practical aspects of formative assessments.

Questionnaires were not used to avoid the limitations of fixed responses and to allow for a deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Data collecting technique

Data collection for this study employed two primary methods: in-depth interviews and classroom observations. In-depth interviews were conducted in two phases. The first phase involved written interviews via Google Forms, allowing students to thoughtfully express their experiences with formative assessments at their own pace. The second phase consisted of face-to-face interviews, allowing a deeper exploration of responses and observing non-verbal cues. The interview protocol, designed with open-ended questions, was carefully piloted to ensure clarity and relevance. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using online transcription tools, with detailed notes capturing non-verbal elements and contextual insights (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Classroom observations were carried out to witness formative assessment practices in action directly. An observation protocol was established to focus on specific behaviors and interactions related to formative assessments. Observations took place over several weeks to ensure comprehensive data collection while minimizing classroom disruption. Detailed notes were made on behaviors and interactions, then compared with interview data to provide a well-rounded understanding of formative assessment impacts (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018; Carter

et al., 2014). Technology such as video recorders, video transcription- vizard.ai, and Google Forms facilitated thorough and accurate documentation.

Data analysis technique

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data from the observations and interviews while adhering to phenomenological principles. The verbatim transcriptions of the interviews included in-depth first-person narratives of formative assessment experiences. The data analysis found key themes and patterns, which were primarily qualitative and textual. Coding important phrases and concepts was the first step in the study, after which they were categorized into more general groups. Phenomenological reduction, which emphasizes the core of participants' experiences, served as the basis for this classification (Moustakas, 1994).

Giorgi's (2009) phenomenological framework guided the thematic analysis, which emphasizes identifying core themes through techniques like horizontalization and imaginative variation. No statistical tests were applied as the study is qualitative, and the aim was to explore subjective experiences rather than quantify them.

Classroom observation data, consisting of descriptive notes on interactions and behaviors, were similarly analyzed to identify themes related to formative assessment practices. Data triangulation, involving cross-referencing interview and observation findings, enhanced credibility and ensured comprehensive understanding. This approach provided a well-rounded view of the participant's experiences and the impact of formative assessments on their language learning.

In analyzing the data, we grouped responses into positive, negative, and neutral themes. Positive themes showed benefits like improved engagement and language skills. Negative themes highlighted issues and frustrations with formative assessments. Neutral themes provided context without strong opinions. This approach helped us understand how formative assessments affected students' learning experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study investigates secondary EFL students' experiences with formative assessment practices through detailed interviews and classroom observations. The results are presented in various aspects of formative assessment, focusing on students' experiences and perspectives.

Students' responses to formative assessment methods

The formative assessment techniques implemented in the classrooms received overwhelmingly good feedback from the pupils. The table below displays the outcome.

Table 1. Students' responses to the assessment method

Students' Feeling	Number of students	Percentage
Feeling Positive	18	72%
Feeling Negative	4	16%
Feeling Neutral	3	12%
Total Students	25	100%

72% of students expressed positive views, finding methods like Quizizz and Kahoot engaging. 16% reported negative experiences, often related to challenges in English proficiency. 12% had neutral feelings about the assessments.

Students' memorable experiences with formative assessment

The second phenomenon examines students' reactions to their memorable experiences with formative assessments. The results are summarized below:

Table 2. Students' memorable experiences with formative assessment

Students' Response	Number of students	Percentage
Positive Response	23	92%
Negative Response	1	4%
Unexpected Response	1	4%
Total Students	25	100%

92% of students had positive experiences, enjoying activities like Quizizz and roleplaying. 4% reported a negative experience due to stress from late submissions, while another 4% did not recall specific formative assessment moments.

Students' opinions on practical formative assessments in English classrooms

The third phenomenon examines students' perspectives on practical formative assessments in English classrooms. The findings are summarized in the table below.

Table 3.Students' opinions on practical formative assessments in English classrooms

Students' Response	Number of students	Percentage
Positive Response	24	96%
Negative Response	0	0%
Unexpected Response	1	4%
Total Students	25	100%

96% of students viewed formative assessments positively, noting benefits in material retention and language skills. 4% had neutral views, indicating a need for more preparation.

Students' opinions on the importance of teacher's feedback in English classrooms

The fourth phenomenon investigates students' views on the significance of teacher's feedback in English classrooms. The findings are summarized in the following table.

Table 4. Students' opinions on the importance of teacher feedback in English classrooms

Students' Response	Number of students	Percentage
Positive Response	22	88%
Neutral Response	2	8%
Uncertain Response	1	4%
Total Students	25	100%

88% of students valued teacher feedback for improving their English skills. 8% had neutral views, and 4% were uncertain about its importance.

Students' preferences for receiving feedback on language tasks and assignments

Students' preferences for the kinds of feedback they get on language activities and assignments are examined in the fifth phenomenon. The table below displays the results.

Table 5. Students' preferences for receiving feedback on language tasks and assignments

Students' Response	Number of students	Percentage
Positive Response	23	92%
Negative Response	0	0%
Uncertain Response	2	8%
Total Students	25	100%

92% of students preferred feedback on language tasks, especially speaking and writing. 8% had neutral or uncertain views on the feedback's usefulness.

Students' experiences and challenges in understanding and applying feedback from formative assessments

The sixth phenomenon explores students' experiences and challenges in understanding and applying feedback from formative assessments. The findings are presented in the table below:

Table 6. Students experiences and challenges in understanding and applying feedback from formative assessments

Category	Number of students	Percentage
Facing No Challenge	9	36%

Al-Imamah et al. (2024)

Facing Minor Challenges	1	4%
Facing Significant Challenges	15	60%
Total Students	25	100%

36% of students faced no challenges in applying feedback, while 60% experienced significant difficulties, such as forgetting key concepts.

Students' perspectives on the impact of formative assessment in EFL classrooms

The seventh phenomenon of this study explores how students perceive the impact of formative assessment within EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, mainly focusing on their experiences and the challenges they face in interpreting and applying feedback. The findings, summarized in the table below, highlight the diversity of student experiences.

Table 7 Students' perspectives on the impact of formative assessment in EFL classrooms

Students' Response	Number of students	Percentage
Positive Response	22	88%
Negative Response	1	4%
Uncertain Response	2	8%
Total Students	25	100%

88% of students felt formative assessments positively impacted their English skills, 4% found them challenging, and 8% were unsure.

Students' perspectives on enhancing formative assessment in English language learning

The final aspect explores students' views on enhancing formative assessment within the context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This section focuses on their recommendations for improving the effectiveness of these assessments to support their language learning experience better. The findings are summarized in the table below.

Table 8. Students' perspectives on enhancing formative assessment in English language learning

Students' Response	Number of students	Percentage
Positive Suggestions	23	92%
Neutral/ Mixed Opinions	0	0%
Unclear about Suggestion	2	8%
Total Students	25	100%

92% of students suggested enhancing formative assessments with more interactive activities and games. 8% were uncertain or had vague suggestions.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive look at secondary EFL students' experiences and perceptions of formative assessment practices. The study explored how these assessments influence student engagement, language proficiency, and overall learning experience.

1. Engagement with interactive tools

The results show that interactive tools like Kahoot and Quizizz are particularly well-received, with 72% of students finding them engaging and enjoyable. This aligns with previous studies by Ismail et al. (2019) and Zhang & Crawford (2024), which also reported high student engagement with digital tools in formative assessments. However, 16% of students found these activities challenging, especially those less proficient in English, indicating a gap in the effectiveness of these tools for all learners. This finding is consistent with Wijaya (2022), who noted that lower proficiency students might struggle with fast-paced, competitive activities.

2. Positive experiences with creative tasks

Most students (92%) reported positive memories of formative assessments involving creative tasks like writing or role-playing. This finding is supported by Chen and Li Zhang (2017), who found that creative assessments can enhance student motivation and retention. The small percentage of students who reported negative experiences did so primarily due to time pressure, a challenge also noted in studies by M. A.-A. Ismail et al. (2019) and Wijaya (2022). These pressures suggest that while creative tasks are beneficial, they must be carefully managed to avoid overwhelming students.

3. Effectiveness in language skill improvement

Regarding the effectiveness of formative assessments, 96% of students agreed that these methods help improve their English skills. This mirrors the findings by Zhang and Crawford (2024), who found that formative assessments, particularly those that provide timely feedback, significantly enhance language proficiency. However, some students (4%) felt that the preparation required for these assessments was burdensome, a concern echoed by previous research (Wijaya, 2022; Chen & Li Zhang, 2017). This suggests a need to balance assessments' rigor with students' capacity to prepare effectively.

4. Importance of feedback

The study reveals that 88% of students view teacher feedback as essential for improving their language skills, with particular emphasis on speaking and writing. This is in line with the findings by Ismail et al. (2019), who also highlighted the crucial role of feedback in language development. Interestingly, 8% of students were neutral, and 4% were uncertain about its importance, suggesting variability in how feedback is perceived and utilized, possibly depending on its delivery or the student's learning preferences. This highlights the need for more personalized feedback approaches.

5. Students' preferences for receiving feedback

The findings reveal that 92% of students preferred feedback, especially on speaking and writing tasks. No students had opposing views on feedback, but 8% were neutral or uncertain about its necessity. This aligns with previous studies, such as those by Chen and Li Zhang (2017), highlighting that while feedback is generally appreciated, its effectiveness can depend on how it is delivered and the context in which it is received.

6. Challenges in understanding feedback

Despite the overall positive reception, 60% of students reported difficulties in understanding and applying feedback from formative assessments. This aligns with Zhang & Crawford (2024) and Wijaya (2022), who also noted that students often struggle with interpreting feedback in a way that leads to tangible improvements. This finding emphasizes the importance of delivering clear, actionable feedback to ensure all students benefit.

7. Students' perspectives on the impact of formative assessment in EFL classrooms

The findings from this study also reveal how students perceive the impact of formative assessments within EFL classrooms. As shown in Table 7, 88% of students felt that formative assessments positively impacted their English skills, particularly in grammar, pronunciation, and overall language proficiency. This aligns with the research question of how formative assessments influence student learning. This positive response is consistent with Chen and Li Zhang's (2017) findings, highlighting the beneficial role of formative assessments in EFL contexts.

However, 4% of students reported finding formative assessments challenging, particularly regarding understanding and applying the feedback received. This echoes the findings of M. A.-A. Ismail et al. (2019), which noted that while most students appreciate feedback, some struggle with its complexity. Additionally, 8% of students were unsure of the impact, suggesting a need for more precise communication and support in interpreting feedback. These insights add depth to existing research by highlighting the diversity of student experiences and the importance of adapting formative assessments to meet individual needs.

8. Student suggestions for improvement

When asked how to improve formative assessments, 92% of students suggested incorporating more interactive and engaging activities, such as group work, games, and peer collaboration. This recommendation is supported by Chen and Li Zhang's (2017) work, which also advocates for more collaborative and dynamic assessment practices to enhance learning outcomes. The remaining 8% of students were unclear about how these assessments could be improved, indicating that while most students have a clear vision for practical assessments, there is still a need to explore alternative methods that might cater to a broader range of learners.

In summary, this study confirms that formative assessments are generally effective and well-received by secondary EFL students. The findings answer the research questions by demonstrating that these assessments contribute positively to student engagement, language proficiency, and overall learning experience. However, there are notable challenges, particularly for students with lower proficiency and in feedback application.

Comparing the current findings with previous studies, there is a consistent emphasis on the importance of interactive tools and creative tasks in enhancing student engagement and learning. However, the differences lie in the extent to which students feel supported in these activities, especially those who may struggle with the pace or complexity of assessments.

The study's shortcomings include the narrow range of interactive technologies it looked at and a possible bias in student self-reporting. Future studies ought to examine a wider variety of formative assessment procedures and how they affect a range of student demographics.

By carefully aligning these results with established theories on formative assessment and language learning, this study highlights the need for customizing examinations to

accommodate the requirements of all students, guarantee transparent feedback, and assist those who might find these techniques difficult.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

This study has comprehensively explored secondary EFL students' experiences with innovative formative assessment (FA) practices, revealing their strengths and areas for improvement in their implementation. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the research has illuminated how these assessment strategies influence students' language proficiency, engagement, and overall learning experiences.

The findings highlight that students generally perceive innovative FA practices positively. They appreciate these methods' continuous feedback and interactive nature, which contribute significantly to their language learning. Most students found tools like Quizizz and Kahoot engaging and effective in reinforcing their knowledge. Feedback, a crucial element of FA, was valued for its role in helping students identify strengths and areas needing improvement, with many students reporting that it positively impacted their motivation and confidence.

However, the study also revealed difficulties that students had with these methods. Some participants reported struggling with the intricacies of some evaluation techniques and comprehending and implementing comments. These difficulties highlight the need for more precise instructions and specialized assistance to improve the efficacy of FA activities.

The study also highlights that although creative FA techniques have a lot of potential, several factors, such as class numbers, time restrictions, and teacher preparation, affect how well they are implemented. To optimize the advantages of FA and guarantee that every student may participate completely in and gain from these activities, these concerns must be resolved.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of continuous refinement and adaptation of formative assessment strategies in EFL education. By focusing on students' perspectives, the research provides valuable insights into how FA can be optimized to support language learning and proficiency development better. The implications of these findings extend to educators and policymakers, suggesting that a more nuanced understanding of students' experiences with FA can lead to more effective, student-centered assessment practices.

As the educational landscape evolves, ongoing research and adaptation of FA practices will be essential for fostering a supportive and dynamic learning environment in EFL contexts.

Limitation

The ramifications of the study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, a key component of developing individualized learning experiences that meet the various requirements of students is coordinating formative assessment procedures with curricular standards and learning objectives. This method improves language skills and creates a nurturing atmosphere in the classroom that helps pupils grow socio-emotionally and fortifies the bonds between them and their teachers.

Furthermore, it is imperative to address varied viewpoints and implement student-centered assessment approaches to maximize the impact of formative assessment on academic success and overall educational outcomes in EFL contexts. Practically speaking, the study emphasizes how formative evaluation may increase student motivation and participation in secondary EFL classes. Educators may effectively promote student participation and skill development by utilizing interactive technologies such as Kahoot! and providing prompt feedback.

Implication

The study's limitations suggest that, although providing insightful information, the conclusions are limited to secondary EFL instruction and might not be generalizable to other educational contexts. From a methodological standpoint, the study's dependence on self-reported interviews and observational data limits the breadth of the insights. It may cause it to overlook minute details that impact how successful formative assessment is. Further difficulties include participant bias in reporting impressions and access issues to technology for interactive evaluations.

Due to its narrow focus and short length, the study may not have adequately captured the long-term consequences or the range of difficulties educators face when implementing formative assessment procedures. Future research should consider employing mixed-method techniques and carrying out longitudinal studies to guarantee broader applicability and a better comprehension of formative assessment procedures across various educational environments to solve these constraints.

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