CASE STUDY

EXPLORING TEACHER AND LEARNER VIEWS ON THE USE OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN PRIMARY EAL CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In England, number of learners who speak English as their second or even third language (known as learners with EAL, English as an Additional Language) in state primary and secondary schools is constantly increasing. In 2012, these learners represented 16% of the entire school population, and in 2015 - 18% (DfE, 2013 and 2016). Many EAL learners have limited proficiency in the language of instruction. This fact makes it difficult for teachers to not only effectively teach, but also accurately assess these learners' academic (linguistic and subject-specific) progress. Making use of a recently introduced formative assessment model to support and assess EAL learners' performance during the lessons seems like a good idea. However, to date little is known about the effectiveness of this assessment method and about the teachers' and learners' views on it. This paper, drawing on a selection of the data collected as part of a larger mixed-methods empirical research study (Afitska, 2014a), seeks to examine teachers' and learners' views on the usefulness of formative assessment methods (including teacher feedback, learner peer-assessment, and self-assessment) for teaching and learning. The paper concludes with a list of implications for practice based on the study's findings.

Keywords: Formative Assessment, Learner Self-assessment, Learner Peer-assessment, Teacher Feedback, Primary Education, English as an Additional Language, Classroom-based Research.

INTRODUCTION

In the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority document it is stated that "in effective schools, teachers and others work together for the benefit of all the pupils" (QCA, 2000: 5). In the context of schools with a high density of learners with EAL, a teaching team may consist of the following specialists: (1) mainstream (subject) teachers and (2) language support teachers. Each of these school staff members has specific teaching responsibilities. Class teachers are qualified teachers with specific responsibilities in a primary school for teaching all school subjects. Language support teachers are also qualified teachers but, they may also be specialists in teaching literacy or numeracy and have specific responsibilities for the provision of language support within a school. These two types of teachers can work either on their own or in collaboration. The latter teaching situation corresponds to that described by Bourne (Bourne, 2001: 3): "English as an additional language support... [...] provides support for learning across the curriculum, and is delivered in English alone, drawing on a range of techniques from enhanced visual aids to scaffolding support for writing, with the EAL teacher or assistant [...] working in the mainstream classroom alongside the class teacher, following the same curriculum". In the study reported in this paper, the teachers adopted both individual and collaborative teaching (including assessment) models in order to further support and enhance learning opportunities for learners with English as an Additional Language.

1. Definition of Key Terms

1.1 English as an Additional Language

An early definition of the term "English as an Additional

Language" appears in SCAA (SCAA, 1996). In this document, EAL is used to describe pupils "who are in the process of learning English on their entry to school" (ibid: 2) and who aim to learn all curriculum subjects entirely through the medium of English. This definition can be further elaborated to specifically represent the linguistic situation of non-native English speaking children in the context of English mainstream schools. An expanded EAL definition includes: (1) children who were either "born in UK, but speak language [or languages] other than English at home and in their community" (DfES, 2005: 4) and therefore are not as proficient in their use of English language as English native speaking children; or (2) children who have "recently arrived [in an English speaking country] and for whom English is a brand new language" (NALDIC International Survey, 2005: 17) or at least a language of limited familiarity.

1.2 Formative Language Assessment

According to Bachman & Palmer (1996: 98) formative assessment is assessment that may help "students guide their own subsequent learning, and teachers modify their teaching methods and materials so as to make them more appropriate for students' needs, interests, and capabilities". When formative language assessment is brought into focus, the above definition may be expanded as follows: formative language assessment is assessment that may help students guide their own subsequent language learning, and teachers modify their language teaching methods and materials so as to make them more appropriate for students' language learning needs. The term assessment itself, in the context of the mainstream classroom, also has its specific definition. Rea-Dickins (2007: 492) suggests that, "within the socio-cultural context of the classroom the term assessment is used to refer to approaches to the elicitation of learner language". The present study adopts this definition and suggests that it includes not only approaches to the elicitation of learner language in the classroom, but also approaches to supporting and promoting the development of language being elicited, since the main purpose of formative assessment is to bring about and support a change in learning, but not merely to measure it. The main purpose of formative language assessment, therefore, is to bring about change in the learners' language learning; in other words, to support and promote their language development.

2. Review of Literature and Policy Documentation

A close look at the official policy documentation, focusing specifically on the needs of EAL learners, reveals several principles of effective teaching and assessment practice that are expected to be followed by all teachers in mainstream classrooms. It is the assessment principles that are of interest to us in this paper. These principles are as follows. Firstly, teachers are expected 'to provide careful monitoring of each (EAL learning) pupil's progress in the acquisition of English language skills and of subject knowledge' (National Curriculum, QCA, 1999). Secondly, teachers are expected 'to use pupils' profiles to highlight aspects […] of pupils' use of English which need particular attention when planning the next stages of teaching and learning' (QCA, 2000: 42). Thirdly, teachers are expected 'to promote EAL learners' language development through the following classroom embedded assessment procedures: (1) recasting; (2) repeating back and modelling correct forms; (3) planning large amount of repetition; (4) providing 'safe' contexts for children to experiment with sound and language' (Assessing English as an Additional Language, 2002: 3, 5, 13-14). Fourthly, teachers are expected 'to be clear about the purpose of the assessment, distinguishing summative, formative and diagnostic aims' (DfES, 2003:11). They should use 'data gathered through assessment of learning formatively and need to ensure that, this data feeds back into classroom planning, teaching and learning' (ibid: 2). Moreover, 'all departments and teachers [are expected to] implement regular assessment for learning and [conduct] assessment practices that immediately inform planning and teaching' (ibid: 13). Fifthly, teachers are expected 'to make the conditions of assessment as favourable as possible for bilingual learners by: ensuring opportunities for self-assessment and peer-assessment as part of feedback […]' (DfES, 2005: 22); by providing additional support where necessary to remove barriers; by ensuring that the observations include situations where pupils can speak

and listen in English in a non-threatening situation; by encouraging and promoting use of dictionaries in first language/English; by giving pupils time to respond and try not to interrupt the flow of an answer; by not over-simplifying questions and extending communication by using more complex language and allowing pupils the opportunity to demonstrate the breadth of the knowledge (ibid: 23). Finally, the teachers are expected to 'take account of the different entry points of learners, with respect to age and curriculum demands, and show EAL progression in the context of the full curriculum' (NALDIC, 2007:1).

Several research studies to date have attempted to investigate various formative assessment practices in mainstream classrooms. Only very few of them, however, have explored the formative assessment practices in EAL classrooms. Below, the author has provided a brief review of the core findings from these studies. A detailed review of the literature on formative assessment can be found in Afitska (2014b). Findings from research on formative assessment can be separated into four large groups. Firstly, there are findings related to the impact of formative assessment on learning. Research suggests that formative assessment can have a positive impact on learning as is evidenced in the scholarly work of Fontana and Fernandes (1994), Black and Wiliam (1998), Rea-Dickins (2001), McDonald and Boud (2003), Wiliam et al., (2004), Carless (2005), Ross (2005), Pinter (2007), Storch (2007) and McGarrell and Verbeem (2007). Secondly, there are findings related to attitudes towards formative assessment in the classroom. Research suggests that, generally teachers and learners have positive attitudes towards use of formative assessment in their classrooms (Hasselgren, 2000; Torrance and Pryor, 2001; McDonald and Boud, 2003; Carless, 2005; Pinter, 2007), however, some of the formative assessment procedures seem to be accepted by learners with less enthusiasm (see the literature on "peer-assessment" by Morris and Tarone, 2003, and Cheng and Warren, 2005). Thirdly, there are findings related to the comparison of the quality of learner self-assessment and peer-assessment to the quality of teacher-assessment. Research suggests that, sometimes the quality of learner assessment may be not as good as the quality of teacher assessment (Patri, 2002 in relation to self-assessment; Cheng and Warren, 2005), though this may not always be the case (Hasselgren, 2000; Patri, 2002 in relation to peer-assessment; Chu, 2007). Fourthly, there are findings related to type of teacher feedback and its potential to be formative for learning. Research suggests that provision of feedback for summative purposes may overlap with provision of feedback for formative purposes (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Cheng and Wang, 2007) and that 'descriptive feedback' in the form of comments seems to be more beneficial for promoting learning than 'evaluative feedback' provided by means of grades (Butler, 1988). The research also warns however, that teacher feedback provided by means of comments may be ineffective if learners understand it poorly (Smith and Gorard, 2005). The final group of research studies relates to the ways in which formative assessment practices can be further improved in the classroom. Research suggests that the quality of formative assessment can be further improved by: (1) developing teacher pedagogical self-awareness (Torrance and Pryor, 2001), (2) thorough planning (Rea-Dickins and Gardner, 2000), and (3) providing effective formative feedback which elicits understanding and guides progress (Torrance and Pryor, 2001).

Drawing on the requirements outlined in the official policy documentation and on the body of existing research on formative assessment, the present study aims to further investigate and deepen scholars' and practitioners' understanding the use of this assessment practice in the classroom. The research question that informs this paper is thus: What are teachers' and learners' views on various formative assessment strategies (namely, teacher feedback, learner peer-assessment, and self-assessment) in mainstream classrooms?

3. Context of the Study

This study draws on the data collected from two classrooms at Key Stage 2 of the English National Curriculum, Years 4 and 5 in a mainstream primary school in an inner city area. As seen in Table 1, both classes comprised a high proportion of pupils learning English as an additional language.

Learners studying at KS2 (7-11 years old) were preferred to those studying at KS1 (5-7 years old) for the following

reasons: (1) older learners may be more able to clearly express themselves, both verbally and in English, (2) they may have better knowledge and understanding of classroom practices.

3.1 Participants' Profiles

Two classroom teachers and one language teacher participated in this study. The teachers were selected on the following basis: (1) they taught in either of the targeted classes, (2) they were either classroom teachers or language support teachers, and (3) they were not newly qualified teachers. The selected teachers' profiles are summarised in Table 2.

The table shows that the language support teacher, who taught both Year 4 and 5 classes, overall had the most teaching experience (10 years), whereas classroom teacher 1, who taught the Year 5 class, had the least teaching experience (4 years).

Following the advice of the language teacher, two learners in each class were selected for this study. They were selected on the following basis: (1) they spoke English as an Additional Language, (2) they were available during the whole period of data collection, (3) they had a sufficient level of English language knowledge to be interviewed, (4) they had different levels of English language proficiency, (5) they were of different gender (2 males and 2 females), (6) they studied in different contexts (two in year 4 and two in year 5), (7) they were not on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) record, and (8) they were not overtly shy, that is they would be willing, in the language teacher's view, to speak to the researcher. The target learners' profiles are summarised in Table 3.

Key Stage/Class	Total number of pupils in the class	Number of pupils with EAL	Level of density of pupils with EAL
KS2/Year 4 (8-9 years old learners)	33	21	64%
KS2/Year 5 (9-10 years old learners)	26	15	58%

Table 1. The Level of Density of Pupils With EAL in the Examined Classrooms

Teacher	Class taught	Teaching Experience
CT1	Year 5	4 years full-time
CT2	Year 4	8 years full-time
LT	Year 5 & Year 4	3 years full-time & 15 years part-time

Table 2. Target Teachers' Profiles

The grading system presented in Table 3 was used by the Local Authority in which this study was conducted. It is as follows. Grade 'A' characterises the English language proficiency of a newly arrived child with little or no English. Grade 'E' at the other end of the spectrum represent an EAL child whose English is at the same level as that of a monolingual child. The school uses '+' and '–' to show that the learners are just above or just below a particular level. As evidenced from the table, the targeted learners have not reached Grade E in their English language proficiency by the time of the study, therefore they were considered as pupils who needed specific help with the linguistic aspects of the programme in order to access the national curriculum fully.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

The data for this study was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with 4 teachers and 3 EAL learners (see Table 4). This method of data collection was preferred to either structured and unstructured interviews as it allowed: "greater flexibility within a structured overall framework (for example in changing the order of questions), more extensive follow-up of responses, the interviewer to remain in control of the direction of the interview, but with more leeway" (McDonough and McDonough, 1997: 184).

Each research participant was interviewed once. Interviews with the teachers lasted for 45 minutes and were conducted at a time convenient to the teachers. Interviews with the learners lasted for 15 minutes and were conducted during the school assembly time. The reasons for doing so were as follows: (1) interviewing children during the assembly did not interrupt their lessons, (2) it did not lessen their play time, and (3) it allowed for collecting the data in the first part of the school day when the children were not too tired. The interview data were collected by means of audio and video recordings in such a way, that it allowed for: (1) careful and repeated analysis of the data (Johnson, 1992; Swann, 1994; Foster, 1996, McDonough and McDonough, 1997), (2) freeing the researcher from the constraints of real time

Pupil	Gender	Class	EAL Learner	Available During Research	English Language Proficiency	SEN
P1	Male	Year 5	✓	✓	D	×
P2	Male	Year 5	✓	✓	C-	×
P3	Female	Year 4	✓	✓	C	×
P4	Female	Year 4	✓	✓	D+	×

Table 3. Target Learners' Profiles

Type of Data	Method of Collection	Year Group	Participants	Data Sets	Procedure
Interview Data	Semi-Structured Interviews	Year 5	P1	1 interview	Audio and video recording
		Year 5	P2	1 interview	
		Year 4	P3	1 interview	
		Year 4	P4	1 interview	
		Year 5	Classroom teacher 1	1 interview	
		Year 4	Classroom teacher 2	1 interview	
		Year 4 & Year 5	Language teacher	1 interview	

Table 4. Data Collection Procedures used for this Study

(McDonough and McDonough, 1997), (3) identifying the participants (Johnson, 1992), and (4) increasing the reliability of the data transcripts.

4.2 Ethical Issues

The study was undertaken in line with the British Association for Applied Linguistics Recommendations on Good Practice and the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. All participants in the study were explicitly informed about the study's focus, its duration, objectives, procedures for data collection and storage, and about their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Learners had this information explained to them orally by the language teacher. All participants were then asked to give their consent for participation by completing special consent forms. Informed consent was also obtained from the learners' parents, since they were children under 16 years old. All consent forms were signed and returned to the researcher. Confidentiality and anonymity with regard to the identity of the school, teachers, and pupils was maintained by amending all teachers' names by using abbreviations (e.g. CT2, LT) and all children's names by referring to them as P1, P2, P3, and P4.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Teacher Views on Oral and Written Formative Feedback

In their classrooms, teachers were reported using (or observing their learners using) various assessment strategies that could carry formative potential for the teachers themselves and for their learners. Teacher feedback can be seen as one of the formative assessment strategies as long as it assists and promotes learning, or informs and supports teaching. When going through a child's written work the language support teacher suggested that marking learner's work with the child at the side of the teacher might support his or her learning better than marking the learner's work without the child. The language support teacher stated:

Comment 1: "it would be so much better if you could mark children's work with them at your side [...] that's why people often in a lesson will try mark as they going along [...] because the children benefit far more from you being able to explain verbally what is wrong, if you just write down they do not look at it" [Lines 186-192].

In this comment the teacher seems to be emphasising the importance of not simply pointing out the mistake to the learner by marking his/her work, which may be seen as a summative perspective on assessment, but also commenting on the learner's work, explaining what exactly is wrong with it by means of "descriptive" as opposed to "evaluative" feedback. According to Tunstall and Gipps (1996), evaluative feedback may support and promote learning, and hence may be seen as formative for the

learners. Moreover, the language support teacher in this comment also mentioned the importance of verbal feedback for supporting learning as it may, in this teacher's opinion, be more likely to reach the learner as opposed to written feedback that may not be read by the learner, or if it is read, may not be understood at all (Sadler, 1989). This language teacher's point may be well explained by the extract presented in Comment 2 where the teacher commented on the procedure of providing verbal feedback to the learner sitting at her side while she was marking his work.

Comment 2: "...when he read his work to me he stopped but there was no full stop there... And I said to him hang on... why? let me read this sentence... and I read it without stopping and I said: you took a breath I didn't... Oh oh I need a comma or a full stop there... so which one is it going to be? you know, sometimes they can then realise it" [Lines 292-296].

The extract shows that the teacher's verbal feedback provided as part of teacher-learner eliciting interaction, where arguably the teacher's intonation and pauses had a role to play, allowed the learner to notice the gap in his knowledge and to address it. Had the feedback been provided in a written form, the learner might have not read or understood it as an opportunity for real-time interaction and the scaffolding might have been lost. Interestingly, however, the learners reported benefitting from the teachers' written comments as is presented further in the 'Learner views on teacher formative feedback' section.

Similarly to the feedback provided on learners' written work, teachers seemed to prefer eliciting feedback strategies (like, giving clues) which allowed "initiating interaction" and providing "opportunities for learners to express their understandings" (Black and Wiliam, 1998) to support learners' oral performances. The teachers justified their preference by a belief that learners may be more likely to remember or explain what was taught to them if they are given "eliciting" feedback rather than "explicit" feedback, which they may not even attempt to understand. The language support teacher said: "they switch off" [Line 180], and classroom teacher 1 commented:

Comment 3: "they will write them [answers] down but they won't remember them" [Line 173]

It becomes clear from extract 3 that even though the classroom teacher admitted that learners might use her feedback, her view was that it might neither support nor promote their learning. When classroom teacher 2 commented on her classroom assessment and teaching practices, her views seemed to coincide with the views of the other two teachers, as presented in the comment 4.

Comment 4: "...when they are given homework they are given an opportunity to talk and express ideas that's their chance of working themselves rather than me saying: well this is it, that is what we are doing and this is the concept.... it is all about questioning and prompting them you know... what is this what is that... trying to get the answers out of them so that you know they are taking part and they are learning as well" [Line 66]

Even though, this teacher commented on using eliciting feedback strategies in relation to the learners' homework only, it seems that in her class, learners were also provided with one more opportunity that could potentially have a formative impact on their learning, an opportunity for exploratory learning in a non-threatening environment. Moreover, in her other comment classroom teacher 2 also mentioned the importance of using information, obtained from teaching and assessment, for informing her own teaching (Hall and Burke, 2003). Comment 5 illustrates the teacher's reported practice.

Comment 5: "Ultimately I am meant to support them ...any misconceptions they have... you know... if they have any misconceptions, that's when I think it is my role to say... make it clear that there is a misconception and this is a, you know, correct way" [Line 68].

This extract provides evidence not only of the teacher reporting that she recognises the gap in her learner's knowledge and addresses it, but also of her efforts in making it clear to the learners where their problem was and what needed to be done to overcome it.

Classroom teacher 1 reported that she would address learners' needs and give them feedback whenever possible. However, she also reported "encouraging learners to self-monitor their work" (Rea-Dickins, 2003) and "providing them with skills and strategies for taking the next

steps in their learning" (Assessment Reform Group, 1999). It is suggested in the language testing and assessment literature that these two approaches to assessment may support and promote learning. It is in this sense believed that in the case of classroom teacher these two approaches might also have had formative potential for the learners. Moreover, classroom teacher 1 reported changing her eliciting mode of teaching (learner questioning) to direct teaching (telling explicitly) once it became apparent to her that her chosen strategy could have not been working particularly well for some of her learners.

In summary, the teacher interview data suggests that teachers' use of feedback as part of assessment and teaching might have had formative potential for both the teachers and the learners. The following potentially formative strategies were reported to be used by the teachers: using descriptive feedback; using eliciting feedback; addressing and explaining gaps in the learners' knowledge; using information for modifying teaching activities; training learners in self-monitoring; providing learners with the skills and strategies for taking next steps in their learning; making corrections in the ways that make sense to the learners; providing opportunities for interaction and exploratory learning; integrating assessment into teaching and learning.

5.2 Teacher Views on Learner Peer-assessment

In this study, the teachers were asked whether any of their learners provided feedback for their peers, that is, did they have any evidence of children engaged in peer-assessment and if they did then, how useful did they think it was for their learners. All three teachers reported observing learner peer-assessment in their classes. Classroom teachers 1 and 2 observed that it was particularly useful when used by the learners in mixed attainment groups. The teachers commented:

Comment 6: "I think they do... I think they benefit quite a lot... I've always found it useful I mean when they work in mixed attainment groups... and... if they are always working in their attainment groups the children who are struggling they are not always getting the right way to do it or the best way to do it and they are not always getting that... they are not always getting the richness of language or the deeper understanding I think" [CT1, Line 91].

Comment 7: "Of course they can [peer-assess]... Definitely [they do] you might have noticed... the reason for the team groups is very evident in the fact that there are those children who are more able, certainly children with English as their first language, and they are there to help children who have English as their second language... to actually help them understand and actually support them as well as myself supporting them... I have I clearly observed it... I definitely think that it is children supporting each other and they are grouped in such a way so that they've got other children on their table that can actually help" [CT2, Lines 34-38].

The extracts demonstrate that the classroom teachers' initiative in setting up situations where learners could help each other seemed, from their perspectives, to be quite successful - learners were reported helping each other and benefitting from such help, particularly when higher achieving learners helped lower achieving learners. In the language support teacher's opinion, however, peer-assessment was particularly helpful when children worked in similar ability groups. The teacher commented:

Comment 8: "I think it is great particularly in a guided reading groups... there you've got a group of similar ability readers and you have a book you are all studying, and each child will read out on their own and if they are struggling on a word the other children or another child who can read the word will say it for them" [Lines 264-268].

It may probably be inferred from the last three comments (Comments 6 to 8) that learners may benefit from working in both similar and mixed ability groups by "providing help to each other" (Harlen and Winter, 2004). Furthermore, the language support teacher also commented on her beliefs about the effectiveness of peer-assessment when compared to simple teacher correction, showing a preference for peer-assessment as a strategy that may potentially support and promote learning better. The language teacher stated:

Comment 9: "how much of it [peer-assessment] they will remember I do not know but probably if it's then discussed with the peer, you know, look I think you should have done

that because... they'll remember that far more than the teacher just correcting it" [Lines 300-302].

Summarising the teachers' views on learner peer-assessment in their classes, it may be suggested that similar to teacher feedback strategies, learner peer-assessment, be it within the same or mixed ability groups, seemed to have a potential to be formative for the learners.

5.3 Teacher Views on Learner Self-Assessment

When teachers were asked to comment on whether and how learners use self-assessment in their classes, classroom teachers commented:

Comment 10: "I think some children are quite good at it I think that is important that they do start to look at their work and begin to check it... there might be hundreds of errors in there... they probably won't pick up everything... but what I am trying to do at the moment particularly with their writing is to just give them something quite small to focus on... I think it is important that they have successes as well as [failures]" [CT1, Line 103].

This extract suggests that the classroom teacher 1 probably found learner self-assessment helpful in supporting and promoting independent learning since she reported working, towards promoting its use in her class by setting the learners specific achievable goals and making these goals explicit to them. Harlen and Winter (2004: 404) suggest that "knowing the criteria for assessing their work may be essential for involving learners in assessing their own work". That is exactly what classroom teacher 2 seemed to be doing in her class. When the language support teacher commented on learner self-assessment in her classes, she mentioned that:

Comment 11: "They will always make miss some [errors] always no matter how... and in years to come I am not going to be there they've got to be able to pick these errors out themselves... I think you know [we need] to encourage them to self-correct" [CT2, Lines 272-276].

In this extract, the language support teacher seems to be highlighting the importance of making it clear to the learners that at the end of the day they themselves are going to be responsible for their own learning. She also mentions encouraging the learners to self-assess. This point, namely that learners needed encouragement to self-correct, reinforces the finding reported in Afitska's (2014a) quantitative research study, where the author reported that learner self-assessment was the least frequently used assessment strategy in the examined classes. The point of similarity between the language support teacher's and classroom teachers' comments (Comments 10 and 11) seems to be that, they both reported perceiving training learners in self-assessment as important, and working towards developing learners' self-assessment skills to promote their independent learning. Viewing self-assessment from this perspective – that it may promote learning – may suggest that it is used formatively in these classrooms.

5.4 Learner Views on Teacher Formative Feedback

To investigate learner views on teacher feedback, the learners were asked to comment on whether their teachers were helping them with learning during the lessons and, if so, how. The learners commented on written and verbal teacher assistance. In relation to verbal teacher feedback the learners stated:

Comment 12: "[I would prefer the teacher] to ask me more questions [because] if she just tells me the answer straightaway I will not know... how to work it out" [P4, Line 100].

Comment 13: "you can learn through them [questions]" [P2, Line 176].

Comment 14: "I will answer myself ... because I want to learn more" [P3, lines 106,110].

These three learner comments seem to be quite homogeneous in terms of learners' views on verbal teacher assistance. The learners reported preferring interactive feedback in the form of a dialogue, with the teacher eliciting answers from the learners rather than immediately telling them, a point of similarity with Yoshida (2008). Rea-Dickins (2003: 92) suggests that eliciting responses from the learners, that is eliciting learner "uptake", "may contribute to whether feedback is effective in promoting processes of teaching and learning". Based on Rea-Dickins' (2003) view, it may be suggested that verbal teacher feedback strategies which the learners reported may possibly be seen as potentially formative for them. In her interview, pupil

4 also commented on the teacher verbal feedback from a slightly different perspective from that presented above. The learner said:

Comment 15: "helpful [meaning the teacher's comments]... because when I do not know, she would make it like clear so I would know and what's what makes it helpful" [P4, Lines 48-50].

As seen from this extract, this time the learner speaks not about the teacher feedback provided by means of eliciting questions, but about the teacher feedback provided by means of detailed and clear explanations. These clear explanations seem to be helping the learner understand the problem and possibly progress through learning. It may, therefore, be suggested that this comment provides further evidence that teacher verbal feedback may be used formatively in classrooms. In relation to written teacher feedback, pupil 1 commented:

Comment 16: "they [teachers] help me to do stuff ... concentrate on it then do it [right] next time ... [I will] pay attention to them [comments]... read all my comments then I can improve more" [P1, Lines 138,140,142].

From this comment, it appears that this learner reads the teacher's written feedback, in contrast to the teacher's belief that learners may not read written comments at all (see the 'Teacher views on oral and written formative feedback' section). Moreover, the learner also reported benefitting from this teacher feedback. This may suggest that the teacher's written comments could have had a formative effect on the learner's learning as they seemed to be making sense and helping him make changes in the context of his own work.

5.5 Learner Views on Peer-Assessment

Learners were asked to comment on whether they help their peers with work and if so how. One of the learners (P4) interviewed on this question, reported helping her peers because they might also help her or should she need assistance with her learning. This learner also mentioned that her peer-help seemed to be beneficial for her peers in that they may "come up with the answer" [Line 140] or "write it right" [Line 144]. In this sense learner peer-assessment may possibly be seen as having formative potential for the learners. Moreover, the learner also mentioned using a similar feedback strategy as her teacher, namely eliciting feedback from her peers rather than immediately telling them the right answers. Similarly, another learner also mentioned using the same strategy in her interview. She said:

Comment 17: "yeah ... like tell them what to do but not tell them the answers" [P3, Line 20].

Interestingly, not many situations were observed when learners did elicit answers from their peers; mostly they seemed to be correcting their peers work immediately by telling them where and how to correct. The extract below from the interview with Pupil 4, where she commented on how she would help her peer, seems to support this observation:

Comment 18: P4: Like say it like yesterday a girl at my table she was spelling 'WAS' wrong and I corrected it for her and then she just said oh that's how you spelt it and then she had to do another sentence and that word was in it as well and then she spelt it right

Interviewer: ok good and when you corrected her how did you correct

P4: Like she put am er 'U' instead of a 'A' and then I told her that you don't put a 'U' because that was spelt 'WUS' and you don't use 'U' like because the teacher would just cross it and just wanting in 'A' because am....

Interviewer: Because it's correct spelling right

P4: Nods [P4, Lines 146-150].

It is clearly evident from this extract that pupil 4 immediately and explicitly corrected her peer once she spotted the error in her writing rather than eliciting the correct answer from that peer. When pupil 2 was invited to talk about his peer-assessment experience he did not mention helping his peers because they might help him as well, but he did note that correcting his peers made him "feel like a boss":

Comment 19: "always... because it makes you feel like a boss" [P2, Line 18].

What can be inferred from this extract, in addition to the fact that peer-assessing made the learner feel like a boss by taking the role of the teacher or examiner of the others, is that he still helped his peers and therefore potentially provided them with opportunities for learning.

When the learners were invited to comment on the situations when they were in a position of being assessed or asking for help, they stated:

Comment 20: "ask the teacher most of the time because the children may be wrong" [P1, Line 10].

Comment 21:"the teacher ... because I'll get high mark my mum will know if I ... the teacher marked it .... I'll put my hand up and ask the teacher" [P2, Lines 6-8, 48].

Comment 22: "when my teacher helps me... because she explains more than other people... the teacher's advice is much better" [P3, Lines 12, 14, 32].

Comment 23: "the teacher because then I am sure it is right and can get more help when the teacher corrects my mistake ... if I ask the teacher that would be more like right because the teacher would have known" [P4, Lines 14, 52].

An interesting observation emerges from these comments (Comments 20 to 23). It becomes evident that the learners reported preferring the teacher's assistance to that of their peers as they seemed to trust the teachers' comments and help more. Interestingly, however, the learner interview data also revealed that when learners had no other choice – either to accept help from their working partners or not get it at all -they seemed to ask for and accept peer-assistance quite willingly and, moreover, sometimes reported finding it helpful, as exemplified by the comments 24-26.

Comment 24: "if there is a question I can discuss it with my group to like make sure the right answer and thing like that... like words I have not read [meaning heard] of before and then sometimes they tell me [other pupils]" [P4, Line 10, 172].

Comment 25: "if I get stuck some people help me to work... yeah [pupils help is helpful]" [P3, Line 8].

Comment 26: "I think it [peer-help] helps me" [P1, Line 6].

In summary, the learner interview data on peer-assessment suggests that learners generally seemed not to mind assessing their peers and were not found to express doubts about the quality of their own assessment. Some of the learners reported observing their peers benefitting from their assistance. However, the learners did seem to express doubts about the quality of the assessment and help when they were the ones who were assessed by their peers. This was the case, only when the learners had a choice between choosing whether to be assessed by their peer or by their teacher. Once they did not have such choice, the learners seemed willing to ask for and accept help from their peers and reported finding this help useful for supporting and may be promoting their learning. Therefore, on the basis of the learner reports, it can be concluded that in the examined classes, peer-assessment seemed to have a formative potential for the learners.

5.6 Learner Views on Self-Assessment

To investigate learners' views on self-assessment they were asked to speak about whether they check their own work after completing it and if so, how they do it and how useful they find it.

When speaking about self-assessment, pupils 2 and 4 noted that they did use self-assessment to help them progress through learning (by looking through the work, identifying the problem and addressing it). However in his interview, pupil 4 also mentioned the fact that he did not always know how to correct the errors once they are identified. This finding may suggest that self-assessment may not necessarily always be formative for the learners, as sometimes they may not know how to deal with their difficulties. Further, pupil 3 when speaking about her views on learner self-assessment, mentioned:

Comment 27: "sometimes... yeah I like checking my own work and other people work... yeah I know how to correct a mistake... not always, sometimes I need a friend to help me" [P3, Lines 82, 86, 88].

In this extract, pupil 3 comments not only on the fact that sometimes she may not know how to address the gaps in her knowledge identified as the result of self-assessment (as was the case for pupil 4), but also on the way she might deal with such situations. She reports turning to her friend for assistance, in other words, asking for peer-help. The author argues, that in the way pupil 3 reports using self-assessment (asking for peer-assessment if needed) it may be seen as formative for her since she could learn from it.

6. Implications for Practice

Several implications for school teachers working with EAL

learners can be drawn from this study. Firstly, this study observed that when the teachers provided feedback to learners in an eliciting way, that is, by asking questions, making clarification requests and prompting the learners, they were more likely to get an immediate response from them. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers may use interactions that involve implicit eliciting feedback when they aim not only to assess their learners' linguistic proficiency, but also to support their linguistic development as part of the assessment.

Secondly, this study suggested that learner self-assessment may help learners become more aware of the gaps in their knowledge and may help them support their linguistic development. However, this research – in another paper – also revealed that learners self-assessed very infrequently during lessons (Afitska, 2014a). Therefore it is suggested that teachers spend a certain amount of time training learners in self-assessment and motivating them to self-assess. This may be done by ensuring that learners understand their learning goals, that they can position themselves in relation to these goals and that they have skills and strategies needed to achieve these goals. In the examined school, for example, one of the strategies to help learners self-assess was inviting them to use dictionaries when they did not know or were in doubt how to spell the word, or a thesaurus when they did not know the meaning of the word.

Thirdly, it is suggested that teachers encourage learners to peer-assess as peer-assessment may provide opportunities for learners to learn from their peers and develop their linguistic proficiency. Afitska (2014a) found that in 96% of all peer-assessment episodes that resulted in learner uptake, uptake was found to be successful. In other words, learners could benefit from their peers' linguistic assistance in more than nine out of ten situations when it was possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the help provided.

Conclusion

The results of this study, in line with the requirements set out in the official policy documents on effective teaching and assessment of learners with EAL, revealed that the teachers and leaners used classroom embedded language assessment formatively, that is to support the teachers' teaching and to promote the learners' linguistic development. Specific findings of the study were: (1) the teachers trained their learners in self-assessment techniques and provided them with opportunities for peer-assessment; (2) the learners preferred their teachers' assistance to that of their peers when they had a choice as to who will address the gaps in their linguistic knowledge; (3) in the situations when it was not possible to get the teachers' assistance learners would turn for help to their peers and generally find it helpful; (4) learners would occasionally be unable to benefit from self-assessment if they did not know how to address the linguistic gaps identified.

The present study was one of few to date that have investigated classroom embedded language teaching and assessment practices in close interaction. Its implications, in line with the implications from a small number of other relevant studies, clearly and yet again highlight the necessity to carry on research in this direction so that more knowledge is gathered into how the development of EAL learners' linguistic proficiency can be supported and promoted by means of classroom-embedded formative language assessment. In view of the fact, that the present study was based on a very small sample any generalisations need to be made with great care.

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