

# Language Teaching Research Quarterly



2021, Vol. 23, 64–79

## Formative Assessment and Motivation in ESP: A Case Study

Snježana Kereković

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, Croatia

*Received 24 December 2020*      *Accepted 19 June 2021*

### Abstract

The paper presents a case study of an ESP course illustrating the implementation of formative assessment to increase students' participation and motivation. Formative assessment is an ongoing process teachers and students engage in while focusing on the learning goals and taking action to achieve them. It refers to monitoring students' learning and the in-process evaluation of student performance by the teacher and by peers providing ongoing feedback to both the teacher and the students. The *Business English for Engineers* course, designed for graduate students of mechanical engineering, focuses on developing the presentation skills of future mechanical engineers. The students enrolled on the course prepare presentations on engineering topics planned by the syllabus, thus taking direct responsibility for learning. The presentations are followed by questions and group discussions on the presented topics and are subsequently assessed by the rest of the students, the presenters themselves and the teacher. Apart from presentations, students are also assigned smaller tasks to do in class in pairs or groups. A grade in the form of points is attached to the delivered presentations and completed tasks, contributing to the student's final grade. The results of the questionnaire completed by the students at the end of the course show that such formative activities and assessment increased the students' motivation and participation in class.

**Keywords:** *ESP, Formative Assessment, Motivation, Graduate Engineering Students, Business English*

### Introduction

In higher education in general and in undergraduate study programmes in particular, summative assessment is still the predominant mode of evaluation of how much students have learnt throughout the course. Teachers mostly administer mid-term tests, end-of-course tests and/or final oral exams to evaluate students' information retention. This practice appears reasonable as undergraduate study programmes include a fair number of courses that teach factual knowledge which students need to acquire in their field of study and which, at the same time, set students up for success in their follow-on courses. However, formative assessment could occupy a more important place in higher education because teachers who

carry out the formative assessment in their courses do not monitor only students' progress, but they also monitor learning while the students take direct responsibility for learning.

### **Language Assessment**

Second language assessment is concerned with the design of assessment procedures and techniques for measuring second language knowledge (Hornberger & Shohamy, 2008). As principal instruments used to evaluate language knowledge, foreign language tests are not viewed today only as tools required for measuring language knowledge but also as instruments connected and embedded in political, social and educational contexts (Shohamy, 2007). Undoubtedly, assessment is one of the most important aspects of foreign language teaching and learning. In educational institutions, assessment in foreign language teaching has two main purposes: (i) to measure the extent to which learners have achieved the goals or the outcomes of a particular programme of learning, i.e., to make summative evaluations and (ii) to provide instructional feedback to help learners progress (Egbert & Shahrokni, 2018).

Assessment is referred to as summative or formative. The summative assessment aims to record the learners' achievement by measuring proficiency at the end of a period of study (Fulcher, 2010; Harlen, 2005), so it seeks to measure the learning achievement related to the whole course. Summative tests may also be administered as interim or benchmark tests to monitor learners' academic progress and determine whether the learners are on track to mastering the material that will be evaluated on end-of-course tests. In any case, the summative assessment does not aim at providing a view on how to improve learners' achievement in the future; it only gives a record of learners' success in the past learning process.

Formative assessment occurs during learning "to provide learners with feedback on their progress and alert the teacher to any aspects of the course that may need an adjustment" (Council of Europe, n.d.). It is defined as a frequent, interactive assessment of learners' progress and understanding to identify learning needs and adjust teaching appropriately (Wiliam, 2011). It is an ongoing process teachers and students engage in while focusing on the learning goals, reviewing where the current work is in relation to the goals, and taking action to achieve these learning goals (Brookhart, 2010). It is designed to promote students' learning unlike summative assessment that is primarily carried out for the purposes of grading and ranking or certifying competence (Brookhart, 2010; Harlen, 2005). Thus, formative assessment refers to the monitoring of students' learning and the in-process evaluation of students' performance. The obtained feedback is used to modify the teaching and learning activities the teacher and students are engaged in and to accelerate learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1998). Furthermore, formative assessment is performed by the teacher and also by peers, providing ongoing feedback to the teacher and the students as well. The key benefit of formative assessment as a joint activity of teachers and students is an increase in students' achievements and motivation (Brookhart, 2010).

Although it seems that it is easy to distinguish between the summative and the formative assessment, some summative assessments related to a course (the student passes or fails a course) can act formatively if the student learns from these assessments. Also, some assessments are designed by instructors to be simultaneously formative (the student should learn from the provided feedback) and summative (the awarded grade contributes to the overall final grade) (Yorke, 2003).

## Motivation

APA Dictionary of Psychology defines motivation as the impetus that gives purpose or direction to behaviour and operates in humans consciously or unconsciously. There are internal motivating forces and external factors that can encourage or discourage certain behaviours. Thus, *intrinsic motivation* refers to “an incentive to engage in a specific activity that derives from pleasure in the activity itself rather than because of external benefits that might be obtained”. On the other hand, *extrinsic motivation* refers to “an external incentive to engage in an activity, especially motivation arising from the expectation of punishment or reward”.

In second language acquisition, motivation is one of the main determinants of second language learning achievement (Dörnyei, 1994) because it provides the primary impetus to initiate learning in the L2; later, it is the driving force for stimulating the long and often tedious learning process (Dörnyei, 2005). Motivation is also a crucial determinant of the extent to which learners are actively involved in learning a foreign language (Oxford & Shearin, 1996). Adult foreign language learners may be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. An intrinsically motivated learner would study a foreign language because of his/her genuine interest in the language and not primarily because of the course credits he/she will be awarded at the end of the course. Intrinsic motivation refers to undertaking an activity because it is interesting and enjoyable, which is itself experienced as a reward by intrinsically motivated people (Deci & Ryan, 2012). On the other hand, an extrinsically motivated learner carries out an activity to get a good grade or approval from the teacher (Dörnyei, 1994) or get some other reward.

Languages for specific purposes (LSP) are not particular kinds of languages or a particular teaching methodology, but rather “an approach to language learning which is based on learner needs” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Hence, it can be assumed that learners of a specialised language are motivated to master the language in order to satisfy their target needs, i.e., to be able to effectively use the language which is required in the target situation. When the knowledge of a specialised foreign language is a requirement for career advancement or a salary increase, an LSP in-service learner will be extrinsically motivated to work hard and complete the LSP course successfully. As regards pre-service LSP learners, i.e., students taking LSP courses in their tertiary education programmes, they are mostly aware of the need of using a specialised foreign language, predominantly English, already during their studies and in their future professional situations. At the same time, on average, they are less driven by the wish to receive a high grade in the exam, and it is not easy to maintain a high level of motivation for a longer period of time. Thus, LSP teachers teaching at the tertiary level need to deal with how to improve and sustain the intrinsic motivation of their students. Rubić and Matijević also argue that LSP learning motivation is commonly viewed very narrowly as being only or mostly about perceived relevance for students’ future career without sufficient attention being given to other important factors which may nurture students’ motivation for extrinsically valued goals (Rubić & Matijević, 2019). And indeed, according to the self-determination theory, if a person’s psychological needs are satisfied, both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation may foster high-quality learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

### **Formative Assessment and Motivation**

In their early study, Black and Wiliam (1998) stressed that formative assessment was critically important for student learning. Furthermore, several studies have shown that the formative assessment and feedback result in strengthening students' motivation, who can be engaged more fully in the learning activities. The following studies carried out at the tertiary level of education and in secondary schools exemplify the link between formative assessment and motivation.

Wheatley et al. (2015) conducted a research project that focused on modes of assessment and types of feedback across a range of modules within a higher education institution in the UK. A series of focus group discussions were held with students and academic staff with a focus on the ways in which formative assessment and feedback (types, timing, and amount of feedback) were integrated into modules together with an exploration of the effectiveness of feedback on future learning. In particular, the discussions focused on learning environments, effective learning, module delivery and assessment types, nature and purpose of feedback received and its practical applications, and features of good practice. The findings of the inductive content analysis indicate that formative feedback benefits the student and the lecturer in terms of charting the student's knowledge and achievement at a modular-specific point in time, thereby further motivating the student to engage more fully with the material.

In two studies, Black and Wiliam (2003) and Black et al. (2003) report on a project in which they developed formative assessment practices with a group of 36 secondary school teachers (24 science/mathematics and 12 English teachers) in the UK in 1999 and 2000. In a series of in-service education and training sessions, the teachers were first introduced to the principles underlying formative assessment and were given an opportunity to develop their own plans of practices they wished to develop. After that, the research team visited the schools and observed the selected teachers teaching a class with whom these strategies were introduced and discussed the teachers' ideas and practice. The research team did not impose a model of "good formative assessment" on the teachers but, rather, supported them in developing their own professional practices. The teachers were also interviewed, and their experiences were recorded; discussions were also held with student groups. The main result of the project is that changes occurred in terms of questioning (the way how teachers put questions and the length of wait time), feedback through marking (giving learners only comments and no marks resulted in the learners focusing on learning issues rather than only marks), peer- and self-assessment (which contribute greatly to the development of students' learning), and formative use of summative tests (summative tests considered as a positive part of the learning process). During the project, teachers and learners changed their roles – the teachers moved from the role of the presenter of content to the leader of exploration and development of ideas in which all students are involved, and the students became partners in pursuit of a shared goal, which improved students' motivation and self-esteem.

Koka et al. (2017) conducted a study to identify formative assessment practices in the first-year study course *Human molecular biology* at the Riga Stradins University, Latvia. The ultimate aim of the study was to support the implementation of formative assessment at the university. The study included a questionnaire filled by a group of 22 students at the end of the course. In addition, classes were observed 12 times by 12 lecturers, two IT professionals (to examine the application of information technologies), three university administration representatives, and one lecturer from another university. The observation protocol covered

students' activity during lecture or workshop, lecturer's activity, and IT use. At the end of the course, a focus group discussion was organised, emphasising the key benefits of formative assessment carried out in lectures and workshops. The study concluded that when formative assessment is organised purposefully and students are involved in the assessment, students learn more effectively and develop communication and other skills they can apply in other courses and later in their professional careers.

### **Case Study**

This paper presents a case study of an ESP course that illustrates the implementation of formative assessment to increase the participation and motivation of students. Although most LSP students seem to be motivated to learn a specialised foreign language, their interest begins to flag after a few sessions. Therefore, the course to be presented in the following section has been designed as a tailor-made course providing a learning environment in which students are supported in their learning activities: the teacher collaborates with the students, the students take an active role in the learning process, and formative and peer-assessments are carried out in every session.

### **About the Course**

The *Business English for Engineers* course has been designed as an elective course for graduate students of mechanical engineering who had already successfully completed a four-semester technical English course in their undergraduate study programme. The course syllabus includes the following topics: Engineering education around the world, Grand challenges for engineering in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Legal forms and organisational structures of companies, Management, Qualities of a good manager, Development of a business plan, Acquisitions, mergers and takeovers, Entrepreneurship, Ethics in engineering and Emotional intelligence at work. The primary goal of the course is to develop the presentation skills of future mechanical engineers as opposed to the *Technical English* course, whose main goal was to develop the skills of reading, writing and speaking in an LSP setting. Therefore, throughout the *Business English for Engineers* course, the students prepare presentations on the topics planned by the syllabus. An additional goal is to prepare the students for lifelong learning; formative assessment provides the students with an opportunity to work on their capacity to regulate their own learning<sup>1</sup>.

Apart from presentations, the students are also assigned smaller tasks to do in the classroom in pairs or groups. Also, there are more laborious assignments that the students work on as teams, e.g., they develop a business plan for a start-up company which they ultimately present in class in the form of a role-play. For each of these activities, the students are awarded points as follows: the maximum number of points awarded for a given presentation is 15 while assignments completed in pairs or groups/teams may be awarded three to ten points depending on the complexity of the task. At the end of each session, the students are also awarded up to five points for their participation (volunteering answers, asking questions, commenting on what has been said, expressing an opinion, and contributing to discussions) in this particular session. Thus, the students collect points throughout the course, making their way up to the successful completion of the course.

---

<sup>1</sup> Models of self-regulated learning can help teachers to enhance students' learning, see Panadero, 2017.

In the last third of the course, the students take a written test, which is an interim summative test evaluating the students' knowledge of business vocabulary. However, the test is not awarded a grade, but points that are added to the points the students have collected throughout the course; hence nobody can fail the test. At the end of the course, the sum of the points is translated into a final grade for each student, and no oral exam is required.

### **Presentations: The Active and Leading Role of Students**

*Technical English*, a compulsory course for all undergraduate students of mechanical engineering which precedes the elective *Business English for Engineers* course, also deals with the topic of giving presentations and covers useful presentation phrases. To refresh the students' memory at the beginning of this elective course, practical guidelines on how to give an effective presentation are briefly summarised for the students to follow them. In this revision session, the teacher has a leading role, but the students are engaged in the discussion as much as possible.

According to the *Business English for Engineers* syllabus, each student is to give one presentation, and everybody can choose freely from quite a wide range of topics. Before the student starts preparing his/her presentation, he/she discusses briefly the content (subject matter) with the teacher. The teacher provides clear guidance by outlining the framework of the content knowledge the student is to present to his peers. This is the initial stage in the process characterised by the teacher-student co-operation, which helps the student to deal with a new content. This stage has proven to be particularly useful when the student prepares a presentation on a topic which he/she is not familiar with, but is interested in learning about it and in presenting it to his/her peers (e.g., the topics of legal forms of companies or company mergers).

The students prepare their presentations at home, and when it is their turn, they have ten minutes at their disposal to deliver the presentations. After each presentation, the audience put questions related to the presented topic to the presenter. The way the presenter answers the questions shows whether he/she has mastered the new material (the content). Also, the presented topic or specific issues are discussed by the whole class. The second part of the question-and-answer period is devoted to the assessment of the presenter's performance. First, the presenter is offered to comment on and assess his/her own performance and inform the teacher and the group about the obstacles he/she encountered while working on the assignment and how he/she overcame them. Then, the rest of the class comment on and assess the presentation by referring to the principles of effective presentations, the teacher adds her remarks and summarises, and, finally, the presenter is awarded points for his/her achievement. The number of points is decided jointly by the teacher and the students.

### **Pair and Group Work: Students' Joint Responsibility for Success**

The tasks that the students work on in pairs or groups range from short tasks done in the classroom and taking only ten minutes to more demanding tasks requiring the students to meet and work on them after class. However, they have one important thing in common: to successfully complete the task and possibly earn the maximum number of points, the students are required to join forces and contribute with their knowledge, learning in the process how to be good team players. In the teacher's experience, many graduate students still have trouble with effective teamwork. Such tasks make them quickly realise that they are jointly

responsible for the result of their effort and that their performance improves because of the joint effort of each team member.

### End-of-course Survey

At the end of the course, the students complete a questionnaire concerning their perception of the course. The full questionnaire is added in the Appendix. The five questions of relevance for this paper are questions 11 to 15.

### Results of the Survey

In three successive academic years (2016/2017, 2017/2018, and 2018/2019), 80 students completed the course, and 53 of them completed the questionnaire. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the results have been carried out.

### Quantitative Data

#### Question 1: Students' evaluation of their own participation in class activities

The majority of 53 respondents (33 respondents or 62.3%) participated in the activities regularly: 21 or 39.6% of the respondents did their best to participate actively and 12 or 22.7% of them always participated in the activities actively. Fifteen respondents, i.e., 28.3%, participated in the activities occasionally, and only five students, i.e., 9.4%, participated in the activities rarely. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the answers to question 1.



Figure 1. Students' self-evaluation of their own participation in class activities

#### Questions 2 and 3: Students' reasons for selecting the answers to question 1

No respondent circled the reason "The topics were boring". Other reasons were circled by approximately the same number of respondents, i.e., it has been found that the distribution of answers was approximately equal.

#### Question 5: Students' satisfaction with the formative assessment and the system of point collection

The substantial majority of 52 respondents (38 or 73.1%) are either satisfied (28 or 53.9%) or very satisfied (10 or 19.2%) with the formative assessment and the system of point collection. Twelve students, i.e., 23.1% of the respondents, are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and two students (3.8%) find this approach interesting but do not like it. No respondent expressed dissatisfaction with the formative assessment and the system of point collection. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the answers to question 5.

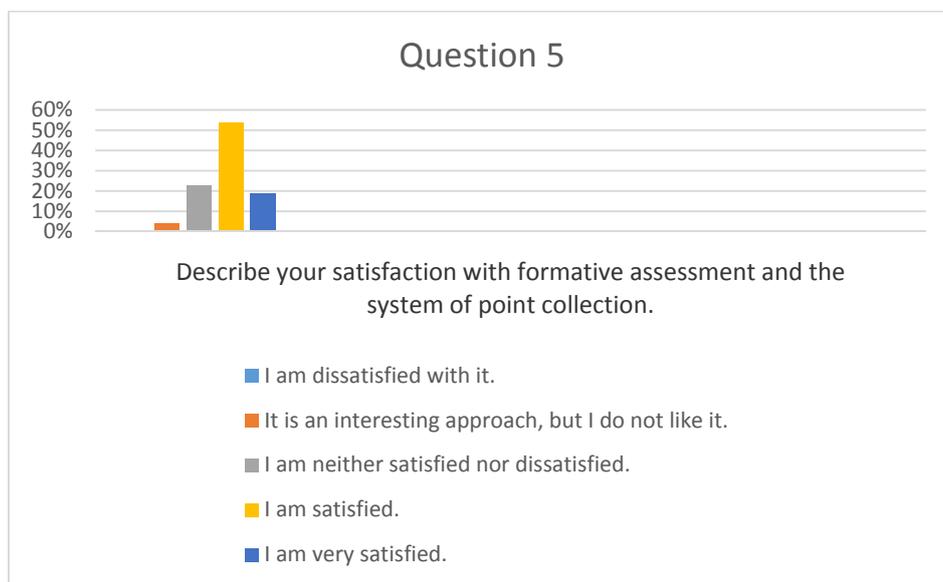


Figure 2. Students' satisfaction with formative assessment and the system of point collection

### Qualitative Data

Questions 4 and 5 required some explanations from students, so a qualitative analysis was carried out.

#### Question 4: What do you think about the design of the course?

Four respondents of 50 (8%) liked and did not like the course design at the same time. Student 1 likes the design of the course because *it enables active and permanent participation*<sup>2</sup> in class but does not like it because *sometimes too many students want to speak and not everybody gets a chance to express their opinion*. Student 2 does not like the design of the course because he/she is *shy* but also likes it because *it helps students develop their communication skills and fluency and forces people to participate*. Student 3 does not like the design of the course because he/she *does not like speaking in public* but *realises that he/she would benefit from this course*, so he/she also likes the course for this reason. Student 4 likes how the course is designed because *the time simply flies* (meaning that he/she is not bored during a 3x45-minute session) and does not like it because *some people speak up only to be awarded more points*.

Only one student of 50 respondents (2%) does not like the design of the course because *the charismatic students* (referring to the students who are particularly communicative) *will be awarded more points*.

<sup>2</sup> Quotations from the questionnaire are given in italics.

Consequently, 45 students of 50 respondents (90%) like the design of the course. A long list of reasons (many of them were mentioned repeatedly) — quoted below in italics — can be grouped in the following way:

a) Reasons related to the learning of the subject matter:

- *Discussions on the subject matter are often very interesting.*
- *The course gives students a chance to really improve their knowledge.*
- *We've learned a lot.*
- *We've been more successful in retaining information.*

b) Reasons related to the development of language/communication skills:

- *This is the fastest way to develop your speaking skill.*
- *Speaking practice is very important.*
- *Different language skills are being developed.*
- *You practise both the engineering and the business vocabulary.*
- *The course really helps develop my English.*
- *The course helps develop communicative skills.*
- *This is a chance to practise English in real situations and not only with pre-made exercises.*
- *I was really practising my communication skills. Students can develop their communication skills.*
- *In the business environment the communication and relationship between co-workers are terribly important.*
- *We can expand our vocabulary.*

c) Reasons related to the mode of instruction:

- *It was a pleasant working atmosphere.*
- *Every student has a chance to participate actively.*
- *Students are forced to participate actively which leads to better learning results.*
- *Students are proactive.*
- *The course design forces students to think in English.*
- *The course design really makes you speak.*
- *It is an interesting way of acquiring knowledge.*
- *We've learned more in this way.*
- *Classes were interesting.*
- *The teacher tried to include everyone in all activities.*
- *Every person has a chance to speak.*
- *You are really engaged in each session. Everybody is engaged.*
- *It aims to give everyone an opportunity to express their opinion. Everyone can express their opinion and speak freely.*
- *This is the best way to learn a foreign language.*
- *It is not a conventionally designed course.*
- *This is an innovative course at our faculty.*

d) Reasons related to personal development:

- *You overcome your insecurities.*
- *You are forced to step outside your comfort zone (at least I was).*
- *We develop our soft skills which we mostly do not have.*

### **Question 5: Students' satisfaction with the formative assessment and the system of point collection**

After the students selected one answer which describes the level of their satisfaction (see the sub-section on quantitative data), they were asked to explain their answer. Some of their explanations are listed here:

- *The assessment didn't seem to be rigorous.*
- *The relaxed atmosphere motivated me to participate actively.*
- *The system of point collection motivated me to participate actively.*
- *It is difficult to quantify communication skills so this kind of assessment is appropriate.*
- *It was good that assessment was carried out at the end of each session.*
- *Such assessment is fair; such assessment is quite fair.*
- *The formative assessment motivates students to put in constant effort, to be proactive and to pay attention to what other students say.*
- *The formative assessment approach and the system of point collection force students to participate in every session not just when they feel like it.*
- *This was something new to us, particularly grading other students and ourselves.*
- *Although I wasn't participating in discussions for the reason of earning points, I can understand that this is a legitimate motive.*
- *The continuous participation and work are valued and there is no cramming.*

### **Discussion**

The results of the survey have shown that almost three-thirds of the respondents (62.3%) participated in the class activities. Regarding the mode of instruction, the students like the pleasant classroom atmosphere, appreciate the opportunity given to each student to express their opinion, realise that they have learnt a lot, and think this is a good way to learn a foreign language. It seems that the favourable learning environment in the classroom created by the teacher motivated the students and resulted in a high level of their participation, which supports Dörnyei's claims that teachers' motivational skills are central to teaching effectiveness (Dörnyei, 2001). Rubić and Matijević also claim that sustaining high levels of LSP student motivation requires consistent teacher effort, even with students with high abilities (Rubić & Matijević, 2019). A survey of the motivation of Rumanian students of engineering to learn technical English also showed that the classroom atmosphere was crucial for stimulating learners to express themselves in English, especially in the activities such as conversations or debates (Abrudan, Caciora, & Sturza, 2017). In his list of strategies to motivate foreign language learners, Dörnyei also stresses the role of the teacher in developing students' self-confidence, promoting students' self-efficacy concerning achieving learning goals, promoting favourable self-perceptions of competence in a foreign language, decreasing student anxiety by creating a supportive and accepting learning environment, promoting motivation-enhancing attributions by helping students recognise links between effort and outcome and in encouraging students to set attainable sub-goals for themselves (Dörnyei, 1994). Most of these strategies are continuously applied in the presented course.

The results of this survey also show that it remains to additionally support and help the students who participated only occasionally or rarely because they feel that their English is not good enough to engage in the conversation by facilitating and enhancing their language skills. The teacher is now set on devoting more time to the students who dislike speaking in public to help them overcome public speaking reluctance. As no respondent said that they participated rarely or occasionally because the topics were boring, it is obvious that the course syllabus has included topics relevant and interesting to students. The fact that the course was tailored for the specific context and audience is also motivating, as suggested by Csizér and Illés (2020).

Ninety per cent of the respondents liked this course design for a variety of reasons ranging from those related to the learning of the subject matter through the development of communication skills and the mode of instruction to the reasons related to personal development. Regarding the learning of the subject matter, in this course, the students are not expected only to retain the information (acquire knowledge), but also to do some research, select information, structure the presentation, rehearse to be able to speak freely, and finally, to give a presentation. In this way, they would not only share knowledge but also engage their peers in a subsequent discussion. Regarding the development of communications skills, students are aware that communication will be of utmost importance in their professional life, and they appreciate the opportunity to practise speaking and expand their vocabulary, i.e., to develop their communication skills.

Finally, regarding personal development, the course seems to have helped some students to overcome their insecurities and encouraged them to speak in public and participate in class activities, which they normally would not do. Obviously, their psychological needs were also satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Almost three-fourths of the respondents (73.1%) were satisfied, and no respondent was dissatisfied with the formative assessment and the system of point collection devised to evaluate the effort and achievement of each particular student after each session. In their explanations, the students stressed that such assessment was fair, and they liked the facts that no cramming was required and that continuous participation and work were valued. Consequently, the students were motivated to put in the constant effort and to be proactive, similarly to the findings of the project conducted by Wheatley et al. (2015).

In the concluding comment section of the questionnaire (question 19), the students also expressed their wish to have more courses of this kind, in their graduate curriculum in particular. Having obtained their bachelor-of-engineering degrees, they feel that as graduate students, they learn more by their own research and by taking a proactive approach to learning. In this course, in addition to being engaged in the learning process, the students are also involved in the assessment of their peers' performance and in self-assessment. Firstly, while assessing themselves, the students verbalise their thoughts about their assignment and reflect on what they did well or maybe struggled with, becoming fully aware of both their process of learning and what they still need to learn or practise. This is also an exercise in which they learn how to self-assess their progress and self-regulate their learning. Secondly, when the students assess their peers, they do not only evaluate another person's achievement but, primarily, they learn from the other person's performance. Throughout the semester, it was becoming increasingly apparent how the students learned from their peers' mistakes and tried to avoid them in their presentations. Also, students in general do not have much

experience in making judgments in the educational setting, so they gladly participated in the peer-assessment. Finally, the feedback provided by the teacher helps students gain a clearer understanding of how they performed and what is expected of them if they want to improve their performance in future. Whenever the feedback is detailed and constructive, the students can build on their strengths and overcome their weaknesses and improve their academic achievement, as also concluded by Koka et al. (2017).

In this course, formative assessment is linked to grading. So, the issue of whether the formative assessment should be used for grading needs to be addressed here too. Brookhart states that the purpose of formative assessment used during instruction is to find out how students are progressing, while students can pay attention to what they need to work on without worrying about a grade (Brookhart, 2010). This course has been designed to engage students in the process of learning as much as possible. Hence, formative assessment was introduced to motivate students to actively participate in class activities. Although graduate students are grown-ups, who should be intrinsically motivated to acquire as much knowledge as possible, in reality, grades still have a significant role in motivating them to learn. The system of collecting points for completed tasks and participation in class activities, which results in a final grade, proved to be a motivating factor throughout the course.

Awarding points to students for their participation at the end of each session poses a difficult challenge. The teacher has to keep track of how each student responded to different activities (giving answers and asking questions, commenting on what has been said, expressing an opinion, and contributing to discussions). The teacher cannot afford to focus only on the topic dealt with in the session but has to pay close attention to the students' reactions in terms of their participation and the language they use in communication.

## **Conclusion**

In the *Business English for Engineers* course, the students occupy a central and active role in the teaching, learning and feedback processes, while the teacher can be seen as a manager of the learning environment. It is not easy to develop such an environment as a number of factors need to be taken into account, such as the selection of topics, types of tasks given to students, time management, continued support, and encouragement to students from the teacher. This case study has shown that this can be done successfully. Students have even suggested that more courses of similar design integrating formative assessment be offered to students of graduate study programmes in particular.

In this study, the teacher and the students have changed their roles, similarly to the project presented by Black & Wiliam (2003) and Black et al. (2003). The content knowledge is covered jointly by the teacher and the students. The students prepare the content and deliver it in the form of presentations to their peers, while the teacher takes the role of a learning consultant and a discussion moderator. Further, the assessment of the performance of each presenter is not carried out only by the teacher but also by the students who give feedback and evaluate their peers' performance. Students also self-assess their performance. The study has proven that graduate students can be entrusted with more demanding tasks; in fact, the more challenging the task, the students put more effort into completing it.

This case study also demonstrates that graduate students are willing to take direct responsibility for learning, on the one hand, and that they can and should be given increased responsibility for the assessment process on the other. Formative assessment, integrated into

the teaching and learning processes and supplemented with a system of point collection as some kind of grading has been carried out in this course; it has been proven that the formative assessment contributed to effective teaching and learning.

The results of the questionnaire completed by the students at the end of the course show that the formative activities and assessment increased the students' motivation and participation in class; this resulted in a high level of students' satisfaction with the course. Finally, the main conclusion of this paper is that formative assessment and feedback should be used in higher education to empower students as self-regulated learners, as Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) propose. As for teachers, the implementation of formative assessment and feedback can help them succeed in the task of designing a motivating learning situation in the academic setting.

## References

- Abrudan Caciora, S., & Sturza, A. (2017). Motivation to learn English: A case study on engineering students at the University of Oradea. *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 5(2), 295-306.
- APA Dictionary of Psychology. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.apa.org/motivation>
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 7-74.
- Black, P. J., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., & Wiliam, D. (2003). The nature and value of formative assessment for learning. *Improving Schools*, 6(3), 7-22.
- Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (2003). 'In praise of educational research': Formative assessment. *British Educational Research Journal*, 29(5), 623-637.
- Brookhart, S. M. (2010). *Formative Assessment Strategies for Every Classroom: An ASCD Action Tool*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Alexandria, VI: ASCD ActionTool.
- Csizer, K., & Illés, É. (2020). Helping to maximise learners' motivation for second language learning. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 19, 19-31.
- Council of Europe. *Assessment (of Language Learning)*. Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/assessment-of-language-learning->
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). Motivation, personality, and development within embedded social contexts: An overview of self-determination theory. In Ryan, R. M. (Ed.), *Oxford Library of Psychology. The Oxford Handbook of Human Motivation* (pp. 85-107). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(3), 273-284.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition*. New Jersey: Mahwah.
- Egbert, J., & Shahrokni, S. A. (2018). *CALL Principles and Practices*. Retrieved from <https://opentext.wsu.edu/call/front-matter/title-page/>
- Fulcher, G. (2010). *Practical Language Testing*. London: Hodder Education.
- Harlen, W. (2005). Teachers' summative practices and assessment for learning — tensions and synergies. *Curriculum Journal*, 16(2), 207-223.
- Hornberger, N. H., & Shohamy, E. (Eds.) (2008). *Encyclopedia of Language and Education, Volume 7: Language Testing and Assessment*. Berlin: Springer.
- Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for Specific Purposes. A Learning-Centred Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Koka, R., Jurane-Bremane, A., & Koke, T. (2017). Formative assessment in higher education: From theory to practice. *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, 4(1), 28-34.
- Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(2), 199-218.
- Oxford, R. L., & Shearin, J. (1996). Language learning motivation in a new key. In Oxford, R. L. (Ed.), *Language Learning Motivation: Pathways to the New Century* (pp. 121-144). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press,
- Panadero, E. (2017). A Review of self-regulated learning: Six models and four directions for research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 422.
- Rubić, I., & Matijević, D. (2019). Autonomy and motivation: a self-determination theory perspective on ESP motivation. *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 7(2), 147-158.
- Ryan, R. M., Edward L., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78.
- Sadler, D. R. (1998). Formative assessment: revisiting the territory. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 5(1), 77-84.
- Shohamy, E. (2007). Language tests as language policy tools. *Assessment in Education*, 14(1), 117-130.
- Wheatly, L., McInch, A., Fleming, S. & Lord, R. (2015). Feeding back to feed forward: Formative assessment as a platform for effective learning. *Kentucky Journal of Higher Education Policy and Practice*, 3(2), 1-31.
- Wiliam, D. (2011). What is assessment for learning? *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 37(1), 3-14.
- Yorke, M. (2003). Formative assessment in higher education. Moves towards theory and the enhancement of pedagogic practice. *Higher Education*, 45(4), 477-501.

## Appendix

### Business English For Engineers Questionnaire

1. Why did you enrol on the course *Business English for Engineers*? (max 3 answers)
  - a) I like English in general.
  - b) I'm good at English so I expected this course won't be difficult for me.
  - c) Upon completing the *Technical English* course I wanted to continue learning the English language.
  - d) I believe that the knowledge of business English is important for my future career.
  - d) This non-technical optional course seemed the most interesting one.
  - e) Some other reason: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Upon completion of the course are you satisfied with your choice?
  - a) yes
  - b) no
  - c) partially
3. The sessions were
  - a) boring
  - b) mostly interesting
  - c) interesting
  - d) very interesting
4. What do you think of the course design which includes many student presentations, i.e., active class participation? (You may circle more than one answer if several answers apply.)
  - a) There were too many presentations.
  - b) It was good that we had an opportunity to develop presentation skills.

- c) Too much time was needed to be devoted to the preparation of the presentation.  
d) Some other opinion: \_\_\_\_\_
5. How much content knowledge (the knowledge related to the topics covered by the course) have you acquired?  
a) I have already known everything.  
b) a little  
c) quite a lot  
d) a lot
6. If you selected a) or b), has the course fulfilled your expectations? YES / NO (please circle)
7. How much language knowledge have you acquired (English business vocabulary, phrases, collocations, grammar)  
a) I have already known everything  
b) a little  
c) quite a lot  
d) a lot
8. If you selected a) or b), has the course fulfilled your expectations? YES / NO (please circle)
9. The most interesting topic covered by the course was \_\_\_\_\_  
(List maximum three topics starting with the most interesting one to less interesting ones.)  
because \_\_\_\_\_
10. The most boring topic covered was \_\_\_\_\_  
(List maximum three topics starting with the most boring one to less boring ones.)  
because \_\_\_\_\_
11. The course is based on the communicative approach. Evaluate your own participation in the activities.  
a) I participated in the activities rarely.  
b) I participated in the activities occasionally.  
c) I did my best to participate in the activities actively.  
d) I always participated in the activities actively.
12. If you selected a) or b), give your reason (you may select all that apply).  
a) I generally do not like speaking in public.  
b) The topics were boring.  
c) I think I am not as good at English as other students and because of that I do not like to speak in front of them.  
d) Some other reason: \_\_\_\_\_
13. If you selected c) or d), give your reason (you may select all that apply).  
a) I like speaking in public.  
b) The topics were interesting and I wanted to express my opinion.  
c) I was trying to collect as much points as possible so as to be awarded a high final grade.  
d) I realised I would benefit from the course most if I participated actively.
14. What do you think of about the design of the course?  
a) I don't like it because \_\_\_\_\_  
b) I like it because \_\_\_\_\_
15. Describe your satisfaction with the formative assessment and the system of point collection awarding your participation and effort after each session.

- a) I am dissatisfied with it.
- b) It is an interesting approach, but I do not like it.
- c) I am neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- d) I am satisfied.
- e) I am very satisfied.

Explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

16. The written test was

- a) easy
- b) neither easy nor difficult
- c) difficult

17. If you selected c), this is because

- a) you did not study for the test at all.
- b) you did not study enough.
- c) Some other reason: \_\_\_\_\_

18. In your opinion, in your professional career the knowledge of business English will be

- a) irrelevant
- b) important
- c) very important
- d) of utmost importance

19. If you have any other comments on the course, write them here.

---

### **Acknowledgements**

Not applicable.

### **Funding**

Not applicable.

### **Ethics Declarations**

### **Competing Interests**

No, there are no conflicting interests.

### **Rights and Permissions**

### **Open Access**

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. You may view a copy of Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.