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Challenges of using formative assessment in English classes in Pavlodar region secondary schools

***Annotation.** The article discusses the questions of formative assessment of secondary school students and the problems that arise when using it. The analysis of homework in English of 7th grade students has been made. The result of the study was the recommendations developed for school teachers in the field of assessment tools, organization and feedback, etc.*

***Key words:** assessment, formative assessment, secondary school, English language.*

Introduction. Over the past few years, the education system in Kazakhstan has undergone a number of changes. New programs were developed based on the updated standard of educational content. Since September 2015, the Program for updating the content of primary education has been successfully tested in 30 pilot schools, which include urban, rural and small schools. The approbation of educational programs brought positive learning results, and since September 2016, in all secondary schools of Kazakhstan, in the first grades, a transition to an updated standard of educational content was carried out and content in the remaining grades is being updated according to the established schedule.

All components of the educational process, including assessment, underwent updating. As known, assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning. Specialists in the field of assessment have studied various aspects of this multifaceted topic: the relationship of training and assessment, the role of a teacher, a student, and a parent. However, the assessment problem remains relevant today; it is still the subject of debate and in the focus of public attention.

The purpose of a criteria-based assessment is to obtain objective information about the results of student learning based on assessment criteria and provide it to all interested parties for further improvement of the educational process [1].

The aim of the article is to identify the effectiveness of the application and the analysis of the problems encountered in the formative assessment of English classes in the middle school.

The object of study is the written homework of students of 7th grade in English using formative assessment.

Main part. The key research ideas are based on constructivist views of learning [2; 3]. New knowledge acquired from 'traditional' transmission style teaching may not be well integrated with other knowledge held by the pupil and consequently only rote, shallow learning takes place. This rote learned knowledge gained from traditional schooling can be brought forth for examinations but it is not internalized by the learners, is of little use after examinations and is ignored at other times. The goal of constructivist teaching is to develop deep understanding of the subject on the part of the pupil so that they can use and apply knowledge beyond the classroom. Constructivist views of teaching require a learner-centered teacher who arranges the classroom around tasks that bring pupils into contact with knowledge, ideas, and skills. The tasks are designed to permit the pupils to bring forth their knowledge of the phenomenon being studied, to question certain assumptions they may hold, and to adjust their beliefs and develop new understandings. An important element of the teacher's role is to realize that individual pupils may approach a topic in a unique way. The teacher's role is to understand how individual pupils understand the topic, and to work with the pupils in adding to or reconstructing their understandings [2; 3].

Alexander R. considers the classroom assessment is no more technical device. Teachers assess by making marks on the page or by using words. Behind whatever form they use are not just objective or quasi-objective norms and standards but also assumptions about children's development, learning and motivation, and values relating to matters such as self-esteem and the relative importance of ability and effort [4].

According to P. Black, D. William the studies show that innovations that include strengthening the practice of formative assessment produce significant and often substantial learning gains. These studies range over age groups from 5 year olds to university undergraduates, across several school subjects, and over several countries [5, 3].

Assessment Reform Group researchers suggest that assessment is a term that covers any activity in which evidence of learning is collected in a planned and systematic way, and is used to make a judgment about learning. A distinction between formative and summative (summing-up) purposes has been familiar since the 1960s although the meaning of these two terms has not been well understood. A more transparent distinction,

meaning roughly the same thing, is between assessment of learning, for grading and reporting, and assessment for learning, where the explicit purpose is to use assessment as part of teaching to promote pupils' learning [6].

If the purpose is to help in decisions about how to advance learning and the judgment is about the next steps in learning and how to take them, then the assessment is formative in function, sometimes referred to as Assessment for Learning (AfL). AfL became known as a concept, after the publication in 1999 of a pamphlet with this title by the Assessment Reform Group, a small group of UK academics who have worked, since 1989, to bring evidence from research to the attention of teachers and policymakers [6].

If the purpose of assessment is to summarize the learning that has taken place in order to grade, certificate or record progress, then the assessment is summative in function, sometimes referred to as Assessment of Learning (AoFL). When summative assessment is used for making decisions that affect the status or future of students, teacher or school (that is, 'high stakes'), the demand for reliability of measure often means the tests are used in order closely to control the nature of the information and conditions in which it is collected [6].

As the subject of the article is homework it is important to know how it assists in learning. Research shows that homework benefits actual knowledge, self-discipline, learning and problem-solving skills.

- Homework is expected by students, teachers, parents and institutions.
- Homework reinforces and helps learners to retain information taught in the classroom as well as increasing their general understanding of the language.

- Homework develops study habits and independent learning. It also encourages learners to acquire resources such as dictionaries and grammar reference books. Research shows that homework also benefits factual knowledge, self-discipline, attitudes to learning and problem-solving skills.

- Homework offers opportunities for extensive activities in the receptive skills which there may not be time for in the classroom. It may also be an integral part of ongoing learning such as project work and the use of a graded reader.

- Homework provides continuity between lessons. It may be used to consolidate classwork, but also for preparation for the next lesson.

- Homework may be used to shift repetitive, mechanical, time-consuming tasks out of the classroom.

- Homework bridges the gap between school and home. Students, teachers and parents can monitor progress. The institution can involve parents in the learning process.

- Homework can be a useful assessment tool, as part of continual or portfolio assessment [7].

According to American methodologists, in order to increase the effectiveness of homework, teachers should understand what makes homework effective. C. Vatterott determined the main characteristics of good homework: *purpose, efficiency, possession, competence* [8].

There is also a different approach regarding the effectiveness of homework for students. In order for homework to be effective, certain *principles* must be followed [7]:

- Students should see the usefulness of homework. Teachers should explain the purpose both of homework in general and of individual tasks.

- Tasks should be relevant, interesting and varied.

- Good classroom practice also applies to homework. Tasks should be manageable but achievable.

- Different tasks may be assigned to different ability groups. Individual learning styles should be taken into account.

- Homework should be manageable in terms of time as well as level of difficulty. Teachers should remember that students are often given homework in other subjects and that there is a need for coordination to avoid overload. A homework diary, kept by the learner but checked by teachers and parents is a useful tool in this respect.

- Homework is rarely co-ordinated within the curriculum as a whole, but should at least be incorporated into an overall scheme of work and be considered in lesson planning.

- Homework tends to focus on a written product. There is no reason why this should be the case, other than that there is visible evidence that the task has been done.

- Learner involvement and motivation may be increased by encouraging students to contribute ideas for homework and possibly design their own tasks. The teacher also needs to know how much time the students have, what facilities they have at home, and what their preferences are. A simple questionnaire will provide this data.

- While homework should consolidate classwork, it should not replicate it. Home is the outside world and tasks which are nearer to real-life use of language are appropriate.

- If homework is set, it must be assessed in some way, and feedback given. While marking by the teacher is sometimes necessary, peer and self-assessment can encourage learner independence as well as reducing the teacher's workload. Motivating students to do homework is an ongoing process, and encouragement may be given by commenting and asking questions either verbally or in written form in order to demonstrate interest on the teacher's part, particularly in the case of self-study and project work.

To study formative assessment implementation, we conducted an analysis of written homework in English of the seventh grade students of Ravnopolsky secondary school of Uspensky district of Pavlodar region

(oral permission was taken from the students to use their homework). There are seven students in the class, four of them are girls and three are boys.

The homework was aimed at training grammatical skills of students on the topic "Present Perfect", where four tasks were given, numbered two, three, five, and six.

The purpose of the task is to form the skill of using "Present Perfect". In the first task students should complete the sentence in Present Perfect. They are given seven sentences, where the verb is indicated in brackets, sometimes with an adverb, which must be put at the tense proposed in the task; in our example it is Present Perfect.

Example: Fariza (just come) home.

Correct answer: Fariza has just come home.

In the second task students should write a negative sentence. They are given five sentences, divided into phrases from which they should make a negative sentence. The first sentence indicates the correct answer, as it is shown as an example.

Example: I / not see / the dentist.

Correct answer: I haven't seen the dentist.

In the third task students should make suggestions using the tips below, as in the example, using the prepositions "since" or "for". They are given five sentences, which are divided into words and phrases, where the first sentence is shown as an example, since it comes with the correct answer.

Example: I / not see / Asel / long time

Correct answer: I haven't seen Asel for a long time.

In the fourth task students are required to mark the correct item. They were given twelve sentences and it is required to choose one adverb from two.

Example: They haven't booked their places at the camp already / yet.

Correct answer: Yet.

Marks are made with words such as "Excellent", "Good", "Satisfactory", "Unsatisfactory", which require additional comment. *The Kundelik website* (e- gradebook) has an example of filling out a mark and its comment. For example: "Excellent" – "Excellent work!", "Well done!", "Great work at home", etc. (Table 1).

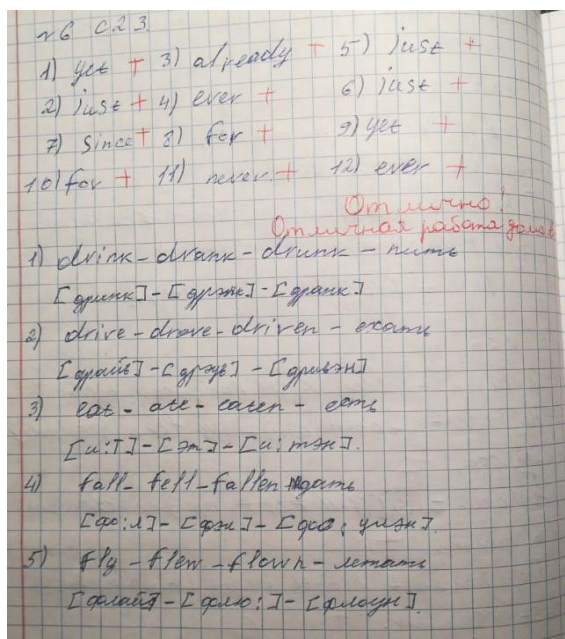
Table 1 – The examples of the comments of the marks

Mark	Комментарий
Excellent	Excellent work! Great job! Well done! Great work at home
Good	Good job! Learn the rules Do not be lazy
Satisfactory	Focus on study Do extra work Be more attentive
Unsatisfactory	Do your homework Do not cheat

In addition to the mark and a brief comment, it is required to give *an extended written comment* on the student's work or certain tasks, which is called feedback.

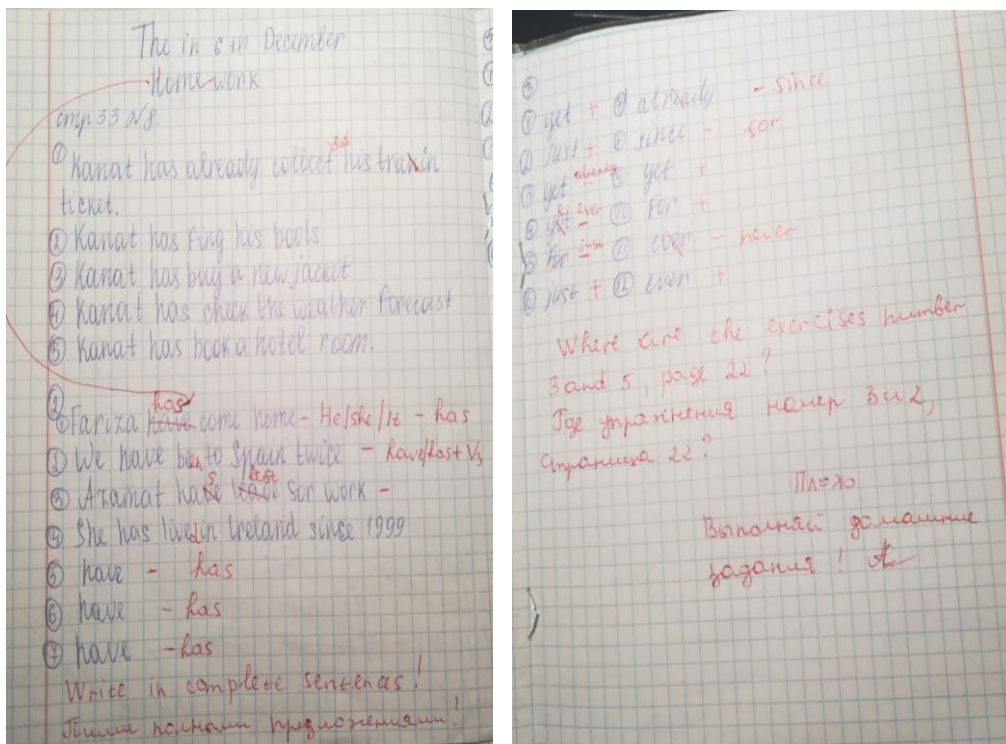
Of the seven students, three students completed the homework. Of three students who completed the homework, two students completed two of four tasks, and only one student completed all four tasks. This suggests that students are reluctant to complete their homework and do not take it seriously, since *formative assessment scores* are not set anywhere and do not affect the final grades. It is likely that students don't see the usefulness of homework. In this case teachers should explain the purpose and value of homework and its relationship to the whole learning process.

If we consider the work of the first student from the 7th grade (Picture 1) we can notice that two of four tasks are completed; there are some errors, both grammatical and spelling. The homework itself is done sloppy and carelessly, and sentences are incomplete. There is also a missing homework title, an assignment number, and a task numbering. The teacher noted all the mistakes with red color and marked the correct answers next to them. The teacher also wrote short comments in English and Russian.



Picture 3 – A sample of homework of the 7th grade student

The homework of the third student contains two tasks out of four, numbered two and six, in which there are a lot of grammatical as well as spelling errors. The homework was done neatly, but such requirements as the title of homework, writing full sentences are not met. The teacher noted all the mistakes with a red paste and wrote the correct answer next to them. The teacher also wrote short comments in English and Russian.



Picture 4 – The example of a homework, 7th grade student

From three written homework submitted, we can notice that in all works the teacher puts a mark and a short comment, without providing a written extended comment, that is, the required feedback. Perhaps the reason of using short comment is that students are of level A1 and won't understand the teacher's comments.

Why is it important to give an extended feedback? Feedback is used at various stages of the lesson and allows the teacher to continuously interact with students, as a result of which there is an adjustment and further planning of the learning process.

When providing feedback to the teacher, it is recommended that a teacher:

- notes the strengths of the student;
- avoids the words “wrong”, “incorrect” without explaining what was done incorrectly;
- gives recommendations on how to correct deficiencies or improve student performance;
- excludes the use of negative comments, including irony, ridicule of the student’s answer, for example, “stupid answer”, “how could you think of this” [9].

When providing feedback to the teacher and the student, it is necessary to focus on the questions presented in table 1. Full answers to these questions will indicate the effectiveness of the feedback [10].

Table 2 – Questions for formative assessment

Teacher	Student
– What stage is the student in?	– What stage of training am I at?
– Where does he or she aim in his/her training?	– How will I achieve the result?
– What needs to be done to help him/her achieve the expected learning outcomes?	– What do I need to work on to achieve a result?

Conclusion. Having examined the homework of 7th grade students in English and the teacher’s work in checking homework, we can come to the following conclusions. Teachers of secondary schools in Kazakhstan adhere to the requirements of the updated program in the field of formative assessment. Since formative assessment was introduced relatively recently, step by step, there are some issues of its implementation.

Students do not take homework as responsibly as they do class work. Due to the fact that they are not given grades (as with the old grading system), they consider doing homework optional or not as serious. In this case, teachers need to clarify the value of homework, its role in the overall learning process.

Teachers are not yet ready to use all the advantages of formative assessment when doing class and homework. It affects the novelty and fear of violating the approved standards. Teachers do not show creativity, but strictly follow the rules.

In addition, the teacher should also know how much time the student spends to complete homework, what equipment the student has at home, and what his / her preferences are. These data can be easily found using the questionnaire.

Moreover the issue of extended feedback training deserves special attention, which is an incentive for further study of the subject. This can be carried out in the form of various workshops, master classes, visits the colleagues’ lessons and more.

Thus, systematic training of school teachers (including English teachers) is necessary in all types of assessment within the framework of methodological council of a school or a number of schools. Also, the exchange of experience in assessment shows specific examples of its use and motivates teachers and students to use different types of formative assessment.

As for the training students of pedagogical specialties it is necessary to provide action research on the assessment issues and share the results of research with school teachers [11-14].

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Павлодар облысының орта мектептерінде ағылшын тілі сабақтарында формативті бағалауды қолдану мәселелері

Мақала орта мектептегі формативті бағалау мен оны пайдалану кезінде туындайтын мәселелерді қарастырады. Талдау барысында 7-сынып оқушыларының ағылшын тілі бойынша үй жұмыстары қолданылды. Зерттеу нәтижесі ретінде мектеп мұғалімдері үшін дайындалған бағалау құралдары, ұйымдастыру мен кері байланыс жүргізу салаларындағы ұсыныстар қарастырылды.

Түйін сөздер: бағалау, формативті бағалау, орта жалпы білім беретін мектеп, ағылшын тілі.

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***Проблемы использования формативного оценивания на уроках английского языка
в средних школах Павлодарской области***

В статье рассматриваются вопросы формативного оценивания учащихся средних школ и проблемы, возникающие при его использовании. Анализу подверглись домашние работы по английскому языку учащихся 7 классов. Результатом исследования стали рекомендации, разработанные для учителей школ в области инструментов оценки, организации и проведения обратной связи и др.

Ключевые слова: *оценивание, формативное оценивание, средняя общеобразовательная школа, английский язык.*