



Lecturers' Perception on the Effectiveness of Formative Assessment on Evaluating Grammar Skills among Undergraduates

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Abstract

Grammar can be classified as the most prominent element in the context of English Language. However, grammar has always been a problem among undergraduates. Although they are given the right amount of input on grammar during schooling days, they still have problems in using it because the process of learning grammar does not continue during their tertiary education. Many lecturers find it difficult in making sure undergraduates are able to utilize grammar in a proper manner as English subjects in tertiary education will only last till the end of the first year in many tertiary institutions. It is proposed that formative assessment should be conducted throughout their duration of study in their tertiary institution. This paper highlights the findings from a questionnaire to 20 English lecturers who are currently serving in two private institutions, namely Management & Science University and Kolej MASA. Ten of them are senior lecturers with lecturing experience of more than 5 years and the remaining lecturers with below 5 years. The categories for the questions were built based on lecturers' understanding on the formative assessment and the needs in understanding grammar in using English. The findings indicate that junior lecturers are keener compare to senior lecturers in terms of using formative assessment in evaluating grammar skills among undergraduates.

Keywords: Grammar, Formative assessment, Undergraduates, Senior Lecturers, Junior Lecturers, Perception

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1. Introduction

Assessment can be classified as the most important procedure in determining students' performance throughout their learning process. According to [Black and Wiliam \(1998\)](#) assessment includes all the activities that the educator and students undertake to get information that can be used as an asset in further altering their teaching and learning so that students are able to cope with planned lessons. Besides that, assessment encompasses teacher observation, classroom activities and discussion, analysis on students which includes their assignment and many more. In general, formative assessment is known as using various methods in evaluating students throughout a particular learning period to achieve learning goals. [Chappuis and Stiggins \(2002\)](#) stated that formative assessment is assessment designed to monitor students' progress during the learning process. This particular assessment promotes progressive learning as students are assessed throughout to determine period so that they do not forget the components which they have acquired from the very beginning of the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, formative assessment should be conducted in evaluating the grammar skills of undergraduate's students. According to Michael Swan, a popular freelance writer, grammar is not just sentence building, it is the "device" which designs the entire English Language. Without grammar, a person is not able to understand the fundamental concepts of the language. Thus, formative assessment can be used in making sure they are able to have the knowledge till they finish their tertiary education.

In Malaysia, students are only exposed to grammar during their primary and secondary school. If we look at the school syllabus, students in school are only exposed to grammar once a week or sometimes once a month just to fulfill the basic requirements of the curriculum. This becomes worse when grammar is not given any importance in their tertiary education. According to [Din \(2007\)](#) more than forty thousand Malaysian graduates could not get jobs in the working sector because they were not proficient in English. This contributes to the drop of the country's economic growth due to high number of jobless individuals.

Lecturers in tertiary institutions are having difficulty with undergraduates as they are not able to understand the basic concepts in grammar which they are supposed to have common knowledge during their schooling days. This eventually makes the students lose interest in learning English and become unable to participate in their lesson's activities.

The current situation in the tertiary environment is students come to class without the correct use of grammar. Most tertiary and private institutions only practice two or three subjects that focus on grammar. For instance, a tertiary institution in Selangor, students would be attending preparatory classes for English which serves the purpose of reviewing basic grammar components. This is not a continual process because it eventually stops in the midst of their undergraduate program. Thus, this leaves a negative impact because students take it for granted and only learn it for the purpose of passing.

Formative assessment should therefore be conducted during their learning period in their respective tertiary institution. This is because formative assessment focuses on achieving goals rather than determining what the goals are. Moreover, the lecturer's belief and attitude towards the assessment will definitely show an impact towards the undergraduate student's progression in their grammar. With the efficient execution of this assessment towards grammar, lecturer will be able to provide sustainable feedback to students about their progress that point out their strengths and weaknesses which needs their attention so that they are able to progress further. This will surely help them keep on track of their grammar and improve their grammar proficiency. Studies have shown that the beliefs held by teachers or lecturers can influence their teaching of grammar according to various factors such as the years of teaching experience and the location of the school ([Arshad and Nurusus, 2015; Nurusus et al., 2015](#)). However, it is still unclear whether the beliefs regarding the use of formative assessment in teaching and learning grammar is influenced by factors such as teaching experience.

Thus, this present study seeks to identify the perception of lecturer's on the effectiveness of formative assessment in evaluating grammar skills among undergraduates. It is hoped that when the perception is identified, the assessment is able to be conducted for all the undergraduates so that they are well prepared when they are to face the real world individually.

The aim of this study is therefore to identify the perception of lecturers on the effectiveness of formative assessment in evaluating grammar skills among undergraduates which is the most prominent way in ensuring students are given the necessary input on grammar so that they will excel in that particular language.

The study aims to address the following questions:

1. What is the difference in perception between junior and senior lecturer's on the importance of understanding grammar throughout learning process especially during tertiary education?
2. What is the difference in perception between junior and senior lecturer's on the implementation of formative assessment in improving grammar among undergraduates?

1.1. Studies on Formative Assessment and Grammar Skills among Undergraduates

In view of the relationship between formative assessment and grammar skills, it is indeed important to have the formative assessment as an ongoing assessment in terms of evaluating and providing input on grammar skills among undergraduates. Grammar teaches us how to build sentences, about the types of words that we use and when we should use them.

Besides that, it is also shown that having frequent formative assessment in a particular classroom will help to accelerate the student learning process ([Good et al., 1983; Slavin and Steven, 1995](#)). It is important for students to learn grammar properly and it is believed that the implementation of formative assessment on learning grammar will aid students in understanding the skills well.

On another research on timing of formative assessment, feedback have shown that students will be able to learn a particular skill if there is immediate error correction and if that particular assessment is on task acquisition ([Kulik and Kulik, 1988; Clariana et al., 2000](#)). The implementation of formative assessment will surely provide students

with sufficient knowledge because they are given an opportunity to practice the language that they are currently learning.

Grammar involves the properties and processes that trigger the use of language. The association of this is that the students need to be aware of the rules and the knowledge they have stored within their brain. This will help them to analyse and the language and be able to use it with proficiency.

Nevertheless, in terms of viewing grammar as a process that triggers the use of language, it also clearly suggests that grammar is not a question of competence but is a question of performance. This statement reflects to the statement stated by [Drach \(1981\)](#) which he stated that learners can use the language creatively if they perform well in grammar. That merely refers to the ability of a person to effectively use his internalized knowledge to achieve the desired communicative impact which can be achieved through formative assessment.

Looking at all the studies and statement depicted above, it is essential to identify the perception of lecturers on the importance of integrating grammar and formative assessment which will improve their proficiency in English language.

2. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative method has been used. A Likert scale questionnaire is used as the data collection tool (see Appendix A). This questionnaire will be distributed to 20 lecturers who work in two private institutions; 10 senior lecturers with working experience of more than 5 years and 10 junior lecturers with less than 5 years of working experience. The questionnaire contains 10 items related to the major constructs of this research which are formative assessment and grammar at tertiary level education. The study examines how formative assessment can provide immediate feedback for the teacher in evaluating student’s level of understanding. Therefore, the respondents are chosen according to their understanding towards formative assessment.

The data collected from participants will illustrated to show the percentage of likeliness or unlikeliness of using this approach among lecturers. A comparison between the two groups of lecturers according to their years and experiences will be done to determine which group favors formative assessment.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section explains the findings of our research. Two tables are tabulated according to lecturer’s response on the questionnaire given.

Table-4.1. Comparison of Perception on Grammar between Senior and Junior Lecturers.

Perception of Senior Lecturers vs Perception of Junior Lecturers regarding Grammar



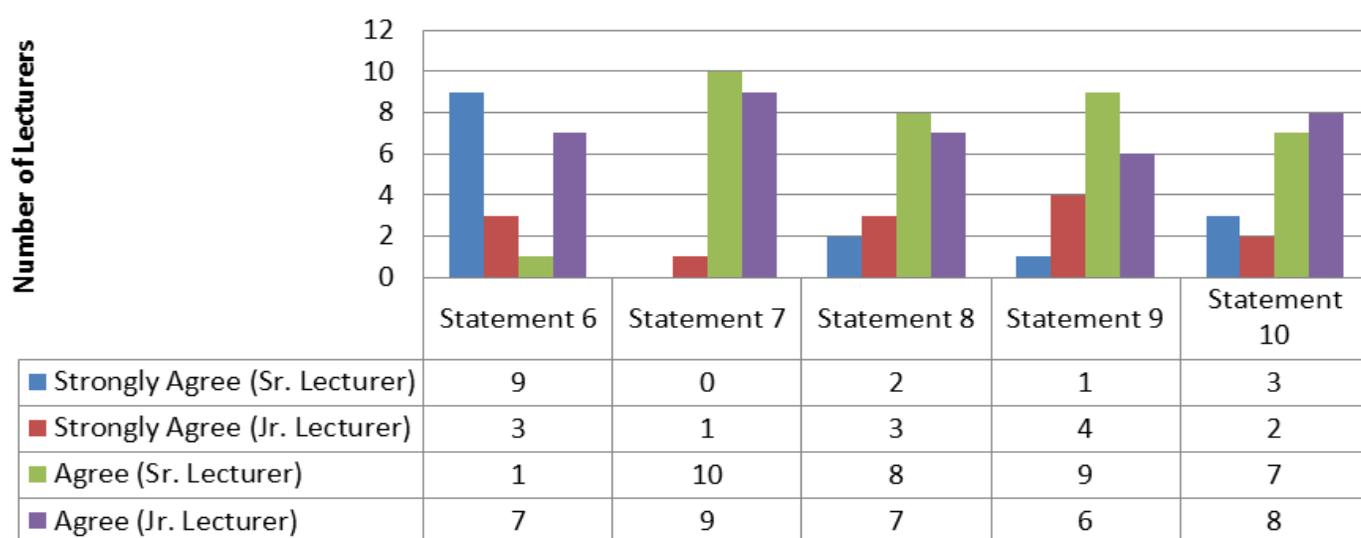
Source: Depicted from the data collected from the questionnaire (Grammar)

Table (4.1) shows the perception of senior lecturers versus junior lecturers regarding evaluating grammar as a formative assessment among undergraduate students. The table only focuses on the strongly agree and agree scale from the questionnaire. For statement one, both senior and junior lecturers agreed that grammatical competence is very less among students. Both parties agreed to the absence of grammar in the studies at tertiary level due to the ignorance of syllabus. Besides that, both senior and the junior lecturers agreed that most of the students preferred to translate from the first language so they tend to do a lot of grammatical mistakes which is indicated on statement 2. Besides, both senior and junior lecturers have the perception that students are demotivated in performing well in the lesson taught in English due to the incompetence of grammar in the statement 3. This means students are afraid to use English because they are nervous that their grammar might go wrong in terms of speaking or writing skills. Based on the statement 4, there are blend of views from the senior and junior lecturers. It shows that students are not participating well in delivering idea while lesson due to grammar incompetence. The senior lecturers strongly agreed that most of the courses are not assessing language in terms of grammar at the tertiary level. Apart from that, they agree with the statement 5 which is the important part has ignored. The experience of teaching would be differing in terms of views of both parties. This is because the course outline might not include on assessing grammar so it is not accessible by lecturers. According to [Corder \(1975\)](#) he believes that an educator needs to be certain of their capability to do a good job in measuring learner’s knowledge of the language which hangs on the learner’s

knowledge of the language be determined by the competence of educators' theories about the language, educators understanding of what is meant by the knowledge of language.

Table-4.2. Comparison of Perception on Formative Assessment between Senior and Junior Lecturers.

Perception of Senior Lecturers vs Perception of Junior Lecturers regarding Formative Assessment



Source: Depicted from the data collected from the questionnaire (Formative Assessment)

Table (4.2) shows the perception of senior lecturers versus the perception of junior lecturers on the implementation of formative assessment in assessing grammar at the tertiary level. Based on statement 6, it shows that both the senior lecturers and junior lecturers are aware of the formative assessment and the process to be used in the lesson. Besides that, senior lecturers shows the high number in practicing of conducting formative assessment in assessing students' performance with the use of correct grammar compare to junior lecturers. This means the lecturers are using formative assessment to assess grammar at the tertiary level but did not utilise in depth among the lecturers and students. On the other hand, statement 8 indicate on the number of lecturers are aware of the benefits in implementing formative assessment. As a result, senior lecturers realize that implementing formative assessment is effective in assessing students' performance compare to junior lecturers. The gap of differences might be on the behavioral of lecturers and the ways of assessing would be vary depend on the experiences of teaching. Hence, formative assessment helps the lecturers to identify the grammatical problems among the students at an earlier stage which is mentioned in statement 9. The graph shows that the senior lecturers agree on the benefits of evaluating students through formative assessment where it helps them to identify the grammar incompetence of a student at an earlier stage. The last statement is on allowing lecturers to scaffold students individually or in groups according to their needs. The graph shows the junior lecturers are agreeing on the statement compared to senior lecturers. Overall, it can be concluded that junior lecturers have more passion in conducting formative assessment compared to senior lecturers in tertiary institution.

4. Conclusion

Formative assessment is an efficient technique that can be used in assessing students to improve their understanding on the matters that they are learning. If assessing grammar becomes an on-going evaluation, educators could be able to achieve the goal of standardized examination at the end of semester or course. It helps the students to know and recognize the standards that they aiming for in the end of a course. Therefore, all educators should take account of the importance of using formative assessment in their English classroom.

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Appendix A



Name of Institution: _____

Years of working experience (Choose one): Below 5 years More than 5 years

This questionnaire is distributed as to study the perception of lecturers on the effectiveness of using formative assessment in evaluating grammar skills among undergraduates.

Personal particulars of participants will not be disclosed as to maintain privacy and ethical policy.

Consent Declaration

I am aware about the objective of this study. I hereby give my consent to be part of this study.

_____.

Please read the statements carefully and circle your votes wisely. Use the Likert Scale determiners as a guide in responding to the following statements.

1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

Statement (s)	1	2	3	4	5
Students still have lack of grammatical competence at tertiary level.	1	2	3	4	5
Many students still depend on their first language and make direct translation to English, causing them to make many grammatical mistakes.	1	2	3	4	5
Grammatical incompetence causes students to have weaker grasp of lessons taught in English.	1	2	3	4	5
Students often find it difficult to express their ideas in class due to the need of using proper grammar.	1	2	3	4	5
Assessing language in terms of grammar is not really a focus at tertiary level for many courses.	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of formative assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
I practice conducting formative assessment in assessing my students' performance especially with the use of correct grammar.	1	2	3	4	5
I realize that conducting formative assessment gives more effective result in assessing students' performance.	1	2	3	4	5
Formative assessment helps me to trace students' grammatical problems at an earlier stage.	1	2	3	4	5
Formative assessment allows me to scaffold students individually or by group according to their needs.	1	2	3	4	5