



# The Design and Implementation of Formative Assessment in British Literature

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**Abstract:** *Formative assessment, also known as process-oriented assessment, emphasizes timely feedback to students throughout the learning process. Unlike summative assessment, which primarily evaluates student performance based on final exams and often overlooks the importance of continuous learning efforts, formative assessment provides ongoing support and evaluation. Extensive research across various educational levels and disciplines in China has demonstrated the positive impact of formative assessment on student learning. However, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding its application in British Literature courses. This paper presents a case study of formative assessment design and implementation for a British Literature course at Lingnan Normal University's School of Foreign Studies. The study was conducted among English-major juniors during the second semester of the 2018-2019 academic year. A questionnaire was administered to assess the impact of this assessment method on student learning. The results indicate that formative assessment significantly benefited students in multiple aspects.*

**Keywords:** Formative assessment, British Literature, Learning process, Learning outcomes.

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## 1. Introduction

British Literature, a compulsory curriculum for fourth-year English majors in the School of Foreign Studies of Lingnan Normal University (and hereafter LNU) aiming to improve and enhance students' ability of literary appreciation, aesthetic taste and ethical codes, plays a significance role in the comprehensive syllabic training plan of the school. Meanwhile, students' learning outcomes serve as measurement as to whether teaching objectives have been realized. And the problems detected during the teaching process can offer positive feedback to teachers for further improvement. Therefore, the means of assessment to some extent matters a lot in this case. For most literary courses in China, Summative Assessment (and henceforth SA) is the most frequently used form, in which written final tests are set to test students' learning outcomes and the score for the final is the only measurement taken into account, the final score is the last call, and the efforts made in the learning process is to a large degree don't count. Students under such circumstances all become last-minute people, cramming knowledge points into their brain upon the final exam, which does no good to the improvement of learners' active learning ability and the cultivation of creativity [1]. SA has long been the major evaluation form in courses of all areas. Despite its numerous merits, its defects cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is an urgency to find a better assessment way to help improve students' learning and teachers' teaching. Formative Assessment (FA), on the contrary, lays its emphasis on the learning process, in which the contributions of the learners are detailedly and carefully documented within a multi-dimensional evaluation framework.

## 2. Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a concept first put forward by Scriven (1967), an American curriculum evaluation expert, and an predecessor in the research field of curriculum evaluation [2]. Bloom (1971), an expert in education evaluation, pointed out that formative evaluation is an evaluation to obtain feedback information to improve teaching and promote students to master the content that they have not yet mastered [3]. In short, formative assessment is also called process assessment, which is an assessment to obtain students' learning effectiveness by spontaneous, repeated evaluation during the whole pedagogical process and key to the realization of quality education. The objective of formative assessment does not lie in the comparison among students, but in providing students with timely feedback of their learning, so that teachers and students can gain insight into the problems of

students' learning process in time, and hence teachers' teaching and students' learning can be adjusted and improved both at the same time. Therefore, a significant feature of formative assessment is Timely Feedback, which is also the basis of it.

In the past decades, education departments in numerous countries have been insisting on the founding position and critical value of formative assessment in educational assessment. From where they stand, students' academic performance evaluated by formative assessment can offer positive feedback to the formulation of curriculum syllabus and teaching plan, and the assessment outcome is more comprehensive than one single written examination. As for summative assessment, traditionally, it only refers to teachers' assessment of students' mastery of what they have learned in the form of examination or observation in the classroom. These behaviors often rely mainly on intuition and lack of systematicness. Modern educationists believe that the feedback gained from formative assessment contributes to working out the problems in students' learning and can improve teaching continuously.

In China, earliest researches on FA were found in the mid-1980s, which discussed the significance of implementing FA from the perspective of pedagogy, and analyzed the demerits and deficiency of SA [4][5]. The study of FA in the field of foreign language teaching, though, did not begin until the beginning of the 21st century, marked by the publication of *Research on Formative Assessment in English Teaching* (Translated by the author) by Luo Shaoqian in 2003 [6], and the appearance of the terminology in *College English Curriculum Teaching Guidebook of Formative Assessment* (Translated by the author) in 2004, Formative assessment has gradually become a research hotspot in the field of foreign language teaching in China.

In recent years, formative assessment has carried out a wide range of attempts in all levels of education in China. It is found that in the classroom where formative assessment is implemented, students' learning effectiveness is significantly improved, and the feedback information of assessment is conducive to helping students improve their learning effect. However, formative assessment, though being adopted in education of different levels and disciplines [7]-[13], hasn't been utilized by lecturers engaged in the teaching of American Literature. The author typed the key words, Formative Assessment, British Literature, in the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) search engine, no results shown concerning research of this aspect. And hence, hopefully, this case study can help to provide some pedagogical reference and enlightenment as to the assessment of literary courses in tertiary education.

### 3. Assessment Format

LNU is a public provincial-level university located in the southern-most tip of China mainland, Zhanjiang Municipality. The School of Foreign Studies is one of the twelve schools of LNU. The formative assessment case study focuses on students of 2016, one of whose compulsory courses then was American Literature. The formative assessment format is comprised of three modules, Participation, Learning Process, and Learning Outcome.

Participation module mainly evaluates students' ability of self-management, and active learning. The assessment of this section is in most part based on students' attendance, class performance like activity involvement, Q&A feedback, note-taking, group discussion.

Learning Process focuses on students' learning effectiveness during a certain period of time, hopefully students' will be keener on what they learning and good are learning habits can be maintained. As for this regard, tools such as quiz, test, thesis, book review, research report, group discussion and so on are made use of.

Learning Outcome lays its emphasis on students' academic performance and understanding of the literary knowledge points and their interpretation of certain literary topics. To achieve this end, written exam supplements to make up for the above-mentioned means which underline critical and creative thinking ability.

Table 1 demonstrates the layout of the comprehensive assessment and the percentage each item weighs. As for Participation Module, Attendance and Activity Involvement are taken into account. What is noteworthy is the latter is subdivided into more concrete assessment parts, like the contribution a student makes in different tasks. Learning Process Module is consisted of 4 quizzes, 1 book review, 1 research report, and 16 group discussions during one semester, each part carrying an equal weight of 25%. Final exam reflects the learning outcome, testing students' mastery of certain literary knowledge points and their interpretation of literary works. Therefore, the

final exam encompasses not only multiple choices, matching items, blank filling but also poem appreciation and essay questions.

**Table 1:** The Respective Weight Percentage Attributed to the Three Modules in the Comprehensive Assessment

Module	Content	Percentage
Participation (30%)	Attendance	30%
	Activity Involvement	70%
Learning Process (40%)	Quizzes 1-4	25%
	Book Review	25%
	Research Report	25%
	Group Discussions 1-16	25%
Learning Outcome (30%)	Final Exam	100%

#### 4. Pilot Application of Formative Assessment in British Literature

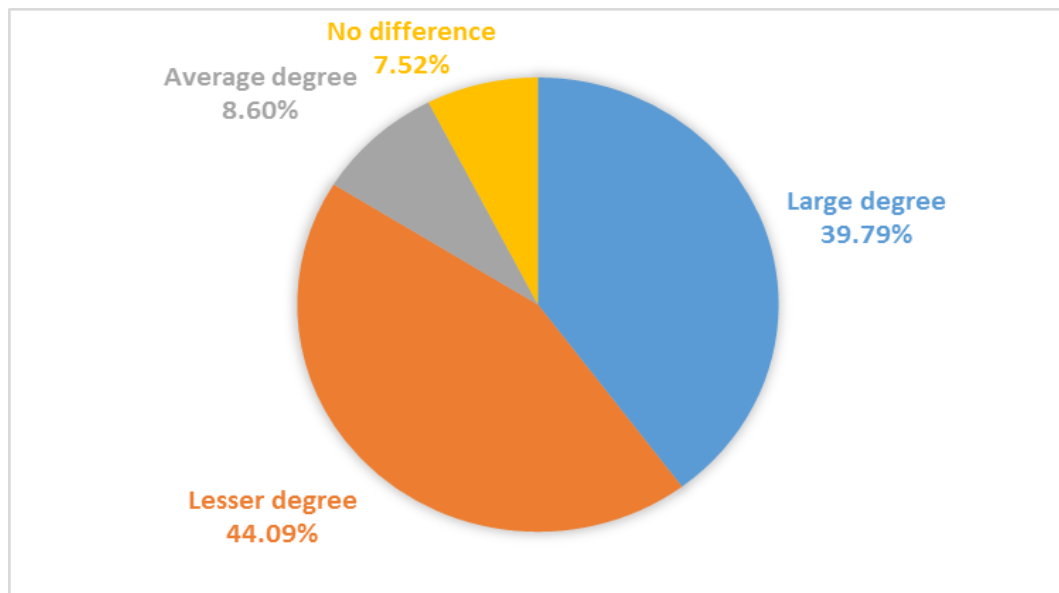
Formative assessment was piloted in the second semester of 2018-2019 academic year among English majors of 2016. Through the experimental practice, some achievements have taken on:

The students showed keener interest and enthusiasm in their learning. After the implementation of formative assessment mode, students in each session took the initiative in the learning process, and contributed actively to the class discussion. This may result from their being aware that their class performances were carefully documented by the teacher and taken into account of the final assessment.

The results of the assessment are consistent and the distribution of the scores is even which lies in the fact that the distribution of the 3 modules, Participation, Learning Process and Learning Outcome is in consistency.

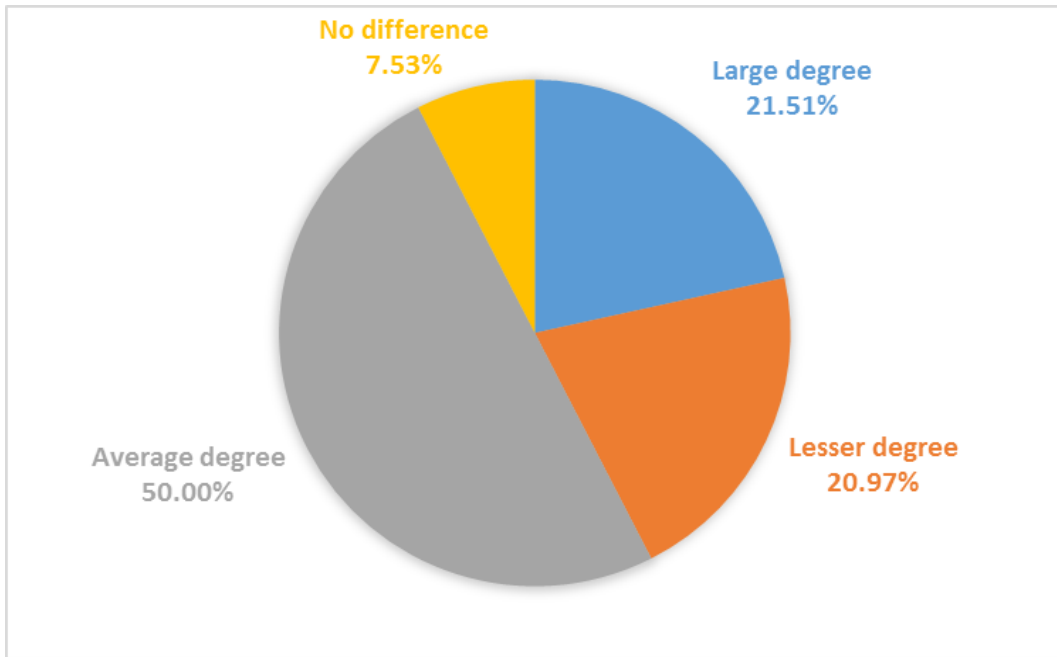
#### 5. Feedback from Students

An online questionnaire which contained 18 questions was formulated, purporting to collect feedback from students of 2016 concerning formative assessment. The total number of students of 2016 is 212, and 186 respondents submitted their questionnaires. The questionnaire was comprised of 2 major parts, the first asking about basic information of the respondents, like gender and major, the second revolving around feedback concerning formative assessment.



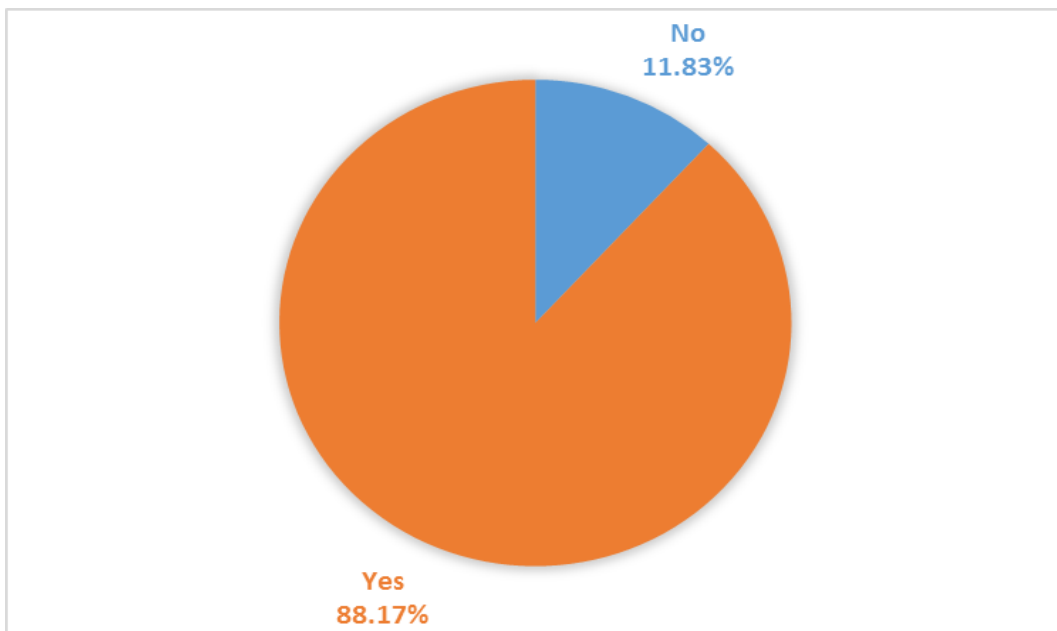
**Figure 1:** Impact of Formative Assessment on Learning Strategy

As Pie Chart 1 demonstrates, it could be discerned that as for to what extent formative assessment changed your learning strategy, 19.89% agreed that it changed their way of learning to a large degree, 54.3% chose to an average degree, 22.04% to a lesser degree, 3.76% to no degree.



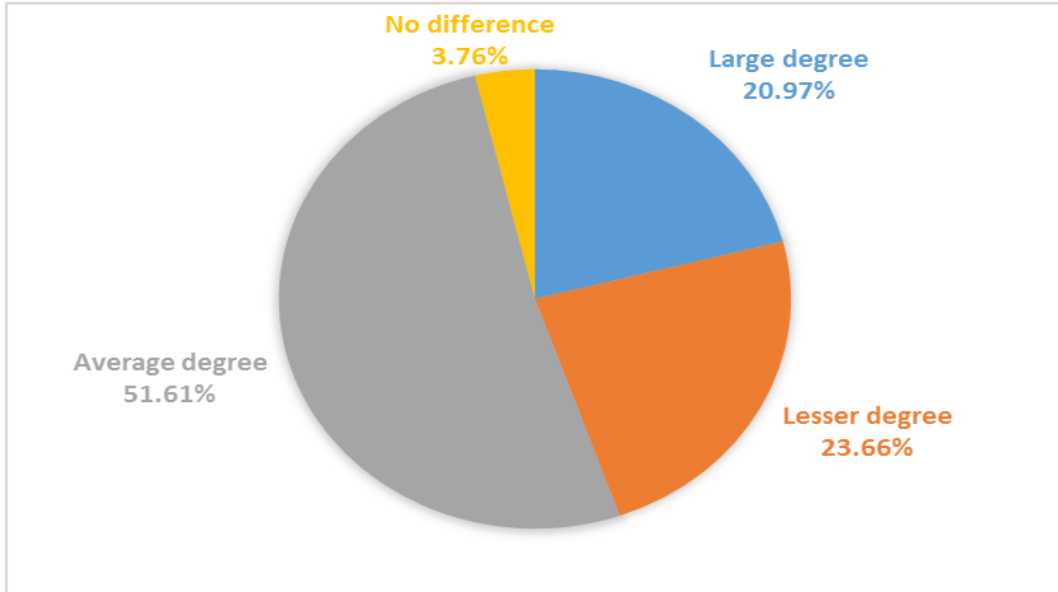
**Figure 2:** Formative Assessment and Active Learning Awareness

Pie Chart 2 illustrates students' feedback related to active-learning awareness. 21.51% reckoned formative assessment facilitated active-learning greatly, 50% thought it helped to some degree, while 20.97% held the view that the effect was not that obvious and 7.53% believed no difference was made.



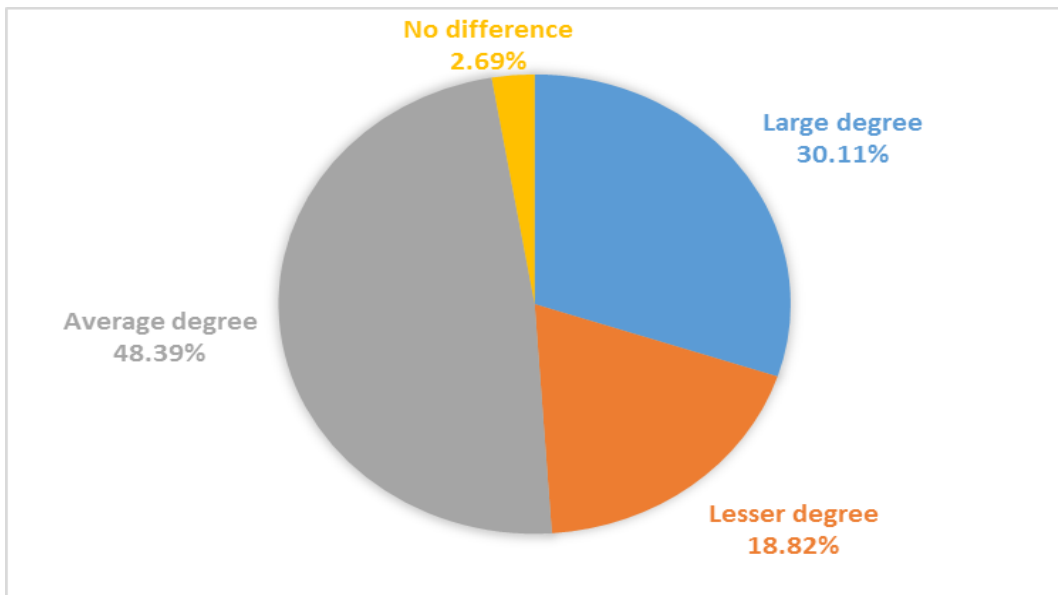
**Figure 3:** The Relation between FA and Critical Thinking

Pie Chart 3 shows the result in relation to the question if FA was conducive to the development of critical thinking. 88.17% agreed on its positive influence while 11.83% denied its helpfulness.



**Figure 4:** Formative Assessment and Learning Effectives

Pie Chart 4 displays the figures featuring the correlation between FA and learning effectiveness. 20.97% deemed that formative assessment greatly boosted their learning effectiveness, 51.61% thought it helped in this respect while 23.66% agreed the influence was small and 3.76% denied the impact.



**Figure 5:** Formative Assessment and Teamwork Ability

Figure 5 shows how FA is related to teamwork coordination ability. 30.11% held strongly that it was improved greatly and the figure of the second level extent went to 48.83% while lesser degree 18.82% and no difference 2.69%.

When it comes to the impact that FA has on communicative ability, the ability to review related literature, problem-solving ability, and creative thinking ability, the collected data demonstrated similar distribution. About 25% agreed strongly on the positive influence of formative assessment on the above-mentioned capacity aspects, 50% deemed the impact was positively mild while around 20% thought the correlation was small and about 3% discerned no difference took place.

What is not surprising but encouraging is that 93.01% students acknowledged the effectiveness of the application of FA in British Literature though there was room for improvement as well. As for the concrete assessment form they prefer, some constructive insights have been provided. One student proposed individualized assessment and

he/she thought that assessment should be diversified based on the different proficiency of students, which is positively thought-provoking and offers the author a new light to probe into education assessment. Some students complained about the tardiness and no-contribution of their teammates. They said that in some cases the teamwork was a solo-work done by the team leader only for other students of the same team simply didn't cooperate and contribute, and they grudged to tell the teacher out of the concern of breaking up classmateship. But in this way, this was not a fair game. So the results of the questionnaire revealed the hidden problems as well which serves as a guidance for further improvement.

## 6. Conclusion

Formative assessment, as a developmental assessment based on students' learning attitude, academic performance in the course of learning, embodies the educational ideology of Student-centeredness and Teacher-guidedness [14]. Therefore, this process-oriented assessment mode can reflect students' learning in a more comprehensive and objective way, motivate students to establish correct learning attitude, stimulate their enthusiasm for learning, and activate them to be independent learners.

The piloted application of formative assessment in British Literature witnessed positive changes and feedbacks from students, and on the whole students' learning strategy, active-learning awareness, critical and creative thinking ability, learning effectiveness, teamwork spirit, along with problem-solving and communicative ability have been improved and enhanced. By dint of Q&A, quizzes, group discussion, tests, final examination and the like, teachers can dynamically detect students' learning process, help them to adapt themselves to the changing learning needs and enhance class participation. Meanwhile, students' competence of comprehensively understanding, analyzing, applying and innovating the knowledge they have learned can to a large extent be promoted.

Compared with SA, FA is more likely to demonstrate the panorama of students' learning and henceforth provide positive feedback to the adjustment and coordination of teaching mode and activity organization. Therefore, it is a useful tool for educationalists to gain insight into the inner mechanism of students' learning and better achieve the teaching objectives. However, the activities comprising the format of British Literature in this case study is far from satisfactory, and from the feedback data through the questionnaire, some problems have emerged. For some students, their interest in learning and self-confidence have been improved, their learning needs met, but with regards to the feedback from the teacher, they tend to ignore them and they deny the helpfulness of FA in their study, which offers perspective and room for further research.

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## Author Profile

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