Implementing Formative Assessments in Teaching German as a Foreign Language in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an action research focused on two formative assessment techniques conducted in two beginner German language classes at the University of the Philippines. The action research involved the following steps: (1) implementation of "exit tickets" and "flash feedback" formative assessment techniques, (2) documentation of student behavior through pictures and field notes, and (3) elicitation of student perception of the formative assessment technique through a subsequent questionnaire. Results indicate a generally positive attitude towards the formative assessment techniques applied in class, as the students felt more motivated to learn due to the real-time and informal feedback. This paper offers a simplified template for implementing formative assessments in the foreign language classroom, which may encourage other foreign language teachers and researchers to experiment with formative assessments and other alternative assessment techniques that promote critical thinking and autonomous learning.

KEYWORDS

German as a foreign language, formative assessments, student motivation, flash feedback, exit tickets

INTRODUCTION

Universities all over the Philippines have been undergoing curricular revisions due to the introduction of thirteen years of mandatory education through the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, as well as the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 46 in 2012, which mandated the implementation of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE). Unlike traditional educational models that focus on the transmission of knowledge and skills by the teacher, an OBE-based curriculum takes a student-centered approach by helping students achieve specific goals or outcomes.

For many educators in charge of curricular revision, this process involves transforming an existing syllabus into an outcomes-based format where intended learning outcomes based on actual student needs are clearly expressed, together with the expected standard of how well such learning outcomes are achieved. Spady asserted that "outcome-based education (OBE) means clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences" (12). Therefore, in order to ensure the attainment of the learning objectives as laid out, revising the curriculum likewise necessitates the restructuring of instruction and assessment systems.

ASSESSMENTS

Assessments are a key area in the planning of any curriculum because it enables educators to determine whether the class objectives were achieved through the chosen series of instructional activities (Wiliam 3). The assessment process is continuous,

and it involves identifying, gathering, organizing, and interpreting student data (DepEd 1). The assessment information influences decisions by various stakeholders, and helps determine students' academic preparedness, to classify and track students according to their needs and abilities, to accurately certify language knowledge and skills, to monitor the effectiveness of a program, and to continuously gauge student progress (Bachmann and Purpura 458-460).

TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS

Assessments can be one of two types — summative or formative. Summative assessment is also known as "assessment of learning" because it is mostly conducted at the end of instruction to measure student knowledge and skills according to certain standards, to generate grades, and to promote students to the next grade or course level (Dixson & Worrell 156). Some examples of this assessment type are final exams, projects, and standardized tests.

When it comes to standardized testing, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is particularly relevant to students of the German language. The CEFR describes language ability ranging from A1 (basic user) to C2 (proficient user), and students can undergo standardized testing to show achievement of a particular CEFR level. For example, students at the A1 level should possess at least basic communication skills sufficient for interaction in familiar, everyday situations using simple expressions and elementary vocabulary. This can be verified by taking an A1 level exam like the *Goethe-Zertifikat A1*: Start *Deutsch* 1, which is offered by the Goethe-Institut, the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany. Preparing for the exam entails approximately 120 hours of instruction. This means that a university student taking German as a foreign language elective should be ready to take the A1 certification after successful completion of nine units of basic German language courses. For study or work in Germany, an even higher level — either B1 or B2 — may be required. B2 is the fourth of six CEFR levels; at this point, independent language users can interact with native speakers with some degree of fluency and spontaneity, without strain for either party. A student at the University of the Philippines whose major discipline is German under the BA European Languages program should be ready to take the B2 exam at the end of his/her program.

Results of summative assessments, especially from high stakes testing, have a huge impact on those who take them: an A1 level certification allows a Filipino spouse to be reunited with his/her partner in Germany, while a B-level certification allows students and healthcare staff to study or work in Germany. However, test scores alone do not always provide accurate information about the student. Because summative assessments usually happen when the learning process has already ended, there is no opportunity to remedy performance, if it were poor. In addition, since such assessments cover lessons taught much earlier in the course, they are usually accompanied with anxiety over possibly forgotten learning, causing unnecessary stress that could impact test performance. To solve this problem, frequent formative assessments should be considered.

Formative assessments can take place before, during or after the lesson proper to provide information about the student's progress and understanding of specific topics, which will be used by the teachers, learners, or their peers in order to address student mistakes or misconceptions, then adjust instruction accordingly (Black & William 140). Its primary goal is to "move students' learning forward while their learning is still in the process of developing" (Heritage 18). That is why this type of assessment is also called "assessment for learning." If it is the student who performs self-assessments in order to monitor his/her own learning, then this form of formative assessment may be viewed as "assessment as learning" (DepEd 2). Examples of this type include KWL ("What I Know," "What I Want to Know," and "What I Learned") activities, ungraded performance tasks, and quizzes.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS IN POLICY

The CHED and the Department of Education (DepEd) have published guidelines that emphasize the use of both formative and summative assessments in an outcomes-based curriculum. CHED describes effective assessments as possibly being "direct, indirect, quantitative, qualitative, formative, or summative" as long as it remains appropriate to achieve the desired learning outcomes (CHED Handbook 38). Whatever the form, assessments must be properly recorded in order to systematically monitor how well students are learning what the teachers are teaching. While a teacher initially plans assessments — how to implement them and what to test — assessments remain a student-centered process because its primary aim is to improve learning.

On the other hand, DepEd prescribes the use of various kinds of assessments, based on the teacher's appreciation of what may be appropriate to the learners' "cultural background and life experiences" (DepEd 1). This means that the teacher should implement different assessments depending on the context and the purpose. While summative assessments like written performance tasks measure achievement of content and performance standards, formative assessments are intended to help students discover their strengths and weaknesses through frequent teacher feedback or systemic self-evaluation. Teachers are encouraged to keep meticulous formative assessment records. Learners' progress must be monitored in order to improve understanding of the students and their learning, which helps teachers discover effective ways to adjust their teaching strategy. While formative assessments are recorded, these records are not considered in computing summative grades, only to determine when the performance objectives have been achieved. Formative assessment records are retained by the teacher who conducted it, while summative assessments are usually forwarded to all concerned: the students for feedback, their parents for guidance, and the school for the benefit of the next set of teachers.

Additionally, DepEd prescribes several examples of formative assessments, such as skill inventories and knowledge checklists at the start of class to discover the students' weak areas and misunderstood concepts. Short quizzes, for example, determine if a lesson's learning objectives have been met, if they are recorded but not counted towards summative grades.

IMPLEMENTING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

In this age of research and innovation, it is but natural that new educational trends frequently emerge, and the teachers who are asked to implement these for the first time may justifiably feel hesitant. Likewise, implementing formative assessments is also likely to encounter some resistance. However, while resistance to change is normal, in the case of formative assessments, it is not insurmountable. Bennett makes a good point when he encourages teachers to adopt an iterative use-reflect-adopt-create cycle in order to improve the integration of formative assessments with deep domain understanding (19). By systematizing implementation, the teachers get accustomed to the formative assessment methodology, and gradually improve.

Similarly, an institution can embrace formative assessments and scale this to all its teachers by systematically implementing a four-step process (Black and Wiliam 146-148):
1. Develop - Teachers can be motivated to implement formative assessments if they see actual examples of their colleagues (or other familiar role models) implementing this technique in their classes. Therefore, the institution should designate teachers from within its ranks to start implementing formative assessments in their classes, then showcase the development process and its impact on learning.
2. Disseminate - Examples from the development stage can be packaged as best practice, then disseminated to as many teachers as possible. Presented with best practices from colleagues, other teachers may be convinced that formative assessments are both doable and beneficial.

3. Reduce obstacles - The school should seek to reduce or remove any remaining obstacles (i.e. psychological barriers) to full implementation of formative assessments.

4. Research - Despite the development of best practice documentation, dissemination to all interested faculty, and reduction of obstacles to implementation, some parts of the formative assessment process may still be unclear. Responsibility for further research then falls on the individual teacher, and the institution should encourage it.

With the above process framework in mind, this action research represents the first step.

PURPOSE

This paper reports on an action research using two formative assessment techniques when teaching German as a foreign language (GFL) to college students in the Philippines. It is the result of an action research project or *Praxiserkundungsprojekt* (PEP) under the *Deutsch Lehren Lernen* (DLL: Learning to Teach German) teacher training program jointly conducted by the Goethe-Institut and the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, for GFL teachers in Southeast Asian universities.

One of the key objectives of this research is to determine how students respond towards the implementation of two specific formative assessment methods. If students exhibit a negative attitude towards formative assessments, then it could hamper execution as teachers are obliged to use overly entertaining ways to "push" students towards the new format. On the other hand, if students are already predisposed to try it, then teachers could instead focus more on the actual content of the lesson. Therefore, it becomes important to know the students better — what are their common backgrounds, likes and dislikes — to help identify which formative assessment type to consider, and how best to implement it.

As previously mentioned, exploration of formative assessments is important because studies have shown its positive effects on student learning. In the 90s, Black and Wiliam conducted seminal work on the effectiveness of formative assessments. In studies that covered a wide range of students (five-year olds to university undergraduates) from several countries, and studying a variety of subjects, they documented that the innovative implementation of formative assessments resulted in significant to substantial learning gains, with effect sizes (correlation coefficients) from 0.4 to 0.7, which are very promising results. In practical terms, a 0.4 effect size would take an average pupil (but exposed to formative assessment) to the top third of his/her class; a 0.7 effect size on the other hand would move an average country's mathematics ranking to the top five (Black and Wiliam 141).

Studies in the past decade have shown promising results for formative assessments in university classes. It is an interactive process between teachers and students that benefits both sides: students benefit with improved awareness of their learning, and teachers benefit with better insight on how to improve their teaching.

By implementing formative assessment techniques, Fluckiger et al. achieved improved instruction, enhanced learning, and better student products in several university disciplines. It turned out that giving students some responsibility over the feedback process was the key to getting these results (140). Combined with timely feedback that allowed quick and frequent adjustments, the teachers created classes that focused more on learning and less on grading.

Nolen examined formative assessment studies at the university level. She concluded that providing specific standards-related feedback with suggestions for improvement - while focused on learning (not grades) - helps motivate students to achieve (319).

In studying how self-assessment affects EFL speaking performance, Huang found that self-feedback was beneficial to student learning and recommended that teachers also spend time designing self-assessment tasks, then use the collected feedback to adjust subsequent lessons (818).

Wanner and Palmer examined both self- and peer-assessments and discovered that students learn from both giving and receiving feedback (1045). This increased their understanding of the assessment process, and how to use assessments to improve learning.

LIMITING BELIEF

Given the potential benefits of formative assessments, it is worth pondering why this assessment type isn't more prevalent. Are they believed to be difficult and time consuming? Bennett asserts that substantial knowledge is required to implement formative assessments, and that most teachers do not possess enough. To remedy this lack, interested teachers would have to be supported with additional time and resources (20).

There are other studies that confirm this limiting belief as being prevalent among teachers in Asia. In 2016, researchers Nguyen & Khairani analyzed twenty-one published studies about formative assessments. Several factors were found to be barriers to implementing formative assessments, including student learning, teacher beliefs, exam fixation, and teacher fatigue. However, by far the most frequently cited reason is lack of teacher knowledge about formative assessments (165). If this were so, then they may soon be required to undergo training in formative assessments, further taxing their already limited time and resources. This paper likewise explores the validity of this assertion.

Do formative assessments really have to be time- and labor-intensive? Or can they in fact be administered quickly, with minimal preparation and with very few materials? Using the formative assessments implemented in this study as a starting point, teachers considering trying this technique can find out.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These are the three questions this research paper seeks to answer:
1. How do students respond to formative assessments?
2. How do students view formative assessments?
3. How much effort is required to implement formative assessments?

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in 2018 as part of the DLL teacher training program for GFL teachers in Southeast Asian universities. The program ran from 2017 to 2019 and consisted of six teaching modules. At the end of each module, participants were asked to conduct action research, also called Practical Exploration Project (PEP), on a didactic aspect that they would like to investigate in their own lessons in order to improve their teaching practice. This particular project was done after completion of Module 6, which was about curricular standards and lesson planning. According to Ende et al., teachers should always consider the learners' current knowledge and skills as a starting point in lesson planning. This can be checked by using informal formative assessments (93). The results can be used as a basis for continuing or changing lesson plans. Out of the many examples illustrated in Module 6, two techniques — exit tickets and flash feedback — were chosen based on the researcher's understanding of the participants' profiles, and what types of activities might appeal to them.

PARTICIPANTS

A total of thirty-five college students aged between seventeen and twenty-one took part in this study. They belong to a generation commonly referred to as Generation Z and are characterized as

being goal-oriented individuals. Berk describes them as more interested in graphics, videos, games or photographs than books, learn through trial and error, and expect feedback while learning (qtd. in Çetin and Halisdemir 86). Just like the Millennials before them who grew up with omnipresent digital devices, members of Generation Z are used to receiving instant answers via search engines. In addition, they expect frequent feedback from their mentors or supervisors (Myers and Sadaghiani 229). Cahill and Sedrak stated that when unable to feed this need for instant feedback, Millennials might feel unappreciated, or assume their work is unsatisfactory (qtd. in Smith and Nichols 43). Supervisors, mentors and teachers should at least be aware of this pervasive need, in order to avoid being surprised or frustrated by the unintended consequences of giving less feedback. To better connect with Millennials and post-Millennials, one must be ready to adapt by accepting closer relationships with students, and to deliver the constant feedback and guidance that they have grown to expect. Formative assessments are therefore particularly important to students and employees belonging to this generation.

Berk describes several paradoxes common to Generation Z students. They are known to be goal-oriented individuals yet are prone to multitask. They like creating many forms of digital content yet prefer typing over handwriting. They are comfortable interacting with authority figures including parents, teachers and supervisors, yet they often exhibit emotional transparency (i.e., they do not hesitate to express their feelings, instead frankly saying what they think), with reduced regard for traditional deference towards authority figures (qtd. in Çetin and Halisdemir 86).

One could say that formative assessments seem to be made for Generation Z students. The way formative assessments work — frequent feedback, varied formats, learning while testing, and open communication — is perfect for this generation's temperament.

The participants in this study were students enrolled in German 10 and German 12 classes at the University of the Philippines. German 10 is a class for absolute beginners, while German 12 is for students with language abilities approaching the end of CEFR Level A1. As previously noted, students at the A1 level are beginners who can interact in familiar situations using simple words and constructs.

Twenty-five were students from non-language studies such as Engineering, Psychology, and Architecture, who had chosen German as their foreign language elective. The inclusion of three to six units of foreign languages in their curriculum serve different purposes. It can acquaint students with foreign texts they will encounter in their specializations, have better access to research and information, or expand their views of the world. A foreign language elective can also be regarded as an initiative towards the internationalization of higher education institutions in the Philippines. CHED guidelines suggest that learning foreign languages helps students become globally competitive by equipping them with "basic communication and interaction skills to fully understand and easily communicate with various nationals" (CMO No. 23 s. 2010).

The other ten students were taking the course either as a major or minor discipline under the BA European Languages (BA EL) program. Instituted in 1976, the BA EL program requires students to specialize in one European language (choice of French, Italian, German, or Spanish), and minor in either another European language (choice of French, Italian, German, Spanish, Russian, or Portuguese) or a non-EL discipline selected from an approved list that includes Tourism, Political Science, and Comparative Literature. Graduates of this program attain a degree of language proficiency that allows them to apply their foreign language knowledge and skills in their chosen careers.

This study is limited to the analyzing of two formative assessment methods — exit tickets and flash feedback — implemented in basic German language classes. No advanced students were tested, and effects on actual academic performance were largely excluded.

EXIT TICKETS IN PRACTICE

According to Marzano, exit tickets can be just index cards or pieces of paper for students to write their answers to feedback questions given by the teacher, and hand in before leaving the classroom (80). They are a tool for reflection about learning — what was learned, how they learned it, where learning occurred, and what comes next. Exit tickets encourage critical thinking and goal setting (Owen and Sarles 22).

There are many ways of implementing exit tickets. Leigh described several variations. One could distribute the slips at the beginning of the session, so students can respond throughout the lesson; or distribute them towards the end of class, so responses are more succinct. The teacher can assign either variable points or the same participation grade for everyone who submits completed exit slips. Another variation is to return slips with handwritten feedback or simply discard them after reading. Finally, the teacher can either share responses in class or keep them private (190).

There are many kinds of questions that can be asked in exit tickets. Marzano described four kinds which he also referred to as prompts (80-81):
- Prompts for gathering formative assessment data. This kind of question asks students how much they understood the lesson, such as: "How would you rate your current level of understanding of what we did today?"
- Prompts that stimulate student self-analysis. This lets the students rate how much effort they exerted in the lesson, such as: "How hard did you work today? Explain why you think you worked at the level you did."
- Prompts about teaching strategies. This asks students to rate the teaching methods used in the lesson, such as: "How did the group work today help you understand the content?"
- Prompts that encourage open student-teacher communication. Marzano considers this type the least common of prompts, but worth the risk of inviting the students to give feedback about the teacher, e.g., "What is something I should be doing to improve your understanding of the content?"

In 2016, Danley et al. implemented Marzano's four exit ticket prompts in classes with education students to find out how exit tickets are viewed as a form of formative assessment at the university. Results indicate that both faculty and students found exit tickets beneficial, especially for gathering data on teaching strategies to assist learning, providing immediate feedback to teachers, and guiding the students to gain awareness of their learning efforts (54). Danley recommends that further research be conducted to see if formative assessments can apply to a more diverse group, covering a broader scope with more participants.

A study by Leigh involved forty-four undergraduate and graduate education students, including some pre-service and in-service teachers who were particularly motivated to understand how to improve their teaching. Data was collected from 608 exit slips and class discussion about the exit slips technique. As a result, Leigh concluded that the students' reflections helped them learn more of the offered content, and guided the articulation, development, and implementation of their beliefs about the practice of teaching (189).

Similar to Danley et al., Leigh also suggested that exit slips could prove useful in other higher education subject areas, and not just for classes on education. They both recommend a broader implementation of formative assessment techniques.

FLASH FEEDBACK IN PRACTICE

Flash feedback is a fast way of eliciting information from a group where each participant is given the opportunity to express something short about a specific subject matter (Reich 1). Also known

in German as *Blitzlichtrunde* — which translates to "lightning round" — this technique can be used at the start of a lesson to inquire about student expectations, wishes, and interests in relation to a new topic. Done during a lesson, it can be used to reveal individual obstacles to learning. If anyone is bored, stressed, or angry, these emotional states can be discovered and addressed during a flash feedback round. If there exist personal conflict or attraction within the group, these distractions can also be revealed by carefully observing how the students interact during the exercise. Flash feedback done after a lesson can be used to determine whether expectations formulated at the beginning have been fulfilled. More directly relevant to the lesson objectives, it empowers the teacher to receive instant feedback about the lesson content, the teaching method, and student understanding.

There are different ways of conducting flash feedback, with the simplest one involving asking the students to arrange their chairs in a circle, then take turns in naming the most important thing they learned or in describing how they feel after the lesson. To prepare for a round of flash feedback, Reich suggests some rules to create an orderly game-like process of feedback collection (3), such as:
- limit the participants to a maximum of twenty-five to thirty;
- write the rules and the questions on a board or flip chart that everyone can see;
- use a "talk object," possibly a stuffed toy or a tennis ball, which can be passed from student to student; only the student in possession of the "talk object" is allowed to answer feedback questions; and
- formulate questions that are clear and succinct, better to encourage one- or two-sentence answers.

IMPLEMENTATION OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT METHODS IN THIS STUDY

This study took place over three regular class meetings. Day 1 of this study took place in the German 12 class (A1) right after a lesson on the past tense of regular verbs in German. It involved implementing exit tickets to a prompt that provided formative assessment data — "How would you rate your current level of understanding of what we did today?" (Marzano 80). Instead of asking the students to give a numeric rating as was done with Marzano's exit tickets (e.g., zero points for understanding little vs. three points for understanding everything), an example from DLL 6 (Ende et al. 94) was adapted. This entailed posting near the classroom door three sheets of paper which contained the following sentences in German: "I understood it," "I almost understood it," and "I didn't quite understand it yet." Before leaving the classroom, the students were asked to sign their name or place any mark or comment on the sentence which best corresponded to their understanding of the lesson. The instructions were phrased in basic German terms that the students already understood at the time. Since the students were beginners who might not have sufficient vocabulary to express what they wanted to say, they were not required to answer in German; instead they were allowed to answer in any language or form they were most comfortable with.

On Day 2, flash feedback was implemented at the end of the lesson on the past tense of German irregular verbs. Students were asked to stand in a circle and individually give oral feedback using either German, English, or Filipino on something they remembered or found important about the lesson. The question as well as a sample response (*Ich habe gelernt: Ich komme. - Ich bin gekommen.* I learned: I come. - I came.) was written on the board. To determine the sequence of the speakers, a small ball was thrown from one speaker to the next.

Exit tickets and flash feedback were also implemented in the German 10 class (absolute beginners). The same procedures were followed, but on the topic of definite and indefinite articles in German.

DATA COLLECTION

Data from the action research was collected from multiple sources. The teacher documented students' reactions towards the assessment methods in photographs, followed by making field notes after every lesson. A short questionnaire was administered on Day 3 to determine the students' perceptions regarding the use of formative assessment activities.

The questionnaire consisted of four questions. The first three questions were quantitative and designed to measure the acceptance of the method used. In the first question, the students were asked how they liked the methods through a five-point Likert-type scale. The second question asked the students which technique they preferred, while the third question asked if they wanted to see more of such activities for the remaining part of the semester. At the end of the questionnaire, there was an open-ended question that allowed the students to provide additional comments on the assessment technique they had just experienced.

To analyze the answers to the fourth question, an inductive content analysis / open coding procedure was employed (Creswell, 197-198):
1. The data were organized according to data type.
2. The responses were reviewed repeatedly. As there were only thirty-five responses, three repetitions were sufficient.
3. The data were coded and simplified into condensed responses of less than eight words each.
4. The condensed responses were transcribed onto a grid-based coding sheet. As each response came up for consideration, a comparison was made to the previous entries. If it was similar to any previous entry, then the new response was grouped under the same column; otherwise, it was placed in its own column.
5. The above process systematically generated the natural thematic groupings from unstructured responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

OBSERVATION DATA

The implementation of the formative assessment methods resulted in mixed student reactions. When exit tickets were used, it was observed that some students were initially hesitant to write down their responses. This was understandable because this was the first time this type of activity was implemented in the class, and likely the first time for most or all the participants to have seen this as well. After a short clarification among the students on how to proceed, everyone eventually participated in the activity by signing their names or writing emoticons on the exit cards, with 75% of the students responding that they almost understood the lesson or did not understand it yet. The exit ticket activity lasted around ten minutes.

In contrast, it was observed that the students were livelier during the feedback round and seemed to enjoy doing the activity. This might have been because it involved the physical activity of throwing a ball to choose the next speaker. Some seemed to be more concentrated on playing with the ball, than on actually giving feedback and this made the duration of the activity longer than expected.

Most of the students declined to elaborate, opting instead to stick with the standard statements signifying understanding (or not) of the lesson. The researcher took notice of five participants who seemed particularly nervous, had difficulty responding verbally, and chose to respond noncommittally with either a smile or a shrug. Albeit only being a handful, these students whose body language manifested reluctance to the activity, represent a learner population that teachers need to consider. Del Villar reported about Filipino students' reasons for oral communication anxieties: expectation of

possible failure, lack of training and experience, fears about audience characteristics, low self-worth, fear of audience rejection, inability to verbalize thoughts, insufficient preparation, and previous unpleasant experiences (162). Students believed that practice and preparation were the best remedies to overcome anxiety (167). Altogether, the flash feedback activity lasted around fifteen to twenty minutes.

STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

Data from the questionnaire show a generally positive attitude towards the use of the formative assessment techniques. The results of the first three questions on acceptability of the methods are summarized in Table 1. The first question asked the students how they liked the activities. While 74% of the participants indicated that they enjoyed doing the activities, no one expressed discomfort. The second question asked which assessment type the students preferred. More than half of the participants chose exit cards over the feedback round. When asked whether they are amenable to doing such activities for the rest of the semester, all the participants agreed. Possible explanations for these responses could be found in the last questionnaire item, about the effects of the formative assessment techniques.

While slightly more than half of the respondents (58%) preferred exit cards over flash feedback, the students reported liking both implementations of formative assessments. Notably, when asked if they are amenable to undergoing more formative assessment exercises for the rest of the semester, every single one of the students signified agreement.

Only 12% of the total responses were negative, referring to the flash feedback activity where a display of anxiety and a number of guarded answers were observed, while 88% of the responses were positive, meaning students find formative assessments beneficial. This is comparable to the findings of Danley et al.: "94% of the students responded with "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" to the statement "Exit tickets were beneficial to me as the student.""

OPEN CODING RESULTS

From open coding of data, three themes emerged: learning benefits, teaching advantages, and feedback characteristics.

Of the students' comments, the most repeated theme (58%) referred to the positive learning benefits that derive from implementing formative assessments. This is comparable to the Danley et al. study where 90% of students agreed or strongly agreed that "exit tickets helped me reflect on my learning" (52). The disparity between 58% and 90% is not surprising, as this study relied on an open-ended question ("In 50 words or less, describe how such activities can help or hinder your learning?"), while Danley et al. presented more specific prompts.

About a third of the comments (32%) refer to the process helping them track their own progress, while about a quarter (26%) declare that the activity was fun and engaging. However, this idea of fun could have received a slight boost because flash feedback was the more recent activity, and the excitement of playing games in class was still fresh in their memory.

The teaching advantage resulting from the use of formative assessments is mentioned in about a third of the comments (32%). Half of these (16%) assert that formative assessments help the professor calibrate future lessons to match the students' learning pace. This was matched by another 16% that said the students appreciated the professor's desire to improve her teaching.

Slightly more than a third of the comments (37%) describe implications from the kind of feedback received from formative assessments. Some 16% cite the non-anonymity of the direct

feedback/flash feedback as a disadvantage, saying that this might cause students to provide either safe or dishonest answers. Comparably, 21% of the comments find the anonymity in exit tickets advantageous, as it may help students feel less embarrassed and encourage honest answers. It may be worth noting that in the Danley et al. study, 98% of the students either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that "My responses on the exit tickets were a true reflection of my learning" (52). When students eventually get used to formative assessments in general – particularly flash feedback – then perhaps the few students who were initially uncomfortable and may have held back honest answers, would learn to be more forthright. These and sample responses are summarized in Table 2.

MOTIVATION AND FOCUS

One of the challenges that came up in this study was the need to improve student motivation and focus on the formative assessment task at hand. While their attitude towards the exercises were generally positive, both written feedback and teacher's observation revealed that there remains room for improvement.

So how can student motivation and focus be improved during formative assessments? Gerschler identified the three factors that have an impact on attention span: distractions, student interest and understanding, and student learning preferences (3).

Distractions can be a focused event (e.g., a seatmate borrowing a pen) or a continuous distraction such as noisy construction activity nearby. Such environmental distractions are intermittent and may be difficult for the individual teacher to control or eradicate completely in the classroom.

Students can more easily focus on assignments that are both interesting and easy to understand, while boredom and confusion over the subject at hand have the opposite effect. Fortunately, a teacher has more direct control over student interest and understanding. This can improve both by being more creative and spending more time preparing for class.

A teacher should take cognizance of the students' learning preferences to adjust teaching and assessment methods accordingly. Students' educational level, generational attitudes, gender, economic background, etc. are all factors that could have some impact on their learning preferences. However, because of the sheer number of factors that can be considered, and because the students in a class are unlikely to be highly homogenous, the teacher may have to compromise by focusing on one or a few key factors (e.g., generational attitudes), then catering to a common denominator.

Stiggins recommends a technique called "assessment for learning," which focuses on frequent assessment and purposeful self-reflection to empower students to be clear on the objectives ("what success looks like"), how to achieve them (using assessments to determine how to do better and in which areas), and where they are at all times on the journey towards attainment of learning objectives. By being more self-aware, students take greater control of their learning, and become more confident of their ability to succeed (15).

Intuitively, one might assume that relative academic performance and how much content was covered in a class would influence student motivation and eventual achievement. However, a longitudinal survey study determined that how students perceive their teachers' focus on learning is actually a better long-term predictor (Nolen 321).

The students in this study were initially hesitant, particularly in the flash feedback exercise. This is considered normal, as studies with flash feedback repeatedly showed that the students' "initial inhibition threshold" may be difficult to overcome (Reich 6). However, this initial reticence may be

overcome through repeated use of various formative assessment techniques in groups that remain generally constant. The teacher should also ensure that the rules are clear and that students actually observe the rules. Clarity and consistency will render the exercise effective.

MULTILINGUAL FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Another issue that surfaced in this study – this time germane to foreign language classes – was the question of whether multilingual assessments are a good idea. As previously stated, the formative assessment prompts in this study were phrased in German, using words and phrases the students were already familiar with at that point. However, answers were allowed in any language if applicable, or in German if necessary. That generally worked out well.

Just as non-language classes may benefit from assessments conducted in the mother tongue (i.e., L1), for a German language class composed of actual beginners with zero knowledge of German, a strong case can be made for multilingual formative assessments, where L1 is used both for giving feedback and for reflecting on learning. This is due to beginners lacking the German vocabulary for doing even basic reflection, which would understandably cause increased levels of anxiety and prevent the gathering of the needed feedback and obviate the reason for implementing formative feedback in the first place.

Extensive research has been done in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and knowledge from that area can be leveraged in German as a Foreign Language (GFL). Thus, it can be extrapolated that using L1 as necessary in a beginner language class can reduce anxiety and increase self-confidence.

Krashen said that negative attitudes towards the target language, lack of motivation, and stress can create an affective filter, an emotional barrier that prevents absorption of input from external sources. As long as this filter exists, getting new language material through to the student would be an unnecessarily difficult task. If the teacher can encourage the student to stop worrying about the possibility of failure, and to instead consider himself/herself a potential speaker in the target language, then such a subtle mindset change may lower the affective filter and increase the student's confidence to attempt in earnest to learn the new language (81-82).

To lessen this worry, the teacher can try allowing limited use of L1 in the classroom. Atkinson proposed some ways of doing this, by language level. For beginners, the teacher can use L1 when explaining instructions, discussing classroom methodology, and presenting and reinforcing the lesson. At all levels, the teacher can try using L1 when eliciting language or checking for comprehension. For advanced students, the teacher can sometimes use L1 when attempting more complicated tasks, such as fostering cooperative learning, checking for sense or context, and testing and developing new teaching strategies (243-246).

CONCLUSION

This study reports on the implementation of formative assessments in the German language classroom in order to determine how students respond to formative assessments, how students view this technique, and how much effort is required to implement it.

The students in this study responded positively to both exit ticket and the flash feedback activities. While the researcher observed some initial hesitation, eventually everyone participated and expressed enthusiasm for further formative assessments.

Ideally, formative assessments should be performed frequently, as this will improve the motivation of young adult students over time. Belonging to a generation accustomed to instant

feedback, which they receive in the form of "likes" and comments on social media or as micro-rewards in mobile games and apps, formative assessments feel like a natural offline extension of their online life.

Formative assessments could also help promote autonomous learning especially when learners are made to track their own progress and find ways of practicing skills that they have not mastered yet.

Studies in recent decades noted that researches tend to focus on formative assessments' effects on academic performance. Meanwhile, research on how students feel about formative assessments remains scarce. This study made it a point to investigate this question: how do students feel about formative assessments? Through surveys, it was determined that there was a generally positive attitude towards formative assessments, with students slightly preferring written anonymous feedback over oral ones. Ungraded informal assessments create a good learning atmosphere and build trust, especially with the characteristic anonymity of exit tickets. Students also find it motivating if they regularly receive direct feedback on their progress. However, feedback does not always have to come from the teacher. As shown by this study, the students can also be trained to do this by themselves, even in the language they are currently learning, by practicing self-reflection, which is a key part of formative assessments.

Formative assessments do not have to be complicated. They can be administered quickly — such as in one-minute papers – where students are given sixty seconds to write down their response to questions by the teacher, e.g., "What is the main point of the lesson or which concepts are most confusing?" They can be administered with minimal preparation, and with simple materials such as the self-assessment checklists for students, which many current German language textbooks offer after a particular lesson. As described in this study, it can be done in the target language using basic phrases already known to the students, even at the beginner level.

Previous studies had reinforced the belief that formative assessments are time-consuming and impose unreasonable additional workload for teachers. However, this study showed that each of the assessment methods used in the two German for beginners' classes required about five minutes of preparation time, lasted less than twenty minutes, and took just ten minutes to analyze. No special equipment was needed, and the researcher just made use of readily available materials.

Foreign language teachers can take the lessons learned from this study and attempt formative assessment techniques in their own classrooms by starting with exit tickets that feature greater anonymity. Later, as students get more accustomed to the idea of instant feedback, other techniques such as flash feedback can be implemented.

This action research demonstrated both the ease of implementing and the advantages of using formative assessments in just two basic German language classes. Eventually, this research can be expanded to gather more definitive results regarding the impact of formative assessments on language learning, with "impact" measured not only in terms of summative exam results but also student motivation to stay in the program and graduate on time. While such a longitudinal study requires more resources to cover the four years of undergraduate study from beginner to advanced levels, it can pay off by revealing how well formative assessments work compared to and in conjunction with other teaching methods and strategies.

Finally, these valuable forms of formative assessment are not restricted to language learning and may be perfectly used in classes of other disciplines as well.

Question	Response	%
1. How do you like the above-mentioned activities?	I enjoyed them a lot.	5
	I enjoyed them.	74
	I neither liked nor disliked them.	21
	I disliked them.	0
	I was uncomfortable with them.	0
2. Which one do you prefer?	Exit tickets	58
	Feedback round	42
3. Are you amenable to doing such activities for the remaining part of the semester?	Yes	100
	No	0

Table 1: Acceptability of Formative Assessments (n = 35)

Theme	Code	Sample Response
Learning benefits	fun and engaging	It was fun. Interactive and fun Activity 2 is more engaging. It helps me remember. It motivates, creates the right atmosphere, and builds honesty and trust.
	progress tracking	It gives me an idea of how my classmates fare and if I'm behind or not. I can study more, adjust my pacing. Self-evaluation makes me aware of my level. It helps me track the lessons that I have to put extra effort on. It helps students evaluate their own learning. It helps students better grasp their learning. Follow up is needed. It keeps track of progress - personal and collective.
Teaching advantages	teaching adjustment	The professor can adjust the pace of the students. It gives teacher idea on how to prepare succeeding lessons. Prof can adjust teaching style and speed.
	teaching efficiency	I appreciate teacher asking the level of understanding and I think it's efficient. I appreciate the prof's desire to improve her teaching. I appreciate that prof wants feedback.
Feedback characteristics	Advantages of anonymity	Activity 1 is anonymous. Identity is hidden in Activity 1 so we can give honest answer. I can freely give feedback without feeling embarrassed. I'm not shy to determine my level of progress. I feel comfortable.
	Disadvantages of direct feedback	Activity 2 makes me choose a safe answer. Activity 2 will generate not so honest answers. Activity 2 makes me anxious.

Table 2: Student Responses Regarding Effects of Formative Assessments (n = 35)

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