

Effectiveness of Using Formative Evaluation to teach Adult ELLs in China

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Literature Review

Research Question: *What cultural factors influence the way adults learn a second language?*

In searching for current literature to assist the researcher in answering the research question, the researcher found that there aren't many resources and research studies out there that deal directly with the question. There is still a lot of research needed on this topic. The researcher found articles that deal with different aspects of the question from various viewpoints. For example, a lot of research studies done that addressed many aspects of this question used children as research subjects instead of adults.

One aspect of this question is taking the learner's own culture into consideration when designing ways to teach the person a second language. According to John U. Ogbu, teachers must, "[r]ecognize that there are different kinds of cultural/language differences and that the different types arise for different reasons or circumstances" (1992, p. 12). A student's rate of speaking, accent or prior knowledge of their mother language all impact how successfully they will learn the second language being taught, which in my case, is English.

When a non-English speaker comes to this country to attend a university, there can be barriers in understanding the academic lessons and lectures. The student may have difficulty in comprehending homework and the textbooks used in class. There has always been a connection between the teacher's instructional strategies and the student's ultimate understanding of the subject at hand. "Consequently, far more attention has been paid to the learner's process of English acquisition than to the impact of teaching strategies such as effective teacher talk, teacher-student interaction, and adult support for students' developing oral and written language production" (Meyer, 2000, p. 228). "Teachers who instruct English learners must be skilled at

lowering four significant barriers to meaningful [instructions]: cognitive load, culture load, language load and learning load” (Meyer, 2000, p. 229).

- “The number of new concepts embedded in a lesson or text is its cognitive load” (Meyer, 2000, p. 229).
- “Culture load refers to the amount of cultural knowledge required but never explicitly explained in order for the learner to accurately comprehend the meanings of a text or to appropriately participate in a learning activity in English” (Meyer, 2000, p. 230).
- “A text or a teacher’s talk has a heavy language load when it is filled with specialized, multisyllable, unfamiliar words compressed into lengthy and heavily embedded sentences and paragraphs” (Meyer, 2000, p. 232).
- “. . . if teachers are asking students to do things with oral or written English that they are not yet ready or able to do in their second language, then the learning load of the activities is too high” (Meyer, 2000, p. 233).

One way a teacher can help lower the culture load is by treating English learners and their culture with respect and dignity and not judgment. Another way of lowering the barriers is by immersing their students in a session where the instructor has them listen to pronunciation and announcement of words related to the subject at hand. After hearing and repeating the various words, the students can understand the phonetic structure behind the English words they are trying to comprehend. Ultimately, teachers that can tap into their own passion for teaching and a student’s yearning to learn can overcome and lower the barriers to meaningful instruction.

Another aspect of the research question that must be dealt with is how to gather data for the research. The researcher thought about using web questionnaires as a data collection

technique to answer my question. In analyzing two case studies in the article *The Use of Web Questionnaires in Second Language Acquisition and Bilingualism Research* the researcher sees that this can be an effective way to gather data about culture and learning English. The informational data was collected through web-based research and was deemed effective.

The final article the researcher researched is by Anita Wenden, entitled *Helping Language Learners Think about Learning*. “[It contained an] analysis of semi-structured interviews of 34 adult language learners [that] revealed they had explicit beliefs about how to learn a second language” (Wenden, 1986, p. 3). “The value of activities in which younger and older adults reflect upon their beliefs about language learning lies in the fact that such activities can surface for examination, evaluation, and possible change and/or modification of the expectations that adult learners bring to their language learning” (Wenden, 1986, p. 9).

The final aspect of the research question is how cultural barriers are a huge issue for both teachers and students in class instruction. Patricia D. Barber stated some techniques that “helped [her] successfully penetrate the cultural barrier and make the classroom experience more enjoyable and meaningful for all parties” (Barber, 2003, p. 29). The first technique is relying on an interpreter if it is a situation where one is present in the classroom. Establishing a relationship with the interpreter and allowing him or her to elaborate on the instructor’s lectures is very important in helping students understand the material. The second technique is tweaking presentations and slowing the class pace down to allow for thorough comprehension of the material. The third and fourth techniques respectively are teamwork and communication.

Allowing for all lines of communication to stay open and encouraging teamwork amongst the students is key to their optimum understanding of the lectures.

In conclusion, though these articles did not answer the research question directly, they made the researcher think about other aspects of the question, what cultural factors influence the way adults learn a second language? Though the researcher didn't find many studies that represented the research question, the articles obtained helped craft a three pronged layer of culture and learning in English.

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ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT	
Name:	Shawntaye Maria Scott
Title of Project:	Effectiveness of Using Formative Evaluation to teach Adult ELLs in China
Date Completed:	Monday, June 24, 2013
IMPLEMENTATION TIME FRAME:	
Number of weeks:	(4 months)
TIMELINE of ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT:	
Start Date:	May 12, 2013
End Date:	June 24, 2013
AREA OF FOCUS: What is your chosen area of focus? Why did you choose this area? How does it directly impact you? Because I am not currently teaching or in a classroom setting, I am not able to do my own research to answer my research question. My original research question was “What cultural factors influence the way adults learn a second language?” I chose this area of focus because I wanted to see if there were ways of using an adult student’s cultural background that could improve their understanding and way of learning English. There are a lot of research studies conducted and done that focus on children and the way they learn English, but not many on adults. Since I’m not conducting my own research, I had to revise my research question a little bit. My revised question is “How can formative evaluation affect the way Chinese adult ESL students learn English?” I think this area of focus directly impacts me a lot since I plan to teach adult ELLs.	
RESEARCH QUESTION: Original Research Question: What cultural factors influence the way adults learn a second language? Revised Research Question for Capstone: How can formative evaluation affect the way Chinese adult ESL students learn English?	
DEMOGRAPHICS	
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA: Where/What is the research site? Who is directly involved? What statistics will give a clear understanding of the context and culture of the research site? (Do not use name as an identifier.) Provide references for sources used.	

The research site is located in a university in the Dalian region of China. Specifically, it is at the Continuous Education College of Dalian University of Technology. The researcher, Qin Yi, the English class instructor and the students of Grade 2010, Continuous Education College of Dalian University of Technology. There aren't really any statistics shown in the research that give a clear understanding of the context and culture of the research site. The researcher does discuss that due to the typical Chinese idea of harmony within the learning process, the classroom environment tends to be hierarchical. The teacher is seen as the authoritarian and the students are the followers.

TARGET GROUP: Who are the students you are trying to impact? (Do not use names - you must use another identifier.) How do you think this strategy or content focus will benefit the target group?

The students the researcher is trying to impact are Chinese adult ESL students. The author's strategy of using formative evaluation for effective teaching will help make the adult ESL students' learning a more enriched experience. It will definitely help the adult student ESL students be able to learn English in a more effective and less rigid way.

BASELINE DATA: What are the baseline data that support your choice for this area of focus? What patterns or trends do you see in the data? What is your proof that an issue exists in this focus area? (NOTE: You may not depend solely on Standardized Test Scores.)

These are challenging questions to answer because there is not a lot of statistical data out there that calculates the effectiveness of adult ESL classes in China. I think the lack of information about this focus area proves that more research needs to be done to address the issues of teaching effectiveness of adult ESL students.

ACTION PLAN

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN: What is your plan to implement the strategy or content knowledge? How did you collaborate with other staff involved with this issue?

The author chose 40 students randomly as the study subjects. The teaching plans and teaching goals were printed and given to each student in the class before the teacher gave the class presentation. The researcher did not collaborate with other staff during this experiment.

PROCEDURES & MEASURES: What are the steps you will follow? How will you measure student progress?

The researcher will follow five steps listed below:

Step One: Teaching

Step Two: Formative Evaluation Step Three: Reflection, Correction and Supplementary Instruction Step Four: Second Formative Evaluation Step Five: Summative Evaluation Student progress will be measured using interviews before and after the experiment.
DATA COLLECTION: What data will be collected? How often? What tools will be used? Copies of tools will go in appendixes. The tools used to collect data are instruments, consisting of questionnaires, interviews and case studies.
IMPLEMENTATION: (Describe the actual implementation of your plan.)
Week 1 - 5: I am not sure how the researcher actually implemented her plan month by month or week by week. The researcher does not state the breakdown of time spent on implementing her plan.
DOCUMENTATION OF ADJUSTMENTS: How did the plan change during the course of the Action Research timeline? What prompted the change? What were the effects of the changes? The researcher does not note whether the plan changed during the course of her research timeline. It seems like everything went as scheduled during from March to July 2010, the time she conducted her research.
ANALYSIS & REPORTING
REPORTING RESULTS: What are your results and how will you share them? How does the baseline data compare to the ending data? What is the story told by your data? The story told by the data is that there is a marked improvement in the student's understanding of the lessons being taught in the unit.
IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE: How will the results impact your teaching in the future? How did the project inform your decision-making as a professional? The research study results have given me hope that making my future teachings more interactive and student-centered in nature will be effective. I will make a note that formative evaluation used in teaching really makes a positive difference in the adult students' academic life. This

project made me consider all of the different ways to enhance my student's daily lessons using creativity and flexibility.

CONCLUSIONS: Did this study improve student performance? Explain. Did this study improve your skills as a teacher? Explain.

In the aspect of the enhancement of teachers' beliefs in teaching, the author concludes through the study that the application of formative evaluation not only helps teachers adopt a new point of view towards their students, believing that every student has the ability to learn, it also augments the teachers' confidence in education itself, in its higher attainments and greater achievements which might otherwise be denied by the traditional way of teaching.

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PERSONAL REFLECTIONS:

I found this empirical research study to be very helpful and useful to me. I plan to teach adult ELLs and more than likely I will teach in countries outside of the United States. Overall, this assignment was very challenging and confusing to me.

I must say that I had a very hard time trying to grasp the different steps of what to do in this Action Research Project since I was not conducting research myself. I have learned a lot through this process and I hope to actually conduct some educational research of my own in the next few years.

APPENDIX**Questionnaire 1**

Age: Gender:

Years of learning English:

Scores of the English test in entrance examination:

Time spend on learning English each week:

Marks of the English test in entrance examination:

Basic Information of Students from Whom Subjects Are Chosen

Questionnaire 2

1. Are you interested in English class?

A. Very interested B. Interested to some extent C. Not interested at all

2. Do you have confidence in learning English well?

A. Strongly confident B. Confident to some extent C. Not confident

3. Are you satisfied with the teaching method your English teacher use?

A. Strongly satisfied B. Satisfied to some extent

C. Neutral D. Not satisfied

4. Time spend on learning English everyday (at home or in school).

A. Half an hour a day B. One hour a day

C. Two hours a day D. Almost learn nothing

5. During the process of learning I changed my attitude to English language.

A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent

C. I do not know. D. Disagree

6. I think the contents of the English textbooks should be close to our life and foster our integral capacity.

A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent

C. I do not know. D. Disagree

7. I think the teacher should have the whole teaching task at her fingertips.

A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent

C. I do not know. D. Disagree

8. I think the teacher should let the students know the teaching task.

A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent

C. I do not know. D. Disagree

9. I think it is important to set an aim in order to learn English well.

A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent

C. I do not know. D. Disagree

10. I think it is important for student to communicate with both the teacher and his or her fellow classmates.

A. Strongly agree B. Agree to some extent

Interviews

At the end of the semester the researcher chose 20 students (10 male, 10 female) randomly to interview. She asked the following questions during the interview:

1. What do you think about the course in general?

2. Do you think the way the course is taught suits your needs and accomplishes your goals?

3. What progress if any have you made so far from attending the course?

4. Do you think you have become more interested and confident in learning English than before you were chosen to attend the experimental class?

Case Study

The case study is actually the body of the experiment. The author applies the theory of formative evaluation with comparisons between conventional teaching and the experimental way.